

# THE RADAR FASHION

BY ALICE LEE TEBO

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## VICE VERSA *Diana Inman's reversible, waterproof and wrinkle-free silk designs are turning the fashion world inside out.*

A bell-sleeved black trench turns into a gold brocade evening coat. A feminine polka-dot blouse becomes a sleek tunic. A zebra-print belt does double-duty as a scarf and can be twisted into 10 different looks. It's all in a day's work for 49-year-old Buckhead-based designer Diana Inman and her remarkably versatile and elegant collection of blouses, pants, dresses, jackets and coats, called Dianaira. The "ira" in Dianaira stands for "interchangeable, reversible apparel." Six or seven items can be mixed and matched for any occasion, from summer to winter, and 80 percent of the line can be reversed for instant day-to-night transformation.

Using black, chocolate and pearl as foundation hues, Inman crafts each piece out of 100 percent Italian silk. "It's the strongest natural fiber, and it's timeless," she explains. "It's not limited to a season. When it's cooler, you can layer it and still be comfortable." But this silk also comes with a Diana-developed twist: Her "bamboo pleat" fabric (so named because of its resemblance to bamboo shoots) is water-repellant and wrinkle-free. Her clothing can be balled up, tossed into a purse or suitcase, and pulled back out in ready-to-wear condition, rain or shine. The label is fast becoming a favorite among well-heeled businesswomen because of its functionality. "A few pieces can be worn in many ways, saving you time and space, especially when you travel," Inman says. "And since my clothing is reversible, you get two for the price of one." That price ranges from \$300 to \$700 for blouses and pants; jackets and coats cost anywhere from \$700 to \$3,000.

Growing up in Taiwan, Inman started drafting her own sartorial sketches at the age of 10 under the expert eye of her mother, a fashion

designer from China, who would then cut and sew the clothes for her. "I enjoyed being different," Inman says. "For example, I would sketch a blouse with only one sleeve." After studying business administration at Taiwan University, Inman ran her own PR consulting firm, furniture store, accessories boutique and advertising company, and published two books on marketing strategy and e-commerce. In 1997, she moved to Atlanta to be near her sister, who worked with the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, and it was here her fashion instincts were fully reawakened. She got some retail sales experience under her belt at Nordstrom and then moved to Neiman Marcus, where she became the specialist for Eskandar and Giorgio Armani. "I was in the store every day talking to customers. Understanding their needs gave me confidence," says Inman. "At this point, I realized it was time to pursue my dream of being a designer."

That decision paid off. When she's not staging nationwide trunk shows, including one at D.C.'s National Museum of Women in the Arts last fall, Inman visits her manufacturing facility in Manhattan's Garment District monthly. She has only recently launched marketing efforts, but Dianaira can already be found in Elements of Style and Potpourri boutiques, as well as high-end stores in North and South Carolina. "I want to build my business slowly—maybe state by state," Inman says. "The couture quality of my clothes will never be sacrificed." ▲

For inquiries or orders, call 678.471.1533.