

LOCAL TREASURE

No one knows cashmere better than Palm Beach cashmere designer Valerie Louthan.

Scottish-born, Valerie's devotion to the luxe fabric has spanned almost 40 years. Armed with a fine arts education, Valerie's early career began with design work for the top cashmere manufacturers in Scotland and then on to the haute couture Paris fashion houses. About nine years ago, Valerie opened up her eponymous atelier in the historic Paramount Building in Palm Beach. It is her only retail base and one of the few designer-owned stores in town.

There is cashmere and then there is Valerie Louthan cashmere. Valerie's cashmeres utilize the fine under-hair of three or four carefully-combed Mongolian goats for a single sweater and up to seven for a cashmere wrap. Cashmere goats are found in other countries in the world, but Mongolian goats produce the most delicate quality, the only quality acceptable to Valerie. Once the fibers have been shipped from Mongolia (and only the finest fibers are selected), the fibers are spun in lanolin, fashioned into a complete garment and then washed in the pure waters of the Scottish rivers. This process produces a baby-skin-soft, sensual garment that keeps its shape over time. (After a few cleanings, many cashmere sweaters, no matter how expensive, no longer fit the way they did the day purchased.)

Valerie offers a wide variety of designs ranging from evening sweaters, capes, caftans, pullover sweaters, matching sweater sets, bathrobes and more. She also

offers a men's line.

Valerie's designs are contemporary classics and timeless classics with a European flair for feminine touches, such as buttons and bows from Paris, satin pie crust ruffles from Japan, new flattering shapes and flirty skirts made to measure. Most sweaters have a choice of custom-made pants and skirts in an incredible range of shades. For sweaters, the wait for custom-made is 10 weeks and for skirts and pants 10 days. Valerie's designs are always in vogue and can be worn with or over a wide variety of clothing, from sporty to dressy. Her prices are significantly less expensive than those of other cashmere designers.

Valerie's clientele is part of the international "Who's Who" set, including the young royals of Europe and the UK. Princess Diana was often seen wearing one of Valerie's black capes, and Gloria Vanderbilt owned 14 of her capes.

While Valerie resides in Harbour Island in The Bahamas, she spends much of her time either in her Palm Beach shop or on the road, meeting up with friends for trunk shows in such places as Newport, Harbor Springs, San Francisco, Pebble Beach and Northeast Harbor.

You can view samples of Valerie's designs by going to her website at www.valerielouthancashmere.com.

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Photos: Susan Green