

# talking with Jenna Lyons

As creative director of the company everyone is talking about, she has shaped J.Crew's Collection, the firm's upscale line

By Marla J. Wasserman



[ Opposite page

Top: From the Crewcuts line, coming soon to Madison Avenue

Bottom: Styles from the spring Collection ]

Long before Michelle Obama catapulted J.Crew's popularity into the stratosphere, Jenna Lyons intimately understood the brand's allure. For the past two decades, Lyons has been part of J.Crew's design team and now reigns as the brand's Creative Director. With her all-American model look and athletic physique, Lyons epitomizes the classic, chic style synonymous with J.Crew and easily relates to the consumer's desires. Two years ago, Lyons helped spearhead the launch of J.Crew Collection recognizing that a market exists for a couture-quality splurge now and again. Despite a hectic schedule – including helping to outfit Sasha and Malia – we recently got Lyons to share the inside scoop on the hottest summer items, where the brand is headed and how you can soon outfit your kids in Crewcuts, when a new city store debuts this summer.

- Q:** For those who aren't familiar with J. Crew Collection, what is it?  
J. Crew Collection is a pricier set of designs that bears its own black label. The Collection came about as a natural extension of J.Crew. As designers, we love to push the envelope and try new fabrics and mills that we never used before. We quickly found we had a following for the more special and unique items. We see the Collection as a part of J.Crew, not as a stand-alone item.
- Q:** What are some of the hottest Collection pieces for the summer?  
Our best-selling Collection item has been an all-over sequin skirt in cognac and Capri flip-flops. Most women are pairing it with a t-shirt (which we love)! I just love to see people mix the brand with everything from casual tees to Valentino and Issey Miyake.
- Q:** Are Collection items sold in their own stores?  
Collection pieces can be found in some of our boutique-style stores such as the one at Madison Avenue and 79th Street. We love the way this store looks and feels and have designed a similar store in Malibu. We also have a store that sells Collection pieces in East Hampton and on Prince Street. Plus, Collection pieces can be purchased on our web site.
- Q:** What has the reception been to the fancier boutiques?  
Amazing. The store at 1035 Madison has been met with huge enthusiasm. People love the elevated service and the store's décor. The service goes above and beyond what most people expect. Between the service, the mix of product and the ambiance of the store, the response has been overwhelming. While the Collection boutiques feel a bit more upscale than a traditional J.Crew store, they are all warm and approachable.
- Q:** Everyone knows that the First Lady is a big fan of the brand! Is she wearing Collection pieces and how does it feel that she chose the brand you design?  
The excitement and pride we feel regarding Michelle wearing our clothes is immeasurable. She has worn a mix of our pieces from the Collection and J.Crew. We are thrilled and honored to be a part of her day in some small way! In addition, having her girls wear Crewcuts is a major bonus.
- Q:** The Obama girls have made Crewcuts a must-have for all fashionable

- Q:** kids – tell us when our city will have its own Crewcuts store?  
While it won't be the first free-standing Crewcuts, come this August, the Upper East Side will get a store at 1200 Madison Avenue. This new store will carry the full assortment of the line: shoes, accessories, even party clothes. We are so excited to be coming to such a beautiful neighborhood.
- Q:** If the women have Collection and the kids have Crewcuts, what is there for men?  
Obviously, J.Crew has a huge male following and we have amazing clothes for men. In fact, we opened our first ever Men's Shop at the former Liquor Store Bar in Tribeca (235 West Broadway) where we also carry specialty items for the men. For the shop, we pulled together the best of our men's collection and combined that with limited edition product and rare vintage finds. Whether it is a Mackintosh coat, Alden shoes, a great suit or amazing Globe Trotter luggage, we have it all.
- Q:** Given the new economic reality our country faces, is J.Crew at the right price point to look fashionable without breaking the bank?  
We certainly think so! Whether you're buying an \$800 coat or a \$98 blouse or an \$18 t-shirt, we have it all and we don't want to alienate anyone who simply likes great style and design, regardless of price.
- Q:** With J.Crew's current popularity, do you ever worry about sustaining the excitement?  
We feel *incredibly* lucky to be in the spot we're in right now! I'm a bit superstitious so I don't want to say too much! We can only hope that customers continue to appreciate what we're doing.

Marla J. Wasserman has written for many magazines in New York. Her last interview for *Promenade* was with fashion designer Catherine Malandrino.

