



**Surprise Package**

This smartly cut khaki raincoat (\$169) unbuttons to reveal a floral printed lining that's echoed in the silk twill shirtwaist dress (\$129). "I like bright and cheerful," says actress **Becki Newton**, 30, of ABC's *Ugly Betty*. "Moody and edgy doesn't suit me." One reason this collection feels so sassy and classy is that it comes with scads of playful extras, from a bra to match your shirt to a rainbow of cute shoes.

# Bright Ideas!

When Liz Claiborne, one of fashion's most venerable labels, needed a fresh look, **Isaac Mizrahi** came to the rescue. The high-energy designer kept the quality and the modest prices (nothing much over \$200) and reinvented the clothes to be witty, modern, and buoyantly colorful—just like him.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROGER NEVE

*"There's a freedom to what Isaac does," says longtime friend Veronica Webb. "He's not a silhouette dictator—he knows that women have bodies that change."*



#### **Mad for Plaid**

Waltzing into the future, Isaac Mizrahi cherishes the grand old brand he inherited: Like Liz Claiborne, he takes familiar motifs (dots, stripes, checks) and turns them into modern shapes. "People respond to prints emotionally," he says. "They trigger memories." This gingham dress (\$189), for example, has a built-in petticoat that reminds **Veronica Webb**, 43—model, actress, TV personality—of her Sunday school best. "Crinolines are like cookies," she says. "They're there to make you happy." Shoes, \$89.



*“Good fit is most important,” says interior designer Rhea Tziros. “I like clothes close to the body, and a classic look.”*

**T**HIS IS A TALE OF two fashion pioneers. In the mid-1970s, boring, manly *Dress for Success*-style suits ruled the office and attractive work clothes hadn't yet been invented.

Enter Liz Claiborne with her array of chic, reasonably priced mix-and-match pieces that weren't "too pinstripe," as the designer put it. Made for busy women like her, "who loved clothes, but didn't want to spend all their money on them," Claiborne said, the label was an immediate hit. Fast-forward to 2008: Claiborne had passed away a year earlier, and her company had lost its luster.

Enter Isaac Mizrahi, whose innovative line for Target, launched in 2003, had brought designer class to mass-produced apparel. His gift for accessible style made him an ideal choice to reinvent the Liz Claiborne brand. His first collection, which debuted in February, overflows with bright color and classic prints. And it comes with coordinated shoes, bags, jewelry, and lingerie so that women with no time to primp (that would be all of us) can instantly look pulled together. It's body-friendly (includes plus and petite sizes) and budget conscious (nothing is outrageously expensive; everything is beautifully made), with ageless appeal:

Although 18-year-olds may love the line, says Isaac, "these are not girl clothes, or clothes that are trying to be cool. I'm designing for women."

Online shoppers can find Liz Claiborne New York at [lizclaiborne.com](http://lizclaiborne.com). The line is also available at Belk, Bon-Ton, Dillard's, Gottschalks, and Macy's.

#### The Matchmaker

For years fashion arbiters have dismissed color-coordinated accessories as too "matchy." But now there's a more organic style, says Isaac, who gave interior designer Rhea Tziros, 30, spectator-style heels (\$89) and a logo-print wallet (\$38) to go with her striped gown (\$169). "Bold patterns have made a comeback in clothes and home decor," says Rhea. "I'm always on the lookout for fun prints I won't get tired of." Necklace, \$48.



**Rethinking Pink**

Brighten your look with pretty separates: Florals and checks mix effortlessly, especially when they're anchored with gray, the softest neutral. *From left:* Isaac's business partner, **Marisa Gardini**, 41, says he's broken her of the all-black habit (sweater, \$79; skirt, \$99; flower pin, \$55). **Veronica** credits Isaac's clothes with improving her mood (jacket, \$219; sweater, \$49; skirt, \$99; flower necklace, \$85).



**Play with Color**

• **Mute it.** People with more subdued taste can follow Isaac's color math formula: any neutral + any bright = gorgeous.

• **Go for it.** If you don't mind being noticed, mix shades you love, even those that supposedly clash. Use a strong, clear palette—nothing murky or dull.

• **Don't avoid it.** When you perpetually wear black, you aren't really alive. "Color is a form of energy; it's nourishment for the soul," Isaac says.



**Tone Up**

(1) Dietitian **Maye Musk**, 60, glows in a yellow jacket (\$119), shirt (\$119), and silver pleat skirt (\$99). (2) Make your future rosier with gingham and flowers (cardigan, \$79; top, \$49; skirt, \$79). You can also "infiltrate your life"—Isaac's phrase—with vivid accessories: (3) eye-catching shoes (\$79 and \$89) or (4) a lively orange bag (\$138). Defy the recession with color, says Isaac: "It's the greatest luxury of all."





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*"I love navy—it's snappy," says Isaac. "Black is flattering and mysterious and charismatic, but navy is all that and more."*

**Blue States**

(5) "Navy and white is very all-American," says Marisa of her checkerboard coat (\$169) and (6) Rhea's striped sheath and jacket (\$89 and \$119). Punctuate the light-dark pattern with (7) a white, bone, or bright bag (\$60, \$118, \$108).



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**Design Democracy**

Young and skinny is no longer the standard of attractiveness, says Isaac. Pigeonholing women and clothes according to age is "very limiting and disempowering," agrees (8) **Faye Wattleton**, 65, cofounder and president of the Center for the Advancement of Women. Her sharp safari-style suit (jacket, \$129) is as timeless as it gets (sunglasses, \$30; bracelets, \$42 and \$48; clutch, \$60). Nor is this collection just for the slender: "Size-ism is as bad as racism!" Isaac says. The slouchy gray pantsuit and frilly blouse on (9) **Valerie Lefkowitz**, 28, a photography student, go up to a size 16 (jacket, \$229; trousers, \$139; top, \$119). "Pleated trousers aren't supposed to be good for women with hips," she says, "but these fit great." Bracelets, \$48 each. Clutch, \$98.

### Denim on Denim

Head-to-toe anything used to be deemed unfashionable, but Rhea's tailored all-denim look—jacket (\$119), shirt (\$59), pencil skirt (\$69), patchwork tote (\$85), and shoes (\$89)—is fabulous. (Tip: When you match, match all the way!) "This suit can take you anywhere, from work to the PTA," Isaac says.



### Not Just Jeans

Friendly denim is the quintessential Fabric Next Door. But translated into a trench-inspired dress (\$119) and upgraded with sleek accessories—silver bangles (from \$25), an oversize tote (\$120), and loafer-style heels (\$89)—it makes Becki look amazingly polished.

*"I'm not a minimalist about jewelry," says designer Iris Barrel Apfel. "With three necklaces and umpteen bracelets, I'm in heaven!"*

#### Accessories Unlimited

"I like big, bold, amusing things, and I pile on a million pieces," says **Iris Barrel Apfel**, 87—designer, connoisseur, and fashion icon (her style was celebrated in a 2005 show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art). Her chunky necklaces (gold chain, \$65; green-and-gold, \$150 each), bracelets (from \$28), and trademark glasses (Liz Claiborne frames, \$36, with FeatherWates invisibles lenses) are set off by a brilliant cardigan (\$59) and dramatic khaki pants (\$79). Iris adored the wide-leg "Hollywood glamour" trousers: "I can't believe how well they fit."

#### Rainbow Coalition

"I prize exuberance," Isaac says. "I prefer it to caution." Valerie's purple coat (\$169), green shell (\$49), and yellow shoes (\$89) don't look clownish, thanks to the grounding of a khaki skirt (\$59). The patchwork tote (\$110) ties the colors together. Necklace, \$65. Bracelets, from \$40. For details see Shop Guide.

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