

Focus

**JNBY's modern luxury**12/07/2010
Reemé IdrisMutable clothes, multiple brand meanings
Kirsten Luce/NY Times ©**Scope**

Hangzhou-based fashion label JNBY was founded in 1994 by 12 students. The brand's 600-strong global retail roster - the latest addition to which is a boutique in NYC - reflects the relevance and global appeal of simple, customisable designs.

So what makes JNBY so special? At first glance, nothing; the casual wear collection consists of leggings, jeans, Grecian-inspired dresses, duffle coats and fitted leather jackets in earthy, practical tones. There are no avant-garde or distinguishable design influences; the appeal of the garments on the rail begins to emerge once tried on.

Incorporated into the designs are the ability for that wearer to play with the clothes, turning one design into the next; what appears to be a cardigan into a Gothic looking wrap, tunics turned and worn backwards to form an off the shoulder bubble top, anoraks becoming dresses.

Shop assistants are more like personal stylists who guide customers through each item's potential based on the shopper's own needs. The shop surroundings are dotted with foldaway tables and fixtures, adding to the sense of impermanence and mutability.

Context

The idea of multi-way wear wasn't invented by JNBY. American Apparel, Rachel Roy and Dolce & Gabbana have all sold garments which encourage this element of play and changeability. However, JNBY have made this feature the very ethos of the brand, all the way to its name ('Just Naturally Be Yourself'), appealing to consumers who want customise their look to suit their mood, body shape or environment, straight from the hanger.

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Retail is an industry like many that is having to square its shoulders and deliver for the changing demands of budget-aware buyers who no longer accept luxury and frugality as opposing notions. They are value-driven, which means that whilst they may still not balk at spending \$400 on a single item, they need to feel that item will not only fit them, but enhance their sense of self and surprise them as well.

JNBY have given their shoppers the freedom of a no-commitment approach to dressing, where single items are in fact, not so single, fitting the needs of frequent travellers and complementing the lifestyles of those buying into impermanent choices across the board from car sharing to contemporary home design.

Insights and opportunities

JNBY exemplify what it means to deliver modern luxury in a transitional economic period where luxury's own codes are evolving. Luxury should be synonymous with meaning for each individual; and they should be able to determine this meaning for themselves with an increased knowledge and access to knowledge.

The cleverness of JNBY's designs lies in their simplicity. As customers experiment with the clothes, shaping each outfit to fit their personality, they warm to the brand for allowing them to play the part of the expert stylist – each deceptively simple item yields an outfit that will feel unique to the wearer, strengthening their inclusion in and enjoyment of the brand.

Further reading

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- nytimes.com
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- Debbi Evans, 'Impermanence as a rising cultural trend', 16 October 2009. Available [here](#)

Industry	Fashion
Location	China New York
Keywords	Impermanence Meaning Value Mass Customisation

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