



A High-End Designer Brand

An Interview with Pamela Roland,
President and Designer, Pamella Roland



EDITORS' NOTE Pamela Roland worked for a women's retailer while attending school in her early 20s before earning her business degree from Michigan State University. She then built an extensive background in marketing and public relations, working nearly 10 years in both corporate and agency environments. While living in Japan promoting family business interests, she worked as a director of public relations efforts for the National Art Show of the College Women's Association of Japan. Upon returning to the U.S., in 2002, Roland launched the Pamella Roland collection (www.pamellaroland.com), which received the prestigious 2003 Gold Coast Award in just its second year of operation. In 2010, Roland was inducted into the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA).

How has the Pamella Roland brand evolved and how do you define it?

Ours is a high-end designer brand. I didn't spend a lot of time on advertising in the beginning; I really worked at the business. A healthy business is the most important prerequisite to growing a brand.

Today, we have a lot of people looking at our business for licensing and other extensions, because we have never made any crucial mistakes as we have gradually built our nine-year-old brand.

Because we have this great brand name, we are now ready to move into an area where the company can grow more, and that is more of a fusion line we're working on now with department stores that will be called Pamella by Pamella Roland. Our price point now for our dresses is a few thousand dollars and up, but this line will be between \$300 and \$500.

What did you initially see in the market that made you feel the timing was right for creating the brand?

I never dreamed I would become a dress designer, nor did I even think about celebrities. Our first few years were more about sportswear.

I started this business when I was in my 40s and I would go to these events but could not find gowns I liked. When I made them, I wanted to make sure they felt good and you didn't have to have directions on how to put the

gown on. I just wanted to put a gown on and feel good in it, and most of the time, I didn't.

So our focus today is making beautiful gowns that feel good and look great on.

Where are your designs produced?

When I started the business, I had a company in Montreal but my sales office was in New York, so I'm still considered a New York American designer. It's still more expensive to produce in New York and I'm probably one of the few that still do. Many of the high-end designers are producing in China.

Are you happy with the distribution channels you have and is there a need to focus on specific stores?

We're in Bergdorf Goodman, Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Neiman Marcus, but all the department stores are tough. Because our brand is becoming well known, people are asking for it more, so we've grown our business.

In the past, it was not easy dealing with the department stores – they had their own struggles. But I have a better relationship with them

today than I ever had and we have relationships with a lot of buyers now.

We have to do trunk shows, because you have to concentrate on where your time should be spent.

But once the Pamella line starts, it will snowball and we're excited about that.

As you build recognition, is it tempting to broaden into new product extensions or are you happy with the range of offerings?

We have many irons in the fire. We're working with fragrance and a wallpaper company just came to us and we have a fun home care product, as well as sunglasses.

Brand extensions are where you can really grow your business. In July, I'm going to Shanghai to explore some opportunities there; it would be amazing to get into China.

In the early days, were there times you weren't sure it would work?

I was so naïve in the beginning that I didn't even think about whether it would work or not. I was excited about it, but as time went on, I realized how difficult this is.

I didn't worry about things as much early on. When you do your first show, it's so exciting. Now when I do my shows, I'm thinking, did my buyers like it, will my customers like it, and then I switch gears and I'm thinking about the next collection.

Fashion is a business you have to love all the time, but I'm much smarter about it now and realize it's a business too.

I would love to get someone to help me run it so I could focus more on the creative side.

How much of a focus are the international markets for you?

We have a big customer base in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and Kuwait – the Arab countries love the beading that we do.

The dresses that sell well are not our highest end dresses – they are our chiffons. We have styles for all body types, but that is our number-one seller now. You choose a style and it comes in any color.

With a celebrity following, has it been a challenge to convey that the product works for all women?

There are some people who will say, I can't wear that because a model wears it. But when they see our trunk shows and we work with them, they see that what we do have can work for them.

What is shown on the runway is not necessarily what will end up in stores.

I've been told that our collection is very wearable. The celebrity thing is big right now – it has built my business because it gets the name out there and for those who want to spend high-end, if they know the name, they know it will be good. We have built our brand reputation around the quality of product. ●



Clockwise from upper left: Pamela Roland; Pamella Roland Crimson Silk Faille Handpainted Chrysanthemum Coat; Strapless Silver-Black Ombre Sequin and Ostrich Feather Beaded Gown; Multicolor Botanical Print Georgette Pleated Dress with Dark Chocolate Beaver Muff