

SUMMER 1999

# THE RITZ-CARLTON®

M a g a z i n e

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Jhane Barnes'  
Mathematical  
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J H A N E

B A R N E S





After settling on a design, Jhane begins yarn selection. The entire process occurs in one location, at her office/studio.





The Jhane Barnes line of men's shirts, detailed here, incorporates design elements right down to the texture.





# J H A N E B A R N E S

combines her gift for mathematics with artistic creativity to produce

With a critical eye, Jhane Barnes reviews possibilities for future designs.



# A R N E S

men's fashion designs for those who aren't afraid to be noticed.

JHANE BARNES DOESN'T SEE THE WORLD THE SAME WAY YOU AND I DO.

Where we see nothing more than a neglected pile of automobile tires or a random collection of pencils on a desktop, the renowned clothing designer sees intricate and beautiful geometric patterns. It's as if the world, for Barnes, is like one of those pictures that only reveal their hidden pattern if you stare into them long enough. Except, she only has to glance to see the hidden pattern and no matter how long we stare, we'll never see everything she does.

She also ventures into the netherworld of the subconscious, returning with vivid images and complex designs. Barnes sees it all — the everyday world and her dreams — through the prism of mathematics.

It is this gift, coupled with her incessant drive, that has made Barnes one of the most celebrated designers in the world.

For the past two decades, she has been producing distinctive, high-quality fashions for men. In fact, she was one of the first women to succeed in menswear. Her \$125 ties and \$400 shirts — which have a hidden





J H A N E

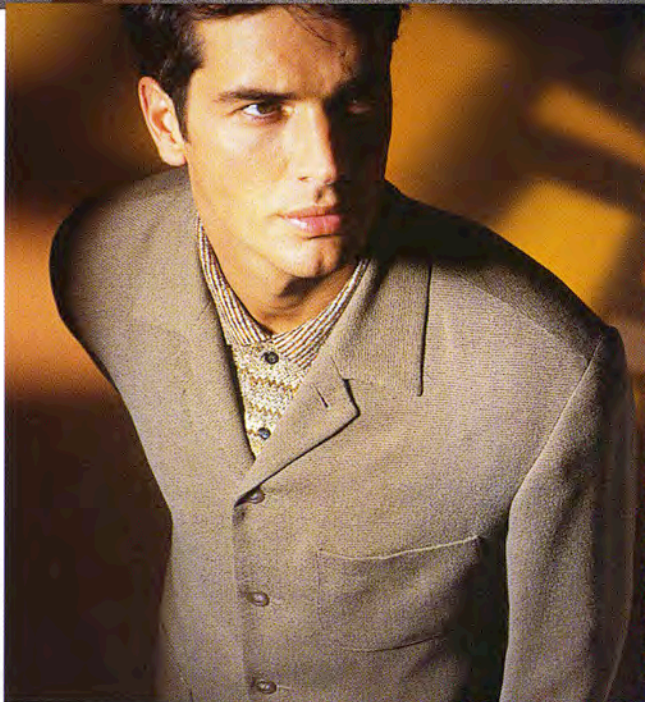


Photo from Jhane Barnes







complexity often belied by their outward simplicity — are worn from Hollywood to Wall Street, Milan to Miami, Washington to Moscow.

Barnes' fashions have caught the eye of well-heeled notables from around the world. President Bill Clinton was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine wearing one of Barnes' geometric ties. Russian President Boris Yeltsin was also seen in *Time* sporting her neckwear. Wynton Marsalis, who owns suits and sportswear, and the eclectic Peter Gabriel, who has purchased a few shirts, both prize her designs.

"People who wear my clothes like to be noticed," Barnes observes. "Many men want to blend in — they're not my customers. Men who like my clothes enjoy them because they're not simple. Every time you wear one of my shirts, you see something different in it, and you get different compliments."

But the New York-based business that bears her name has gone far beyond just designing menswear.

Her privately held company, which in addition to menswear now includes textiles, furniture, bedding and carpets, had sales of \$80 million last year. In addition to supplying boutiques internationally, the petite, 45-year-old designer has opened her second freestanding retail store in Scottsdale, an upscale suburb of Phoenix, Arizona. The first one opened in Los Angeles.

# BARNES

In June 1998 she formed Jhane Barnes Textiles, which concentrates on marketing textiles to the contact furniture industry. Her initial collection, which includes wall coverings, upholstery fabrics and drapery, won the *Best of NeoCon 1998* at an annual furniture exhibition. Last year, she opened the first Jhane Barnes Textiles showroom in Chicago.

The start of the National Basketball Association season brought another debut for Barnes. She redesigned the Orlando Magic's uniforms, doing away with the dated pin stripes and introducing a subtle tone-on-tone pattern with ultra thin alternating blue and black stripes. A barely visible intricate star pattern, the team's logo, can be seen in both the white-on-white home uniforms and the blue-on-blue road uniforms.

Although now a star in her own right of the design world, Barnes had other celestial aspirations growing up: astrophysicist or fashion designer? Create clothes or study the universe? How many teens have had to face a question that represented such a seemingly broad gulf between careers? If it isn't the typical dilemma faced by teenage girls from Maryland in the 1960s, it was nonetheless a very real — and very tough — choice for Barnes.

In retrospect, despite her love of music, math and science, it seems clear that Barnes was headed toward a career in fashion design. She made her own clothes all through junior high, even getting sent home

**TOP LEFT:**  
The boutique in Scottsdale, Arizona

**BOTTOM LEFT:**  
State-of-the-art computers that create algorithms are the spool and thread of these intricate designs.

Photo by Janette Beckman



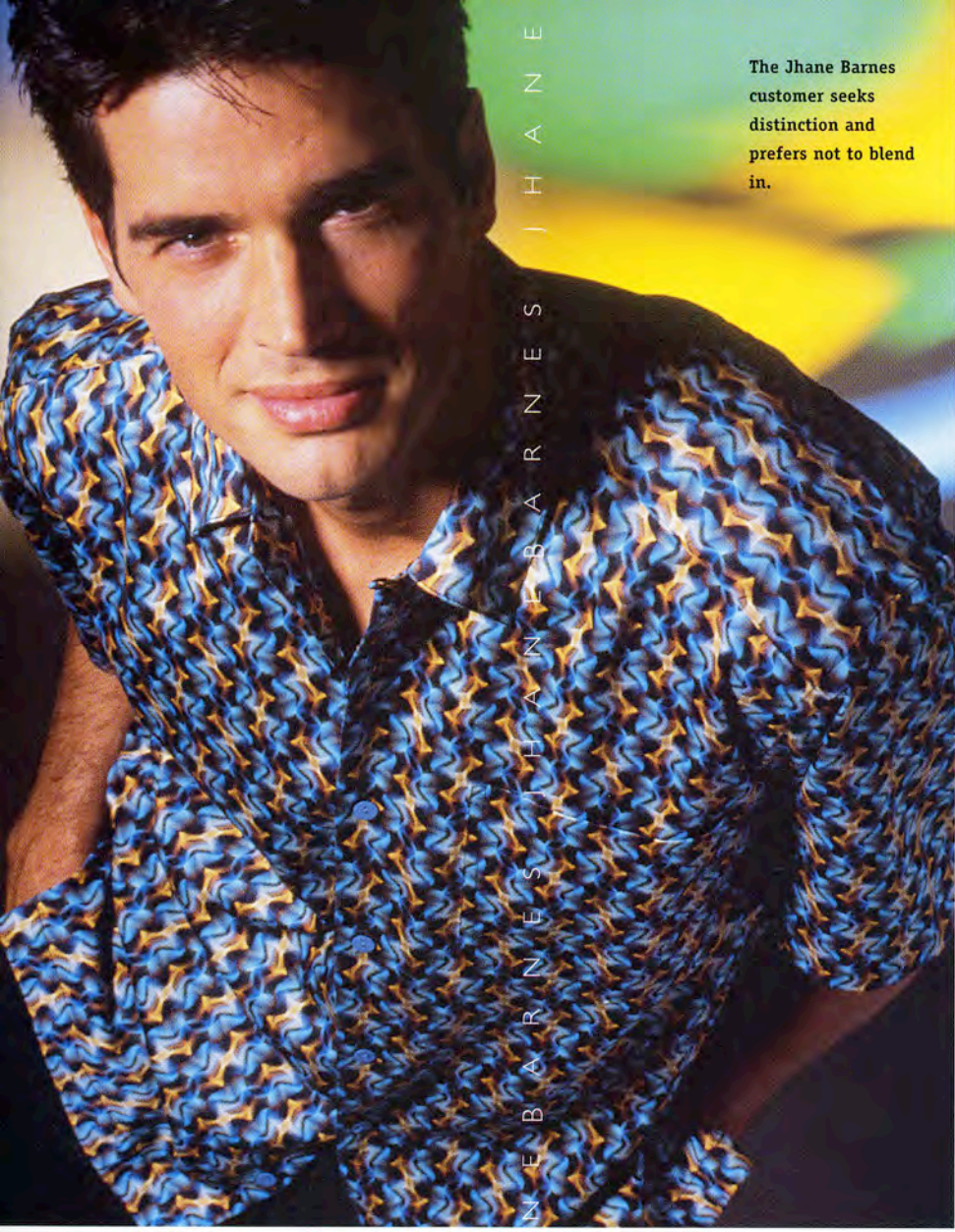


Photo from Jhane Barnes

The Jhane Barnes customer seeks distinction and prefers not to blend in.

J H A N E B A R N E S J H A N E B A R N E S J H A N E B A R N E S J H A N E B A R N E S J H A N E B A R N E S

several times when her creations were too short or revealing. Even at that age she pushed the boundaries of fashion, protesting until the district dress code was changed to allow girls to wear pants. When a friend surpassed her percussion abilities and nabbed her spot with the school's dance band, Barnes decided that if she couldn't play with them, she would clothe them. She made the group's uniforms.

"I was crushed at first," Barnes remembers, "but then I had a blast making them." Barnes designed black with blue lurex-trimmed jumpsuits with adjustable shoulders so future band members could fit into them. The uniforms were a success, and Barnes developed a reputation as a talented designer.

What Barnes aspired to most, though, was a career in science. But her high school clothing teacher advised that while she might make a good astrophysicist, she had the potential to be a great designer. He urged her to follow the latter path.

Following high school, Barnes enrolled — to the disappointment of her parents — at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. In 1976, her professional career began to take off even while she was still attending classes.

On a trip to Philadelphia to sell some of her designs to clothing boutiques, she found only rejection. Crying and dispirited, Barnes was on her way back to the train station when a softhearted shop owner noticed her and asked to see her samples.

"I stopped and started talking to him," Barnes says. "He loved the pants I showed him and gave me an

order for 100 pairs for the opening of his store." The pants sold quickly, and the shop owner was soon ordering 100 pairs a week. The next year, a retail executive spotted a pair of Barnes' pants on a model in a restaurant in Manhattan. He tracked her down and ordered 100 pairs, which went to Bloomingdale's and Dayton Hudson. The order soon expanded to nearly 1,000 pairs.

The rising volume of orders were pushing Barnes beyond her financial resources, but a \$5,000 loan from her FIT biology teacher allowed her to continue to grow.

In those early days, she lived in Brooklyn, where what little money she earned provided a larger space than she could find in Manhattan. She'd cut the fabric at home, and then drag it to the factory on the subway.

"Jane" redesigned herself as "Jhane" in 1979, adding the mysterious "h" for two reasons: to make herself sound European and possibly male. "There were no women making men's clothing under their own names at the time," she explains. But she never saw the gender issue as a negative. "It was just another challenge that made me work harder."

It was in the early 1980s that Barnes began to incorporate her first loves — math and science — into her design and manufacturing process. She was among the first to own a fabric-





Watching the patterns come to life, Jhane Barnes oversees the work of a weaver.



H A N E B A R N E S J H A N E B A R N E S J H A N E B A R N E S





## H A N E B A R N E S J H A N E B A R N E S

weaving computer program that allowed her Atari computer to drive her handloom. The software took over the loom's pedals, which, depending on the sequence they were stepped on, created the fabric's weave. No longer restricted by the need to remember pedal sequences, she was free to design more and more complex fabric weaves and patterns.

As liberating as it was, Barnes soon felt fettered even by the best software. She spent more time fixing computer-generated weaves than if she had created the weave from hand. Rather than be limited, she went directly to the source—the mathematicians and computer programmers—and worked with them to develop her own software. She was able to have the mathematicians write the complicated algorithms that would create the weaves and patterns she envisioned.

Today, Barnes employs a team of mathematicians through a company called Design Software.

“What I do today,” Barnes says, “couldn't be done without computers—it's too complex.”

A glance at one of Barnes' intriguing shirts or ties, with patterns resembling kaleidoscopic visions or Asian mandalas, and it's easy to see her need for computers.

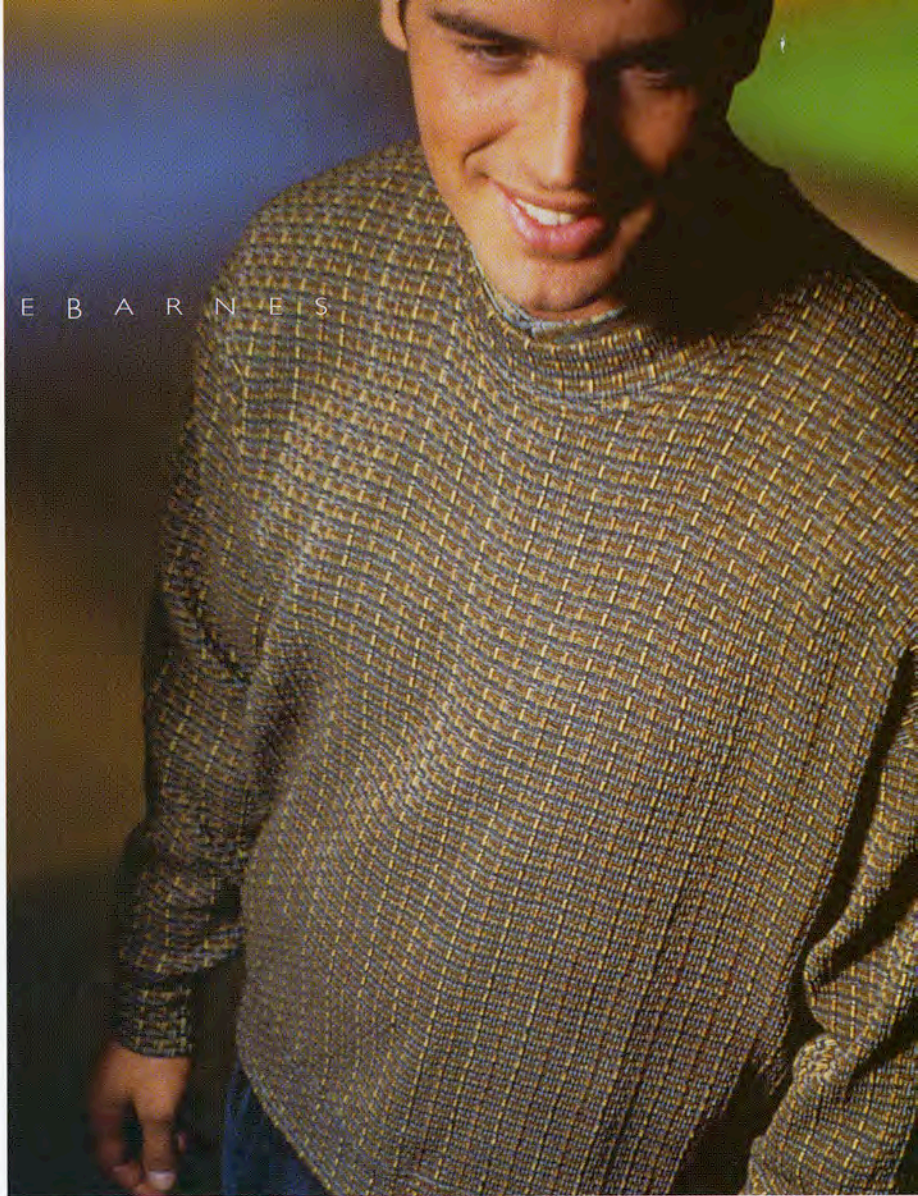
Barnes now relies on state-of-the-art Macintoshes running her own custom programs, which enable her to go directly from computer screen to creating the fabrics. Most designers, Barnes explains, buy prints from textile artists. Those who do work on computers aren't aware of the math involved.

“No one I know is working with mathematicians to create algorithms that automatically produce patterns. That's where we're doing ground-breaking stuff,” she explains. And, even when Barnes does design something by hand, she and her mathematicians will analyze it to see how math could simplify or automate parts of the process.

So advanced is Barnes' use of mathematics, that her designs are featured in a math text, *Algebra II: Exploration and Applications* in a chapter entitled *Sequences and Series: Fractals for Fashion*.

Barnes shares her success with husband Katsuhiko Kawasaki, who she married 11 years ago. The two met through his family, from whom Barnes was buying fabric made in Japan. “He was the only one who spoke English,” Barnes says. These days, Kawasaki operates his own company as a textile converter. Not surprisingly, one of his largest customers is Jhane Barnes, but he also sells to Calvin Klein and Ann Taylor.

The two share their secluded glass and concrete home in Pound Ridge, New York, north of Manhattan, with two Dalmatians and a golden retriever. The house, which is decorated with furniture Barnes has designed and Asian elements like shoji screens, includes a music room outfitted with electronic drums and synthesizers (She admits to a secret desire to be a percussionist in new age musician Yanni's band.) The serene house sits by a one-acre lake.

**FAR LEFT:**

Only the finest of threads are used in order to achieve such detail in the patterns.

**ABOVE:**

The result is a form-fitting garment without the weight.



“What’s great about Jhane,” says Lisa Gerbasi, a vice president for Saks Fifth Avenue, “is that she constantly evolves. Her business continues to grow. She has a very loyal following and her designs are very specific to her, which is unusual in the market.” Some customers, Gerbasi says, like to be called the day Jhane Barnes items arrive to be sure they never miss a new design.

Creativity is something Barnes carefully nurtures. She has a floatation tank she uses to open her mind and tap into the depths of her subconscious. She studies brain waves and the functions of the separate hemispheres, and reads heavily in the new age field. Recent nightstand reading includes *Lucid Dreaming*, a guide to taking conscious control of dreams and using them to explore and expand creativity.

Dreams have brought her not only the occasional design, but also great insight into the process of how she works. One dream led to a whole new approach to working with color through her software and computer-aided design. She realized in a dream that the interaction she had with the computer didn’t affect color, only the patterns. In her dream, she says, she analyzed how and why she did certain facets of design, and how they could be translated into mathematical terms. “I woke up excited,” she says, “and called my mathematician. It took about two days for him to incorporate my new ideas into the software, and now it’s really changed — and speeded up — the way I apply color.”

Barnes approaches all of fashion design with a skepticism appropriate for someone who contemplated a career in the hard sciences, but she delights in finding new ideas that can’t be disproved by her scientist friends.

Keeping work interesting, both for herself and her employees, is important to Barnes. She recently moved the company’s headquarters into a new 12,000-square-foot space in a Manhattan high-rise. Nearly floor-to-ceiling windows are on three sides of the office with unmatched city views. “It’s fun to work here,” she says. “I insist people learn something new every day. I believe that’s why we’re living — to love and to learn. I seriously believe that’s the only thing we take with us to the next life.” To facilitate that, she moves employees around from one responsibility to another.

When Barnes has doubts about her chosen career — she often feels she should be working for the environment or on population control rather than something as fickle and ephemeral as fashion — she rediscovers enjoyment when customers tell her how much they love her creations. “Several times a year,” Barnes confesses, “I think, ‘Why the hell am I in this business? I should be doing something more useful.’ But I get broken out of my doldrums when someone says, ‘Your clothes make me feel good — they help me express who I am.’”

Barnes continues to push the boundaries of fashion design and fabric innovation. For the past few years she has been experimenting with another computer-generated process called photo-realism. Using clothing dyes rather than printer’s ink, she can create one-of-a-kind prints composed of millions of colored dots. While it can take a full day to create 50 yards of fabric, the quality and intricacy of the pattern are unsurpassed. She has also begun creating designs out of an environmentally friendly fabric called Tencel, which is a natural cellulose found in trees. The fabric has more body than rayon, drapes better than silk and wrinkles less than linen.

Designing lighting fixtures for businesses comes next, she says, and possibly patterns for Formica, too. After that, it seems likely the world will see the first Jhane Barnes line of women’s clothing, which could be out as early as this fall. (She often wears one-of-a-kind pieces crafted from her own fabrics.)

“I’m not out there searching for new things to design,” Barnes claims with a laugh. “People just keep calling and asking me to do new things.”

Although Barnes wasn’t sure when she was young which direction her abilities would take her, and she may not have realized they’d work surprisingly well in conjunction with one another, she always had the intensity and determination that would eventually bring her to her ever-expanding empire today. “I always knew, even as a teenager, I’d be this successful.” ■