

Beyond the Boudoir

BY DANA ROBINSON

Luxurious details continue to keep Natori on top.

For those who aren't familiar with the **Natori** collection of high-end lingerie and sleepwear, the line can be summed up in a few words: Simple. Elegant. Luxurious.

The stunning styles were created by **Josie Cruz Natori**, founder, president, and CEO of **The Natori Co.** What began as a start-up company in 1977 eventually became a blend of Josie's Wall Street background, strong cultural ties to her homeland in the Philippines, and feminine instincts. The culmination of those factors evolved into a lingerie empire that has been going strong for 30 years.

"I just happened to have landed in lingerie by accident," says Josie Natori. Feeling that it was time to move on from her position as a vice president at Merrill Lynch and nurture her entrepreneurial spirit, Natori considered many different business options. The decision to go into the apparel industry came after a friend encouraged her to visit a buyer at **Bloomingdale's** with the selection of hand-embroidered blouses that another friend in the Philippines sent to her. The buyer suggested lengthening the blouses to create nightshirts, and the first order for 1,000 nightshirts came from **Hudson Bay** department store in Canada. The Natori collection was later launched at **Saks Fifth Avenue**.

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The sale marked the end of her career at Merrill Lynch and heralded the beginning of a new concept in fashion—innerwear as outerwear. Natori continued to create an array of loungewear looks that were suitable for wearing at

home or around town. "We were the first to do the beach cover outfits that could easily have been ready-to-wear," says Natori. "Because it was a real niche, [my collection] became a big fish in a small pond in a very short time." Natori insists that she was unaware of the strict categorizations of fashion, and simply designed styles that pleased her. "I didn't know the words 'sleepwear' or 'loungewear' or 'daywear,'" continues Natori. "I just approached it as a way of dressing. I just looked at it ... from my own feeling as a woman—what I would like."

The Natori collection has blossomed over the years and now includes five distinct lines that abide by Josie's philosophy about style and design. "It's always been about making a woman feel good about herself," says Natori. "I feel that women work so hard, and I like to be able to think that we make things ... that enhance her feeling about herself, and also enhances her life." Among those lines are





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Natori, an elegant offering of lingerie and loungewear; Josie, a youthful line of simple, fun styles; Cruz, an affordable array of colorful robes and caftans; and Natori Home, a collection of bed linens, pillows, and throws.

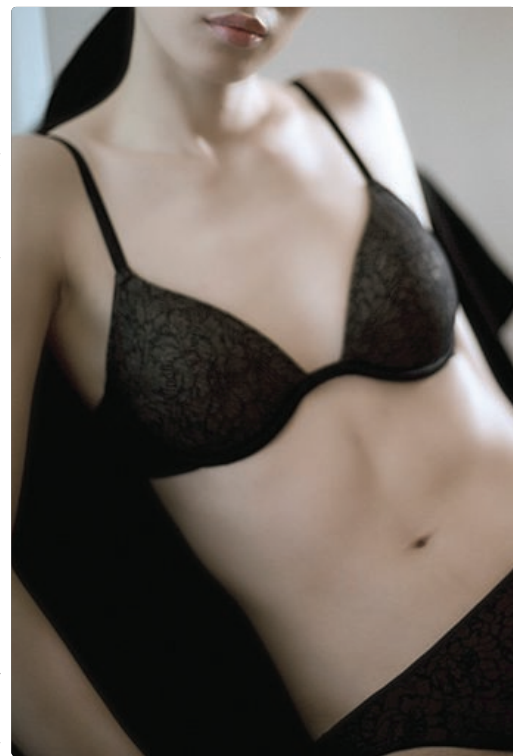
February 2007 marked the addition of Josie Natori Couture to the Josie Natori Collection. The line of couture creations includes silk and cashmere kimonos, robes, and tunics that blend intricate embroideries and classic elegance. The stunning styles were created as a part of The Natori Co.'s 30th anniversary celebrations. Josie herself was amazed at the warm reception they received. "Bergdorf brought it in as part of the collection early in June, and they sold out in three styles," says Natori. "So, in this one, price is no object—they sold a \$2,700 kimono." The couture collection will continue as part of the Josie Natori line because it has been so well received.

Based on the success of the Josie Natori styles, Natori will be releasing a couture bridal line for spring. The collection will include "really exquisite things

that can be made to order," says Natori. "This is really where we can experiment and use the most exquisite fabrics from Europe and really extravagant beading and embroidery ... It's a playground to be able to do the best of Natori without any limitations."

Also new for spring is the launch of the Josie Foundations line of bras, underwear, and structured pieces, such as bustiers, camisoles with underwire, and thongs with removable garters. The collection was released under Dana-Co, a Natori licensee. Natori also relaunched the Josie collection of lounge-, sleep-, and daywear titled Josie InsideOut. The relaunch is intended to remedy a problem among retailers: — the needs of the contemporary customer "who doesn't want to dress like [her] mother," says Natori. "I think our answer to that is our Josie brand for spring. This is addressing an audience who has not really been shopping, particularly in the department stores."

Throughout 30 years of continuous expansion, Natori has stayed true to her original vision. "I always believed that Natori was a total concept," she says. "We stayed as a luxury brand in the specialty stores and the proper department stores." So, what will the next 30 years yield for Natori? Why, high-quality, stunning designs that combine the many facets of lingerie, lifestyle, and luxury, of course. ♦



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