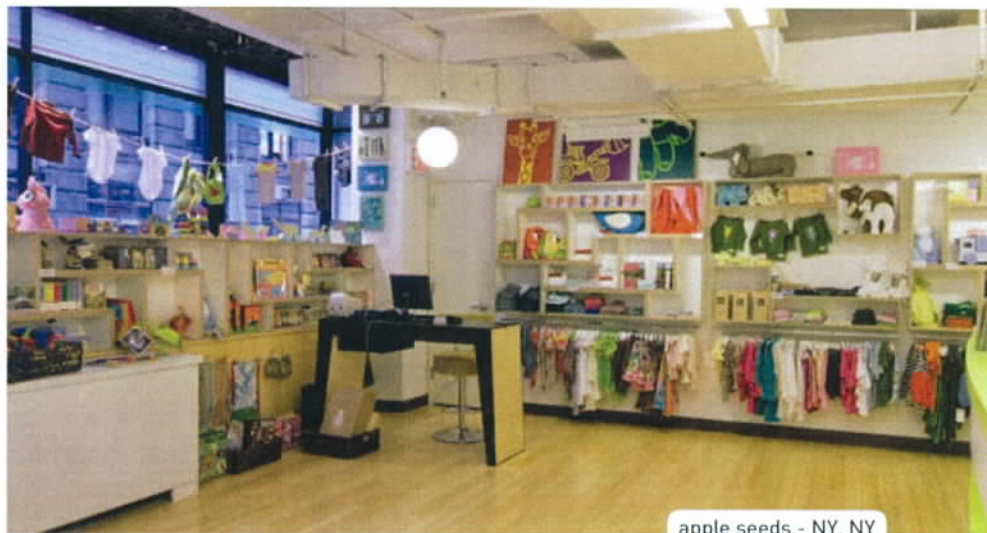


Today's Boutique Chic for Tiny Shoppers

Written By Allison Lurker

THANKS TO SOME TRULY INNOVATIVE RETAILERS, IT REALLY IS BECOMING A KID'S WORLD OUT THERE! WHERE ONCE THE REALM OF FASHION WAS DOMINATED BY TREND-LOVING ADULT MEN AND WOMEN, TODAY THE YOUNGEST OF FASHIONISTAS ARE MAKING BOUTIQUES ACROSS THE U.S. THEIR NEW PLAYGROUNDS.

Perhaps nowhere is this more literally true than at **apple seeds** in New York City. Opened in March 2007, apple seeds' founders Allison Schlanger and Alison Qualter Berna created the space to function as the ultimate play/learning/retail space for the city's children and their families. Apple seeds features a state-of-the-art indoor playground, a kid-friendly café, a space for birthday parties, classes for kids and, of course, a children's boutique. So while the little ones get to enjoy some much-needed playtime, parents happily indulge in quality retail therapy in the boutique, which offers an eclectic assortment of clothing, toys and accessories from around the world.



apple seeds - NY, NY

After only four months of business, the apple seeds boutique is already seeing some strong trends when it comes to consumers' clothing purchases. "We first sold out of the Glug Baby line of clothing," says Schlanger, explaining that, like many of its other popular brands, this San-Francisco-based offers everything the modern, hip parent wants for him or herself, but in smaller, age-appropriate sizes. Other regularly asked-for labels include Junk Food, Egg & Avocado, Devi Baby, Chick Chat and The Tunes Co.'s line of concert tees for little ones.

When it comes to toys, stuffed animals and other goodies, apple seeds has searched high and low for some of the most unique items they could find from countries around the globe — many of which give back to the very communities in which they are made. For example, proceeds from purchases of Kenana Knitter Critters hand-knitted puppets

and backpacks, made of homespun wool, go directly to the African knitters and their families for healthcare. Likewise, Pastel Toys handmade wooden blocks and vehicles benefit a sustainable elderly adult community in Israel, while Barefoot Books, which discuss issues like adoption and other cultures in a manner that is both appropriate and interesting to kids, also give back to the community. Other frequent fun purchases include Zid Zid stuffed toys, Manuella vinyl bibs and stuffed animals, and Jeeto's vibrant animal paintings.

Also catering to Manhattan's audience of trendy little ones is **Babesta**. While Babesta has enjoyed a strong online presence since 2004, this modern-day urban children's boutique only recently opened its physical doors in May 2007. For owner Jennifer Cattau, the past couple months have been busy — and prosperous — ones. "We've been doing

very well with the Harajuku Lovers line of tees, hoodies and onesies by Gwen Stefani," she reports, noting that her consumers love anything with a touch of rock-'n'-roll and even a Japan-imation flair. Along these lines, she's also had great success with KAOS Recycled's line of vintage kids concert tees and halter dresses, as well as tees by Junk Food. Little Lubbaloo dresses have been another top-seller, and Cattau expects them to perform well throughout the summer season. "For the summer, it's all about comfortable one-piece dressing," she stresses. And finally, as the only retailer in the U.S. to carry the very stylish Swedish line of Lollopard clothing for boys and girls, Babesta has always considered this to be one of its favorite collections.

Just a borough away, in Brooklyn, NY, **Olá Baby** sells to little ones from infant through children's size 6. "We've been selling a lot of clothing that has

"We've been selling a lot of clothing that has fun sayings lately."

- Carla Barbosa

fun sayings lately," says owner Carla Barbosa, citing the Very Excellent Baby collection of onesies — with phrases like "No hablo" or tattoo-inspired hearts with "Mom" or "Dad" in them — as a customer favorite. "In two weeks, I've already had to make two reorders!" she adds. One of her bestselling gift items recently has been a onesie from the brand Pluto that plays off a screen shot of the Google homepage, featuring the words "Goo goo, gaa gaa." This label's Big Brother/Big Sister T-shirts have also been popular among shoppers in search of the perfect gift. Olá Baby additionally offers toys, furniture and accessories for babies and young children. Cloud B's Sleep Sheep and Twilight Turtle continue to be a huge hit, while new parents are often drawn to the revolutionary Bumbo Seat infant chair and its new attachable play tray.

At **The Little Room** in Woodmere, NY, owner Stefanie Schulman outfits her littlest customers in the classics. Her most popular lines — targeting infants up to 24 months, and most recently expanding to include toddlers through a children's size 12 — include Baby CZ, Petit Bateau and Margery Ellen Baby. "Anything that's really, really soft, from specialty blankets to burp cloths to sweet knits, always do very well," Schulman reports, noting that her customers continue to be drawn to clothing and accessories in shades of pink and brown.

While **Belly Button** on Staten Island tailors about 80% of its business to maternity clothing and accessories, the remaining 20% that caters to babies up to 24 months is booming. "When kids are this age, everything is cute!" says owner Nicole Iuele. Iuele's main goal in branching into the children's business has been to offer brands that weren't already being carried by other area boutiques. "What has really been working for me are three-piece, take-home layette knit sets — with a sweater, hat and booties — from Baby CZ," she says. Another line popular with Belly Button shoppers is Baby Nay, which offers very comfortable and fashionable cotton sets featuring funky prints. Parents love Baby Nay's bellbottoms, swing tops, and little kimonos with matching pants. "It's not like dressing them in footy pajamas," explains Iuele. Specifically for its male audience, Belly Button carries short sets by Mish Mish, a very well priced line of "true boy clothing."

Not far away in Lawrenceville, NJ, **Bellies and Booties** is cornering the market on haute couture for little ones. Founder Stephanie Gold reports that, because of their great price points (\$22-24), she has a hard time keeping Junk Food tees in the store. Customers are constantly stopping in to pick up these increasingly popular and comfy kids shirts — especially the Beatles, Rolling Stones and Little Miss



Stephanie Gold, Bellies & Booties - Lawrenceville, NJ

Giggles styles, she notes. Haute Baby meanwhile offers the ultimate in little girl clothing. From frills to toile to ballet-inspired touches, this line is always a favorite with moms who love dressing up their little ladies. According to Gold, Bellies and Booties is also a hot spot for baby and maternity gifts. "Our Petunia Pickle Bottom baby bags always sell out, and our Gucci and Louis Vuitton baby-wipe holders are also very popular."

Also in the Garden State, **Oolala Boutique** in Nutley caters to maternity and young children. Owners Hope Carajanes and Yvonne Gonstewski report that the Tea Collection line has become an instant favorite for infants and toddlers. "One piece is cuter than the next," says Carajanes, noting that everything in the collection mixes and matches. "The concept behind it is to purchase six pieces all for about \$100," she adds. The line also answers another new demand of today's modern-day customer. "The clothes aren't so 'baby' — they're more like little outfits," says Gonstewski, noting that the brand puts a new twist on the traditional solid pink for girls and blue for boys by using patterns with soft sage greens, periwinkles and pale pink. For the fashion-savvy mom, Oolala offers Petunia Pickle Bottom diaper bags, including the new Touring Tote, which, according to Carajanes, "is a little smaller than the traditional diaper bag, looks more like a purse, and easily attaches to a stroller." Popular baby gifts include Terra Traditions albums and Empress Baby's "Baby's First" keepsake boxes.



Oolala - Nutley, NJ

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You Are My Sunshine - Wilmington, NC

No matter where in the U.S. they may call home, tiny trendsetters everywhere are learning to love boutique-chic looks.

Further down the East Coast, in Wilmington, NC, sisters and co-owners of **You Are My Sunshine**, Leigh Ann and Carmen Cosby, have been enjoying their role in the children's retail market since February of this year. For their target audience of infants through 24 months, in addition to some hand-made pieces for toddlers up to a size 6T, the Cosbys have been particularly successful with Vintage Onesies' line of onesies and rompers, which feature whimsical phrases such as "What Happens at Grandma's Stays at Grandma's." In this same vein, the sisters note that custom embroidery — on any of their products — has become popular with customers. Pillowcase dresses, shortalls and Trumpette Socks — some with roses and some in the design of a small Mary-Jane shoe — are other current bestsellers. Anscan picture frames and ceramic letters, to hang in children's bedrooms, round out the mix when it comes to gift buying.

Down at **Kids in Bloom** in Boca Raton, FL, the heat is on, but boys and girls know how to stay cool. Owner Ina Bloom reports that her business is primarily all about mixing and matching different

tank tops, shorts and skirts. Designed for young girls from infant through a children's size 10, and boys from infant up to size 16, Kids in Bloom offers light and comfortable clothing that is always stylish. Presently, Made You Look's soft, antiqued tees, shorts and sweats are selling especially well in both the boys and girls collections. And, notes Bloom, no matter what the age, girls always tend toward the pinks, while boys prefer their clothing to be in blue and gray tones.

No matter where in the U.S. they may call home, tiny trendsetters everywhere are learning to love boutique-chic looks. From custom-embroidered blankets to tiny rocker tees, fun hoodies to designer accessories, with the help of some very creative local retailers — this article representing only a very small sampling — kids are getting the best of adult style in pint-sized packages. ■

Retailer Directory

apple seeds

10 West 25th Street
New York, NY 10010
212-792-7590
www.appleseedsnyc.com

Babesta

66 West Broadway
New York, NY 10007
212-608-4522
www.babesta.com

Bellies and Booties

4120 Quakerbridge Road
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
608-716-1700

Belly Button

305 New Dorp Lane
Staten Island, NY 10306
718-987-0540

Kids in Bloom

9858 Clint Moore Road
Boca Raton, FL 33496
561-477-7227
www.kidsinbloom1.com

The Little Room

1014 Broadway
Woodmere, NY 11598
516-295-5017

Olá Baby

315 Court Street
Brooklyn, NY 11231
718-422-1978
www.olababy.com

Oolala Boutique

146 Chestnut Street
Nutley, NJ 07110
973-667-3361

You Are My Sunshine

321 N. Front Street
Wilmington, NC 28401
914-671-2174 (store)
910-409-5062 (website)
www.youaremysunshine.biz