



Local Hero

Championing the hip trend of artisan-made fashion and gifts, a newcomer to town has Houston going mad for Mod.

| By Tara Seetharam | Photography by Laurie Perez |

When law school grad Karee Laing, 33, lost her job drafting contracts for General Motors' legal department in Detroit's auto industry crash, she made a life-altering decision and exited Corporate America. "Sometimes you just know," she says. "When you feel like there's something else that you should be doing, then maybe there *is* something else you should be doing."

Craving a change of scenery from Michigan, the Jamaica native took a friend's advice to give Texas a whirl, and she instantly fell in love with Houston. "It's the vibrancy of it all," she says, also noting the city's modest cost of living compared to other big towns. "You've got the big-city vibe without all of the expenses."

Three years later, she has a whole new life—and a successful upstart business. The creative, *Lucky* magazine-obsessed Laing

"Why not give back to local artisans?" asks ModMade founder Karee Laing. "Maybe I'll start a movement."



OBJETS D'ART
Jamaica native Laing's online store and pop-up shop at Coquette tout artisan-made accessories such as those above.

is making waves in her new hometown with her spin on the growing trend of artisan-made goods. She just opened a funky online store called ModMade Goods (modmadegoods.com), which features all hand-crafted but decidedly modern items.

Think everything from bright clutches and lemon-colored ceramic pigs, to her own line of crisp, attitude-packing stationary ("What's up, pudding cup?" one card reads). She prides herself on spotting intensely passionate craftsmen, like the man who carves trays from barn wood in Quitman, Texas. "Why *not* give back to local artisans? Maybe I'll start a movement."

In step with this philosophy, the bold beauty is using her new biz to promote fellow women entrepreneurs. She gives 10 percent of ModMade's earnings to local charities that help female entrepreneurs achieve their dreams. And that's just what a "ModGirl" does, Laing says, describing someone who knows "being stylish means being [a] citizen of the world who gives back."

Besides her online biz, she's also selling her finds in a pop-up shop in the back of Coquette Boutique (1848 Westheimer Rd., 713.527.7377). She originally hooked up with the store as part of her other job—heading her own PR and marketing firm, Studio Brand Collective. She represents local businesses such as event planners, architects and jewelry designers.

The self-proclaimed overachiever—she speaks with the eloquence of a seasoned businesswoman, even as she rocks a leopard dress and neon flats—credits her confidence and drive to her mother, a "renaissance woman" who moved her four teenage daughters from Jamaica to the States in search of opportunities. "When I think of all that she did for her kids, not knowing anything, it reinforces a lot in me. If you work hard, generally things do fall into place."

And that's her plan. This winter, she's expanding her firm to include Web seminars for interior designers, and she continues to scour the Internet for chic finds for ModMade. She'll eventually open her own shop in Houston, where she can blend her PR firm with ModMade and even house a few of her artisan suppliers.

And the other thing on her to-do list? Finding a man who can "balance her craziness," as she puts it. This she says with a twinkle in her eye.

