

A Fine Tradition



Snowflake

ITS DEDICATION TO QUALITY CANADIAN DESIGN AND EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE ENSURES SNOWFLAKE TRADING CORP. IS AN ENDURING SUCCESS



“WHAT I HAVE ALWAYS strived for with our stores is to sell items that are of

exceptional quality,” says Rokie Bernstein, founder of women’s apparel retailer Snowflake Trading Corp Ltd. “Ideally, every piece we sell at Snowflake should be enjoyed for a lifetime – if not longer.”

Bernstein opened her first Snowflake in 1979. The tiny boutique retailed boots, hand-painted long underwear and clothing, plus Canadian-made leathers, furs, sweaters, outerwear and accessories. “Rokie is a big promoter of Canada,” says Megan Halprin, Bernstein’s sister and Snowflake CFO. “It is her wish that Snowflake be known internationally as a showcase of great Canadian design.”

Bernstein tested other retail concepts in Alberta and in 1987 opened Vancouver’s first Snowflake. In 1988 the Banff store moved to a larger location in time for the Calgary Olympic Winter Games. “We literally waited for years for an opportunity to have a store on Banff Avenue,” says Halprin. Today, there are Snowflake boutiques in the Fairmont Chateau Whistler hotel, the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver and Banff’s Sundance Mall. There is also a Miriam Joy store in Banff’s Cascade Plaza.

Snowflake has remained true to its original concept of showcasing established and up-and-coming Canadian designers. All stores carry an assortment of fur, leather, shearling and knit outerwear and accessories, plus boots. “Our flagship store is in the Hotel Vancouver,” says Bernstein. “We are surrounded by some of the most sought-after labels. Snowflake is the only store in the group owned by Canadians, and the only store featuring Canadian products.”

Bernstein deals with manufacturers directly and works with designers to create what she believes will sell in her stores. “I sold Paula Lishman’s first knitted fur jacket,” she says. In the late ’90s, Bernstein started moving the company into the wholesale market supplying cashmere and fur products and accessories to the industry.

Bernstein is proud of its many longtime staff. “We put a lot of time and effort into training,” she says. The result is a strong sense of loyalty, passion for the store and its products, and a shared commitment for Snowflake’s success.

Snowflake is a company of women, which sets it apart from other retailers, but there are other differences as well. For example, although Snowflake is a fur store, its merchandise is not locked up. “As much >



Clockwise from top: Company founder Rokie Bernstein; Snowflake storefront in the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver; Miriam Joy’s granddaughters.



SNOWFLAKE TRADING CORP. LTD.

as possible, we want to project a friendly, relaxed atmosphere,” says Halprin. And the hard work has paid off: Snowflake received a Consumer’s Choice Award for Best Fur Salon.

The company continues to evolve. It has added menswear to its stores, including outerwear, gloves, boots, and cashmere accessories, and it’s also preparing for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. “What we sell is essentially Canada, and not many other retailers out there can say that,” says Bernstein.

Snowflake has also opened an “e-store,” where many of its signature items are available for purchase online. “When we first launched the website, we didn’t think we’d sell the big-ticket items,” says Halprin. “One of the first sales was for a \$6,000 fur jacket.”

The influence and memory of Bernstein and Halprin’s mother is never far from the sisters’ thoughts. In 2002, they opened Miriam Joy as a tribute to their mother. The store features items that range from “very affordable

to a tad indulgent,” says Bernstein. “The concept of the store was inspired by the cashmere sweaters we found in Mom’s drawers and the furs in the closet after she passed away.”

Quality, history, and tradition are not just an idea, they are a reality in the company. “We opened up our business 28 years ago on a handshake,” says Bernstein. “We still prefer to do business that way.” Undoubtedly, Snowflake has thrived because of Rokie. “She is such a visionary and brings incredible passion and dedication to our company,” says Halprin.

“Our signature motto is, ‘Simply the best in great Canadian design.’ To us, that means not only do our products have to be the best, but we also have to be the best. It is a tough statement to live up to, but we are ready for the challenge. After all, we are the front door to Canada.” ■

