

# PHILADELPHIA STYLE

## TORY BURCH

FASHION'S FASTEST GROWING EMPIRE

LAURA FATTAL SPEAKS TO ANDREA MITCHELL

PLUS Joseph Altuzarra, Pat Ciarrocchi, Pierre Robert



# TORY BURCH

## has it in the bag

Designer and philanthropist Tory Burch has a new partnership that is poised to make her iconic label bigger than ever. BY CHIP KIDD PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERIC OGDEN

What would Tracy Samantha Lord Haven—heroine of *The Philadelphia Story*—choose to wear for getting her groove on at *American Bandstand* in the 1970s? The undeniable answer is Tory Burch—and it would have made her the most fabulous gal on the floor. I summon this tri-generational fantasy confluence of Philly-based icons as no accident, but as an affirmation that the first two helped give rise to the third. Really, how lucky are you, Philadelphia: classic film, music, and fashion, all from your corner of the world, and all for the ages.

First, Burch describes what to her mind distinguishes Philadelphia style and fashion: “Women there love clothing that’s not so complicated. They want to be fashionable, but they are also very active, doing a lot with their kids, so they want to be comfortable. When I go there for the weekend [Burch’s mother recently moved to Haverford], I love our clothes because it’s so easy to just throw something on and put things together—casual chic.”

OK, we all know that Burch has been a New

York girl for many years now and long a fixture of Big Apple society, but in any discussion about her beginnings, she is the first to hearken back to her roots in Valley Forge and at The Agnes Irwin School, which my friend Lisa Birnbach declared more than 30 years ago was one of the preppiest schools in America. This is by no means a bad thing; quite the opposite, when you look at the gorgeous and beloved output that has been created under Burch’s watch, and what she endeavors to do for empowering women. And she is scarcely 45. I could cite the staggering numbers concerning her business, which started a mere seven years ago and has grown into a half-billion-dollar enterprise with more than 60 stores worldwide, but that, however impressive, is not the point.

The point is her passion, and the work that goes into all of it—the shoes, the bags, the ballet flats, the dresses, everything else, all delightfully stunning, beautifully produced, yet not prohibitively expensive. Along with the expansion of Burch’s core brand with its new Manhattan flagship store and recently opened boutiques in Hawaii and Beirut, this year sees her first foray into the beauty business with a fragrance in development with



Angelique blouse in tamarind (\$295) and chain and stone bead rosary necklace (\$245). Tory Burch. King of Prussia Mall, 610-337-2565; toryburch.com. Pants, shoes, bracelets, and ring, Burch's own





Pennie jacket in storm blue (\$275) and Samona top in blue dot (\$250), **Tory Burch**. King of Prussia Mall, 610-337-2565; [toryburch.com](http://toryburch.com). Ring, Burch's own



Estée Lauder that will launch in 2013. “We are extremely excited and proud to be working with Tory Burch to develop her fragrance collection,” says Veronique Gabai-Pinsky, global president of Aramis and Designer Fragrances at Estée Lauder. “Tory’s eye for creativity, interest in culture, and keen business skills make her the perfect partner for the Estée Lauder Companies. She has a strong community of women sharing the same philanthropic values who love to be close to the brand and the social responsibility it represents.”

**T**hat idea of a community of women has become the center of the Tory Burch brand and led to the launch of the Tory Burch Foundation in 2009. By partnering with ACCION USA, a leading US microfinancing lender, the foundation has provided micro loans to women in need who want to start small businesses and otherwise cannot get financing. The foundation further sweetens the pot by offering a mentoring program so that the educational as well as financial needs of these entrepreneurs are met.

Speaking of this, all proceeds from the sale of her recent collaboration with street artist James De La Vega go to the foundation, and the results are stunning. The bags, wallets, and iPad cases are a riot of expressive color and jottings that contrast brilliantly with the vessels’ expert craftsmanship. It’s as if Burch and De La Vega took a white leather tote and passed it back and forth, taking turns covering it with vibrant doodles and exchanging messages of encouragement: IF THE CUP ISN’T FULL... ADD WATER; BE MINDFUL EVEN IF YOUR MIND IS FULL; YOU ARE YOUR BEST INVESTMENT.

Amusingly, when Burch first encountered De La Vega’s work (walking past his storefront on St. Mark’s Place in New York’s East Village), she introduced herself, gave him her card, and said she was amazed by his message and would be interested in collaborating on something. His response: “Absolutely not.” She laughs as she recalls, “So I said, ‘OK, well, it was really nice meeting you.’ And I bought a few stickers for my boys’ rooms and left.” A year later, he called her back, impressed with her foundation and her work in general.

When presented with this opportunity to sit down with the woman herself, as a graphic designer, I first had to ask her about the logo. It’s kind of fascinating, because as ubiquitous as it is in her oeuvre, it’s also discreet in its own way—just abstract enough not to make her customers look like billboards for her brand, but distinct enough to be unmistakable. Where did it come from?

“Modco,” she says, referring to the downtown

branding firm that counts among its other clients Vera Wang and the estate of Diana Vreeland. “They showed me over 200 ideas, but I knew which was the right one immediately. I’m also a huge fan of David Hicks [the British Midcentury Modern interior designer], and there’s a nod to him in it, too.” Indeed, Hicks’s mark is four severe H’s joined to make a sort of X; but Tory’s two T’s that make a plus-shaped cross have a touch of baroque styling all their own.

Before I get a chance to delve into her upbringing on a Valley Forge horse farm, she tells me about a trip to Myanmar from which she has just returned, the highlight being a dinner with none other than Aung San Suu Kyi, the Burmese dissident activist who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 and was released from decades of house arrest only in late 2010—sort of the Nelson



Burch with her mother, Reva Robinson



With brother Jamie



Clearly style runs in the family: Burch's parents, Reva and Buddy



Burch and her jewelry design director, Justin Giunta, painting inspirations for the De La Vega collaboration

“The clothes should never wear *you*. Learn what looks good on you and your body, for your age, to feel confident.”



Mandela of Burma. "I think she's going to run for office—after 20 years of house arrest! Incredible," exclaims Burch.

So, let's talk about clothes.

I ask Burch to tell me one lesson that she learned about fashion from her mother. The answer doesn't disappoint. "The clothes should never wear *you*; that was something she always told me. Learn what looks good on you and your body, for your age, to feel confident. Don't follow trends too closely."

Her reflection on the same topic concerning her father is a bit more involved. "I always thought he should have been a designer, he had such impeccable style. He was known among his peers as one of the first men to wear Gucci loafers in Philadelphia. That was considered very odd, but appreciated. He also loved his John Lobb shoes; he had the same pair for 40 years. I hung on his every word about clothes, but we disagreed about chunky heels—he didn't like them, and I did. He preferred a more refined shoe on women, something sexier."

Burch and her brothers have kept much of their beloved dad's wardrobe, most of which was custom-made in Europe, New York, and, yes, Philadelphia. "The detailing is just exquisite, unique, different. His trademark was he used to have his jackets lined with Hermès scarves." She plans to eventually use it as reference for a Tory Burch men's line, but that will come down the road. When she does decide to commit to it, she plans to start with gifts and accessories and build from there. "We do have some swim trunks in the works, actually."

Burch then tells me about the heirloom that is nearest to her heart (literally): "A pendant my father had made for his mother; it's engraved JE TA AIME—UN PEU, BEAUCOUP, PASSIONNÉMENT, À LA FOLIE. Which loosely translates as, 'I love you a little, a lot, like crazy.' It wraps around a sunflower ornament. I wear it often, and it's become the logo for our foundation."

**T**he question that most fascinates me when it comes to designers is who they pay attention to, and Burch, as a lover of fashion, is not shy with her answer. "Well, I'm always looking, but the first collection I probably look for now is Céline," she says. "And I always love Proenza Schouler, and what Olivier Theyskens did for Rochas." She thinks some more. "Balenciaga. Prada."

She has just started doing runway shows (her second was on February 14), which she likens to "getting married twice a year." "It's this huge shooting plan, and we work a year in advance and it's a tremendous amount of work, and then it's over in nine minutes," she says. "And then you wait for the reviews."

Next we delve into the creative process, and just how much of the line she creates or at least oversees. "I oversee *everything*," she says. "We have a great design team. I give them direction,

talk about colors and fabrics, we do that all together; then we talk about shapes and silhouettes, and they come back and present things, and then we edit. Then things get sent to Asia, where our production is, and the samples come back, and we fit the samples. So it's really a collaborative process... and that's just ready-to-wear. Then we have handbags, footwear, costume jewelry, and it goes on and on. Eyewear. We ship new product to stores 11 times a year." She doesn't sound at all exhausted by this.

Or anything else, for that matter. She exudes pure calm that never spills over into arrogance ("My father was very calm. I got that from him"), and she has a great vibe with her coworkers—I could sense it in the time we spent together. You cannot fake that.

You also cannot fake knowing so much about visual culture, both in and outside of the fashion world. When she

asks where I am from and I tell her Reading, she tells me of an artist named Jack Savitsky, also from the area, a folk painter of coal miners who died in the early 1990s. I'm not familiar with him, but sure enough, his work is fascinating.

"I have so many things that I want to do," Burch confesses when I ask about the future, but she then hesitates. "No, I mean 'we.' So many things *we* want to do... and I feel like we're just beginning."

Tracy Lord would approve. **PS**

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Tory Burch with Cousin and Co. founders Shekima Francois and Undra Duncan



## MEN-TORY-ING

The Tory Burch Foundation helps women entrepreneurs both financially and through its priceless mentoring program.

Tory Burch launched her foundation at the height of the worldwide financial crisis with the knowledge that "women entrepreneurs in America face significant challenges. They are more likely to live in poverty, more likely to be denied a loan, and are more likely to juggle starting a small business with caring for a young family." The foundation's strength is that it addresses both the logistic and spiritual growth of these businesses. Terri McCullough, executive director of the foundation, explains further, "Tory's intent was to support the economic empowerment of women through microfinance and our relationship with ACCION USA, and then we founded the mentoring program, which is our effort to connect women entrepreneurs with people who have had great success in a variety of industries."





Reena blouse in ecru (\$250) and Tribley pant in Amethyst Durlez print (\$250), **Tory Burch**. *King of Prussia Mall, 610-337-2565; toryburch.com*. Bracelets and ring, Burch's own

Makeup by Berta Camal  
Hair by Jessica James