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Tory Burch in
her own design

TORY IN ALL HER GLORY

In just four years, TORY BURCH has made her mark in fashion—by remaking luxury in her own image. *By Carrie Karasyov*

THEY WANT TO KNOW *everything*. What fragrance she wears. What her favorite restaurant is. If she has plans to start a home line. Who her style icon is. How she entertains. What her house looks like. What skin products she uses. How, with three young sons and three stepdaughters, she can do it all. As soon as I tell other women that I am interviewing designer Tory Burch, the questions come flying, as if I'm up against a fashion firing squad. I've interviewed major celebrities, from movie stars to political figures, but no one has generated as much interest as this petite blonde forty-one-year-old, who launched her eponymous label in 2004. When she opened the doors to her boutique in the fashionable Nolita section of New York City, she did almost \$100,000 worth of business the first day—selling out virtually her entire collection. Her tunics became the uniform for everyone from the Upper East Side lady who lunches to women across America who wanted to look like an Upper East Side lady who lunches—or, more correctly, her modern-day version: younger, hipper and on a tighter schedule.

Success has followed success. Tory appeared on *Oprah*, and the host's lavish praise increased the frenzy to epic proportions: that day there were eight million hits on her Web site (toryburch.com). She won the Accessories Council Excellence Award for Accessory Brand Launch in 2007. Named for her mother, her Reva shoe—a comfortable flat with the brand's recognizable T logo—became an instant best seller and spurred numerous

knockoffs. In less than four years since her debut collection, Tory Burch has become an industry force, with twelve free-standing stores across the country and plans to open many more. But why?

"When I looked at the market, I realized a specific price point was missing," explains the designer, curled up on the sofa in her sprawling yet homey apartment at New York's Pierre Hotel. "Luxury, as I see it, is not exclusionary. I think it used to be defined by a lifestyle that was based on wealth. But for me, luxury is not something you can buy. It's about having personal style and living your life based on your individual aesthetic. It is not about spending money but about having taste and being creative. Luxury is knowing your taste, developing it over time and understanding how to apply it to every aspect of your life."

It's easy to understand the adulation she inspires, since Tory herself is the embodiment of effortless chic. She is the kind of mother who wakes up at six in the morning to take her boys skateboarding in the park and who divides her day between working and tending to her children's needs. (Divorced from venture capitalist Chris Burch, who remains her business partner, she briefly dated Lance Armstrong last year.) A self-described tomboy, she is reluctant, she says, to spend extensive time grooming; she often leaves the house with little makeup and wet hair, yet she always looks put together, as does her home. Her apartment, spectacularly decorated in bursts of color—

Portraits by *John Huba*

Despite describing herself as a tomboy, Tory has long been one of the most glamorous women in New York. Now she's at the helm of a formidable business, translating her taste and lifestyle into an instantly recognizable fashion brand. Crinkled-chiffon gown with clear sequins (\$850), at Tory Burch, NYC, 212-334-3000. Her own gold cuffs by Kirat and her own ring (on middle finger) by Sevan.



Daniel Romualdez worked with her on its design—is filled with antiques, first-edition books and spectacular artwork, but she is quick to point out a tear in the sofa's fabric and to comment that "everything is not perfect, and I'm okay with that." For this New Yorker, life is about living.

"Time is a luxury for me, definitely," she explains as children's voices and ringing phones can be heard down the hall. "It's about time management and putting my kids first and work after. People look at me, and I think they sometimes have a perception that's very different from the reality of what my life is. I'm not really that hung up on looking perfect all the time. I don't get frazzled. I'm pretty calm; even when entertaining, I'm fine. You know, things will work out, whatever's going on."

One source of appeal to her legions of fans is that Tory seems like one of them. A Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, native, she relocated to New York City after college and worked in fashion PR and marketing at such companies as Vera Wang and Ralph Lauren before quitting her job, as many women do, to spend time with her growing family. Then, as her children began to get older, she became restless and started collecting tear sheets from magazines, pictures of paintings, old photographs, catalogues from vintage-clothing sales at auction houses. A picture of a wall in Morocco that had a nice pattern, photos of 1960s clothing from a company called Jax—all these and various other images she put into a black binder that she refers to as her "book of inspiration." It was a happy time for her, a time when she could dream of launching her own label.

"In the beginning," she says matter-of-factly, "I didn't think I could do it, and I didn't have the confidence to do it. I met with Narciso [Rodriguez] to ask his advice. And then I started to put together my book of inspiration and worked on it for about a year; then 9/11 happened, and I just put everything on hold. Then, a year later, I was back living in the Philadelphia area, and I decided to do it any-

Tory's Tips

► **Jewelry:** "Jewelry is an important element of any outfit. The trick is not to overdo it. I like to pick one bold piece and make that the focal point. I have a few pieces that I wear all the time and that work well with everything. I think estate jewelry is great, and auctions are great places to get it. It's less expensive that way. I love old David Webb [vintage necklace, right]. I like Art Deco jewelry, old Cartier."



Fortune cuffs (\$350 each), at Tory Burch, NYC, 212-334-3000.



▲ **Cuffs:** "I also like wearing two identical cuffs—one on each wrist. I've always loved the way it looks. Bold cuffs or a necklace is a great way to add a bit of personal style to an outfit. A vintage cuff or necklace can make a simple outfit unique."



Trumpet top (\$295) and Belinda cropped pants (\$350), at Tory Burch, NYC, 212-334-3000.

◀ **Dressing:** "I try to stay away from any firm 'rules.' I think the best guide to looking chic is to focus on what looks good on you, since what works on one person may not work on another. But every woman should own a great-fitting pair of jeans, one nice piece of jewelry and something unusual that is beaded or embroidered. And every woman should have a few great pairs of pants—in addition to the perfect jeans, a pair of wide-legged cream trousers for evening and a pair of wool-flannel pants for day. A great cardigan and sleeveless shells are essential for layering."



▲ **Photos:** "I love having old photos of my parents around from trips they took during the 1960s and '70s. I also find that I can never have enough pictures of my kids in the house. I always travel with photos as well because they make a hotel room feel more like home."



◀ **Packing:** "I bring pictures of my children, a cashmere throw, Kiehl's lotion in the coriander scent, my Porthault baby pillow and my iPod—those are my travel essentials. I pack everything in tissue paper so nothing gets wrinkled. And I always pack a red ribbon for luck. It's something I picked up from my mother."

Kiehl's lotion (\$19.50), kiehls.com.

▼ **Beauty:** "My beauty regimen is very easy, and not much effort goes into it. I use Bobbi Brown cosmetics, and Patricia Wexler M.D. for sun protection. Erno Laszlo sea-mud soap is another of my favorite products; I get it at Neiman Marcus. My mother used to use it, and I love the way it smells. It always reminds me of my childhood."



Patricia Wexler M.D. moisturizer (\$39.50), bathandbodyworks.com. Bobbi Brown moisturizer (\$48), bobbibrown.com.

► **Entertaining:** "I don't like parties to feel stuffy. The other day I had some friends over for lunch, and I got takeout from my favorite Greek restaurant. I put the salads in big wooden bowls and arranged some fresh pink hydrangeas in a large vase. We used my favorite bamboo flatware [right] and some patterned napkins. You don't have to spend a lot of time or money, as long as you have a nice presentation and keep everything simple and chic."



Napkins (\$100 for four), at John Robshaw Textiles, johnrobshaw.com.



◀ **Candles:** "Scented candles are another important element in a room. I love the Istanbul and Buenos Aires candles from Vie Luxe. I often have candles burning in the bathroom or the living room, even when I'm not entertaining."

Vie Luxe candle (\$40), at Bergdorf Goodman, NYC, 800-558-1855.



◀ **Music:** "Music is really essential to a party. I love everything from hip-hop and rock to classics like Van Morrison and Neil Young."

► **Flowers:** "I love fresh flowers in every room in my house. I like bright colors and prefer arrangements with all one type of flower, such as these from Helena Lehane [212-888-7763]. I think it looks more modern that way. I like flowers to be simple and not too planned."



Tory's Favorites

Five Luxuries She Couldn't Live Without (or Wouldn't Want To): "My iPod, Porthault linens, caviar, Eres lingerie and fresh flowers."

Favorite New York Restaurants: "Il Cantinori, Bond Street and Nobu—I like sushi a lot. I love Il Mulino downtown and Sette Mezzo uptown. And Morimoto in the Meatpacking District."

Favorite Luxury Destinations: "Bali, Turkey, Morocco, India, Vietnam. I usually stay at the Four Seasons or an Aman resort. The Amans are so exotic, amazing. I love Asia, all the different parts of it."



Favorite Collectibles: "I love old books and first editions. They're all over my apartment—books on fashion or architecture, old David Hicks books [above], a lot of art books, Shakespeare. Even for the kids, I collect first editions, like *Tom Sawyer*. I also collect jewelry, porcelain, old Imari china and Puiforcat silver. I love Georg Jensen, too, especially the acorn pattern [right]."



Fork and knife (\$255 each), at Georg Jensen, NYC, 212-759-6457.



Vetiver cologne (2.5 oz, \$55), sephora.com.

Favorite Perfume: "I use a men's cologne that my father used to wear: Vetiver, by Guerlain."

Current Favorite Designers: "Proenza Schouler and Balenciaga. I love sheer talent, and these young guys [Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez at Proenza Schouler, and Nicolas Ghesquière at Balenciaga] and what they create and the artistic way they are working—their material, their execution and their fit—are unbelievable. They're all unbelievably chic. Jack and Lazaro are at the forefront of what's going on; they're very influential and directional. I also love Oscar de la Renta, Carolina Herrera, Alber Elbaz and Narciso Rodriguez."

Style Icons: "My mother and father, definitely. Out of everyone else, David Hicks is the most influential, for his mix of pattern, color and texture.

The rooms he did look very fresh to me now. I wanted to translate his vision in ready-to-wear—my way, but he was a big inspiration. I also love Talitha Getty's bohemian spirit, and Babe Paley [above] was very put together and fresh. Both had an effortless style that didn't seem too contrived."



way, and the store opened eight months later."

Included in that first collection (and in all future collections, she promises) was her interpretation of a tunic, inspired by a \$30 green floral-print vintage one that she had purchased at a Paris flea market six years earlier. The piece became a fashion phenomenon among women of all ages, because Tory had translated their needs and created a product that they had been coveting but couldn't find elsewhere in the market—something that they could wear, something that they *would* wear and yet something that would also make them feel stylish. Like Tory, these women had been supplementing their wardrobe with basics from the Gap or Banana Republic and buying the occasional Marc by Marc Jacobs item, but many were not finding the middle-range piece that could be worn daytime through evening. Women with larger bank accounts who wore only designer clothing needed something less precious; less affluent women wanted more aspirational pieces. "Tory gave us color," sighs one fan. "She gave us pattern and chic clothes that are upscale but don't break the bank. I had enough black and gray clothes to last a lifetime. I am happy to have orange in my wardrobe now!"

That is music to Tory's ears. "It has always been my goal to have my collection feel luxurious in spirit but to keep the prices accessible. We designed our stores to feel more like a room in someone's home than a traditional store, so our customers have that luxury experience," she explains.

And for those who want to know, there *is* a home collection being planned for sometime down the road. She's also thinking about doing a book, among other projects. "I am definitely gaining more confidence with each collection. I'm very decisive. I know exactly what I like and what I don't like right away. In that sense I'm somewhat of a perfectionist."

But right now, it's dinnertime. Friends and family are gathering in the kitchen, and Tory is surrounded by the things she loves. For her, that is the biggest luxury of all. ✕

"I love living in color,"
Tory says of her apart-
ment, which glows
with vivid hues and
patterns—but she could
also be speaking of her
designs. Here she pairs
a bright-yellow silk-
jacquard top (\$250)
with a white crepe
pencil skirt (\$250),
both at Tory Burch, L.A.,
310-248-2612. Her
own necklace by Van
Cleef & Arpels.

Hair by Kevin Lee at the
Kenneth Salon. Makeup
by Bobbi Brown. Mani-
cure by Ana-Maria for
Onyx Salon & Spa/artists
bytimothypriano.com.

