

# The new designers

Over the past half-dozen years, we've seen an unprecedented surge of fashion in the Islands. Talented designers are defecting from the big pressure cookers of New York and Los Angeles, choosing our more mellow lifestyle. It's a challenge to manage the business side of fashion here, but these designers are finding ways to make their fashion splash in our part of the pond.

-Paula Rath



**top:** Handbags from the Tutu's Lanai line. **left:** Meleana Blaich on the lanai of her tūtū, Amelia Bailey, whose Mānoa home inspired her spring/summer collection.



## MELEANA BLAICH

After establishing a successful handbag business in New York, Meleana Blaich, 27, decided to come home in 2006. "I always knew I wanted to come home. I couldn't see myself

designing and succeeding in that world," she said. "It's such a feeling of disposable fashion and always moving on to the next and the new. I want to design things people will love and wear for years to come."

Her spring/summer collection, called Tutu's Lanai, takes its inspiration from the Mānoa home of her grandmother, respected kupuna and floral designer Amelia Bailey. The person she misses most in New York is fellow Punahou graduate and handbag designer Bliss Lau, with whom Blaich shared a studio. Lau helped jump-start Blaich's business

by talking her into a trade show, where several boutique owners snapped up Blaich's bags. Lucky, Nylon, California Apparel, Daily Candy and Elle Girl have featured the feminine floral bags on their editorial pages. Blaich's handbags sell for \$135 to \$180 at Baik Designs, Riches Kahala, and online at [www.meleana.com](http://www.meleana.com). They are also sold through Anthropologie's online catalog (though they are not identified by the line's name).

**Go to:** [www.umaghawaii.com](http://www.umaghawaii.com) for video of Leighlani designers at work.

## LEIGHLANI

Holland Henderson of Kailua and Stacey Schiller of Kāhala, both 32, have been friends since seventh grade. They attended Punahou together, then went on to Chapman College, later transferring to the University of San Francisco, together, of course. When they both found themselves pregnant, a business partnership was hatched. Frustrated by a search for cute maternity clothes, they modified a couple of commercial patterns to create their own. The garments were so successful that they investigated pattern makers and cut-and-sew contractors in Honolulu, and Leighlani Maternity was born. The name combines each of their daughters' middle names — Leigh and Lani. The line is meant for hip moms who want to maintain their personal style. Fitted, feminine and even sexy, the dresses, skirts, pants and tops are appropriate for work, a party, or dinner and a movie. Learning to adjust the sizes and create clothes that can be worn through the final trimester has been a challenge, Henderson said. "It's so awful to grow out of your maternity clothes." Their clothes are sold locally at Kahala Kids, Makana Mother & Baby, and Sweet Peas.



**left:** Holland Henderson, left, model Christina Hassing and Stacey Schiller celebrate a pretty pregnancy. **above:** This dress can be worn four different ways.