

# KeepMe Duo Keeping It Casual and Chic

By Marcy Medina

**MALIBU, Calif.** — It seems only fitting that Ali Kay and Anne des Barres live and work steps from the beaches of Malibu, since their loungewear line, keepMe, is equally casual and chic.

The pair was introduced in 2006 by Diane von Furstenberg, for whom des Barres worked at the time and whose son, Alexandre, is Kay's boyfriend.

After struggling to find loungewear that was neither frilly nor outdoorsy, they came up with the concept of keepMe, which revolves around pieces that could be kept at home or cross over into sportswear. They launched a small collection for spring 2006 that sold out at Henri Bendel.

"It's a market with so much potential," Kay said.

"It's the one thing you are missing, but don't know you are missing until you go home and pick up every time," des Barres added. Shortly after meeting each other, Kay, 23, graduated from Columbia University and moved to Malibu. Des Barres, 28, remained in New York and became a teacher.

After a year of bicoastal business, des Barres left the classroom. She headed to Malibu two months ago and the partners honed a complete 18-piece collection for spring.

Cut from loose-weave Modal that is soft yet durable, the drapery, sporty styles range from off-the-shoulder cropped T-shirts to wide-leg pants to a soft-cup racerback bra and underwear sets.

"It is cozy, but flattering,"

des Barres said. "We wanted to make sure all the pieces worked together."

Instead of prints, des Barres and Kay stuck to muted solids accented with striped elastic waistbands.

"We both have athletic backgrounds, so there is a somewhat sporty feel to it," said Kay, a basketball buff who has a life-size cutout of Miami Heat star Dwyane Wade on her office wall.

Wholesale price ranges from \$15 to \$38.

"We are designing for customers like ourselves and our friends, so we wanted people to be able to buy a few pieces for under \$100," said Kay, estimating spring sales at \$400,000.

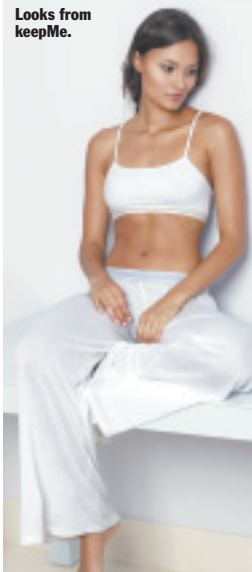
Though they are hoping to attract specialty department stores and boutiques and will show their line at the Fashion Coterie trade show next week, the pair is also exploring nontraditional avenues such as hotel minibars and direct-sales models.

They pride themselves on taking a hands-on approach, even delivering their own fabric to factories. "We want to do it all," Kay said. "We're are prepared for world domination."



Anne des Barres and Ali Kay

Looks from keepMe.



PORTRAIT BY DONATO SARDIELLA; FASHION BY DAVID TESSIERI



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