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Mesmerizing Retailers for 20 Years

By Robert McAllister—TECHNOLOGY EDITOR

Los Angeles-based updated resource **Mesmerize** is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, but the company's owners are not making a big fuss about the milestone. They would rather let their clothing creations speak for themselves.

The company is known for its exotic prints on silky tops and dresses, priced to retail below \$200. The line is aimed at women looking for contemporary design with a misses/updated fit. Almost every dress in the line has some type of stretch factor. That formula has gained the company a loyal and growing following.

Over the past 20 years, the company has evolved from earning \$200,000 a year to earning about \$6 million a year. The family-run operation is led by designer Kambiz Hakimi. His brother, Kamran, and their father, Eli, run the manufacturing, sourcing and financial end of the business.

The Hakimis have come a long way since moving to Los Angeles in the early 1980s. The Iranian-born family fled their country during the Iranian Revolution of 1979 because of the wave of anti-Israeli sentiment facing Jewish Iranians.

In Iran, Eli Hakimi had been a successful real estate developer, but the new regime seized much of the wealth that belonged to Iranian Jews.

The family at first moved to Israel for three years and then to Los Angeles. The West Coast and its bustling apparel manufacturing community was high on the list of destinations for Iranian refugees.

The Hakimis did not have any experience in clothing production. The family launched the business out of need, not desire.

"We had nothing. The apparel industry was booming then, and it was an avenue to make money. At first, it was done just out of need and survival," Kambiz Hakimi said.

Kambiz Hakimi learned design virtually on his own with the help of some courses through the **University of California, Los Angeles'** and the **University of Southern California's** extension schools. He also went to broadcasting school and makes documentary films. He is currently producing one on the plight of Iranian refugees.

His eye for film has translated well in apparel. Kambiz Hakimi became influenced by European designers but wanted to apply his own ideas to apparel.

"Women want to be the first to wear something. They want to be unique," he said.

Despite his soft-spoken persona, Kambiz Hakimi is the opposite when he's working on design.

"We are never safe with design. We are daring and never play it safe," he said. "We've been this way every season."



Designer Kambiz Hakimi is on a long winning streak with his Mesmerize label.



SOMETIMES
IT'S
NOT WHAT
GOES INTO
MAKING A
GARMENT
BUT WHAT
DOESN'T
THAT
MAKES
IT BETTER.



**SRILANKA
APPAREL**
GARMENTS
WITHOUT GUILT



Model Tatiana Papenora wears a Mesmerize Holiday dress.

overseas. The company also has a private-label business, but the Mesmerize label is its backbone.

“Our goal is to maintain our strong relationships with the boutiques,” said Kambiz Hakimi. “We make our clothing to fit well and to last. We build our business on trust and honesty.”

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The company's animal prints, featuring leopard and giraffe patterns, among others, have become its signature. Its strong Resort looks have expanded in recent years. The company recently launched a day-dress line called **Hope & Emma** as well as expanded into other looks. It has also expanded into plus sizes.

At the recent **Los Angeles Fashion Market**, the company was doing well with a new series of tailored trousers in pin stripes. The line also featured hand-painted deep V-neck tops featuring elaborate figures and artwork.

“Everything else could be moving slow, but Mesmerize will be sizzling,” said the company's West Coast sales rep, Sharon Koshet.

Retailer Susan Gilbert, a buyer for **Jonathan**, a boutique in Redondo Beach, Calif., said Mesmerize has proved itself over the years.

“I like the way it sells. The fit is great, but it just sells,” she said. “They are great people too, and you don't always find that in this industry.”

Kambiz Hakimi said no one at the company's downtown Los Angeles factory has voice mail.

“We want to be accessible all the time,” he said. “Somebody here will always answer the phone, and the owners are always accessible.”

About 70 percent of the line is still produced in Los Angeles, with the remainder sourced



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