

Karen Miller

The Dallas area businesswoman is making her mark with designs that bring out her customers' "inner goddess"

Karen Miller has been studying design since she was a child. She just didn't think of it that way at the time. She began sewing at the age of twelve, and when she couldn't find a pattern that she liked, Miller says she made her own by taping brown paper bags together, lying on the floor and sketching out her silhouette. "Let's just say that my technique never rendered a design that could be duplicated," she laughs.

My intention was simply to make myself an outfit or a prom dress that no one else had."

At the time, Miller, who lives in Plano, says she considered her designs a hobby—she didn't think to pursue design seriously as a career. In college, she studied economics and accounting, but always found herself doodling sketches of outfits during class lectures. That habit persisted through her professional career in corporate finance, where many SEC filings, due diligence reports and other documents shared the same fate.

It's not how you play

Miller began playing golf in her late twenties, when she grew tired of watching male colleagues sneak out of work in the afternoon to play golf across the street at the Los Angeles Country Club. She bought a set of irons and began frequenting the Rancho Park driving range every night after work. She caught on quickly, and was soon comfortable playing with her colleagues in playing scramble and best ball formats.

Miller played golf predominantly with clients and colleagues, and often was the only woman in her group. Although there was always a good deal of pressure to keep up with the guys, Miller says she noticed one trend in particular. "Sometimes I played better and sometimes I played worse, but if I looked good and felt good, it really didn't



Miller with her son Geoffrey.

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matter how well I played. I was always invited back to play again.”

Curious as to why she was the only woman playing, Miller would ask her golf partners why their wives or girlfriends didn't play golf. The answer was almost always the same: “She hates the clothes.”

“I knew when I could muster up the strength and courage to start my own company, this was what I was going to do. I felt there were too many women missing the opportunities and enjoyment that golf offers, and I was convinced that if I could change the look, more women would pick up the game. More importantly, I wanted to encourage women to use golf to develop the relationships and contacts that would lead to the kind of success that I enjoyed in my corporate career.”

“I'm going for it”

Miller entered a challenging stage of her life when she became a new mother at age 43. She says she quickly discovered that she was not cut out to be a stay-at-home mom. “I knew that whatever I did this time was going to be fun, creative and gratifying,” she says. “I also knew it had to be something that I could be passionate about.”

In December, 2002, Miller made her decision. “I will never forget the moment, because it was one of the most powerful changes I have experienced in my life,” she remembers. “I was visiting with Karen Villines, the retail merchandiser at Gleneagles, our home club in Dallas. I told her I'd finally decided to start a golf apparel company. I had no idea how long it would take, but I was finally ready to go for it.”

Miller spent many months researching every aspect of the business, as she had done for years in her career at PricewaterhouseCoopers. Although

10 years had passed since she'd conceived the original idea, she saw that the opportunity was still there, and the market was now ready for a change. “It was very clear to me that women's golf was ready to begin the style transformation that tennis underwent over a decade earlier.”

The commitment Miller made in the conversation with Villines at Gleneagles became the catalyst for a whirlwind of events. With the help and guidance of friends Laura Sakai and Greg Smith, her father, Robert Baum and especially her husband, Geoff, who helped finance the venture, American Goddess was formed in February 2003. Only seven months later, the company introduced its debut collection at the Fall PGA Show in San Diego, garnering exceptional reaction to the line. “I was amazed to see how powerful the combination of passion, commitment and hard work truly is,” she marvels.

Evolving the brand

One year later, the company has eight employees and 10 sales reps across the U.S. The line is made exclusively in the U.S. and carried in five-star resorts, private clubs and women's sportswear retailers throughout the U.S. and Mexico. In August, Miller changed the name of the company to Isis, and introduced the new sportswear brand ISISPORT. “The name ISISPORT says it all. Our designs are tailored to fit women of all sizes, because every woman deserves to look and feel like a goddess.”

Miller says her design team, led by Nicolette, a veteran designer and educator, creates sportswear with the demands of their customers' busy lifestyles in mind.

“We view our customer as we view ourselves. We have busy schedules. Many of us have kids. We take care of



Rosa Collins models the ISISPORT collection.

ourselves as best as we can, given the demands of our schedules. We like to be comfortable, but still look good when we play golf. And we like our clothes to be versatile, so we can justify buying outfits that can be worn on more than one type of occasion.”

Giving back

According to Miller, more changes are in the works. The company is expanding its U.S. sales representation, and establishing an international distribution network. Plans for a new market segment in the activewear market will be unveiled in 2005, along with a new spa/yoga/lifestyle collection. According to Miller, a more personal initiative is also underway.

“We are establishing the ISISPORTS Foundation, through which we will actively support deserving women's and children's charities. In the spirit of the goddess, our company is about nurturing and giving back to our communities, to make a difference in the world we live in.”