

French Connection

The French phrase, "ses petites mains," translates to "the little hands." Ask Beth Miles, however, and she'll tell you it has two meanings. "Ses Petites Mains stands both for the tiny hands of the children that wear my clothes and the beautiful, small hands that do the intricate design work," said Miles, owner and creative director of the San Francisco-based girls' brand.

Miles learned to sew, knit and crochet at a very young age, later studying at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. Her career in apparel design included stints at major companies like Polo Jeans and Liz Claiborne.

In 1999 the designer left New York for the West Coast, where she was the director of product development for Esprit. Her daughter, Somerset, was born two years later, and Miles was challenged with finding suitable clothing for her little one.

The clothing brand, which debuted in Spring 2005, is available for girls ages 12 months to 6 years old and celebrates their innate beauty through playful styles and quiet details.



Ses Petites Mains leverages Miles's years in the apparel industry.

For inspiration, Miles needs only observe her daughter. "Through watching her, I learn what she's comfortable in, what

she enjoys wearing and how different fabrics work together," she explained.

The Spring 2007 collection features fabrics such as cotton voile dobbies, denim, stretch seersucker, multi-stripe seersucker with lurex and cotton bubble gauze with lurex. The palette consists of cherry, green (pomme), white, black, aqua (lagoon) and

dark-wash denim.

Among spring silhouettes are the Suki Tonic kimono top, Somerset shirtwaist dress with puffed sleeves and high-waisted belt, and Chloe shift dress. Various slip dresses work well underneath other pieces, which creates a petticoat look and adds an element of playfulness, Miles noted. Meanwhile, details such as stitched pleats and pearlized buttons add a delicate touch. Miles' favorite piece is the summer shirt-waist, her idea of "the quintessential little girls' dress." A close second is the Annie E, a Bermuda-length, "Rosie the Riveter" work overall with a halter back, multi-stripe inset and front pockets for collecting small items like seashells.

Importantly, Ses Petites Mains is a domestic brand, added Miles, who works with a factory in San Francisco and uses only local pattern makers.

"After working for so many huge companies where we outsourced everything, it is essential to me that I reinforce a domestic base," she said.

Wholesale prices range from \$17.50 to \$39. Contact Ses Petites Mains at 554 Liberty Street, San Francisco, CA 94114; (415) 533-1695; www.sespetitesmains.com.