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PARTNERS IN SUBLIME

For Elie and Rory Tahari, creating a chic fashion empire is a team effort



Rory and Elie Tahari in front of the Harry Bertoia sculpture that graces the second floor of their 510 Fifth Avenue studio.

You can't help but be delighted by the smile that spreads across Elie Tahari's face when he talks about his wife of eight years, Rory; her name first comes up when I ask him to describe the woman who wears his clothes. He searches a

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Those adjectives indeed describe the world of Elie Tahari of late; while his is a label that may

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little for the answer, and then explains why. "My wife gave me a list," Tahari says with a laugh. "The words we use are 'modern, smart, sophisticated

have been on your fashion radar for more than 30 years, it's only in the last decade, Tahari says, that he really feels he has come into his own. Ask him

Tahari's 510 bag was created as an homage to the Bertoia sculpture and was launched as an exclusive in the designer's new Bal Harbour store.



ELIE TAHARI



Tahari's Spring 2009 collection focuses on floral prints and a mix of soft and tailored pieces.

the reason, and there's that smile again. "I had been in the business a long time as a single guy, but my big success came when I met my wife," he says. "I saw how she wore clothes and how she put things together; the more I understood, the better my collection became."

Given such praise, I can't help but ask Rory and Elie how they met, and while they answer the question on

partnership almost from the start. Elie focuses on the design side, while Rory, who is vice chairman to his chairman, handles the business end, such as overseeing the ad campaigns. She also weighs in on topics such as store design, including the November opening of their latest boutique, a Bal Harbour location they had long coveted. "I came down for Art Basel in December and

graces the second floor, where a Chase Bank branch still operates. The sculpture also spawned the idea for an accessory, the gold-accented 510 bag that Tahari noted would be exclusive to Bal Harbour for its opening.

But it's the floor-to-ceiling light and adjacent outdoor terraces in his studio's fourth and fifth floors that draw Tahari's profound admiration. "It's not tinted glass," he is careful to point out. "You're able to look at color and fabric in actual light. You feel the light no matter where you are, and I love that."

Tahari always has brought a deft hand to his colorations and his mix of prints, so maybe it's this studio move that causes his Spring 2009 collection to be especially vibrant. Tahari says Miami was most definitely an inspiration, and you can see that in the rich mix of reds and pinks, in the breezy floral floor-length gowns or crisp looks such as a top-stitched khaki sheath. "Spring is very soft with a lot of color and prints, because those have been doing very well for us," he says. "But you have to mix in the tailored pieces; it's the mix that's important."

Ultimately, knowing the influence that Rory continues to have in the world of Elie Tahari, mix being one such example, is it correct to call her his muse? "The truth is, we really inspire each other," Rory says. "He has an incredible love of interior design, and I have an incredible love of art."

"And as we know, art and architecture and fashion are very much combined," Elie adds.

"That's where we both get our strength and our power and our inspiration," Rory says. "He inspires me every day. Perhaps we're muses for each other." ■

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separate days, perhaps it's a sign of their compatibility that each remembers the story almost identically down to the detail. "It was his 46th-birthday party, and my best friend was going and had been wanting to introduce us for some time," Rory recalls.

"She didn't want to meet me; she thought I was too old," Elie says (Rory was 26 at the time).

"But I went, and it really was an instant attraction from the moment our eyes met," Rory says. "It sounds so fairytale or clichéd, but that's really the way it happened for us. And then in the middle of the party, a photographer came over to take our picture, and he grabbed me and pulled me in; I sort of pulled away, and he said, 'Come take the picture, you might be my wife.'"

"It wasn't a line, really; I had never said that to anyone in my life," Elie notes. "It just came out of my mouth, I didn't know why."

His wife she became, and it's been very much a

walked in the finished store for the first time, and it took my breath away," Rory says. "I sat down on one of the chairs—chairs I think Elie literally took out of our house, by the way—and I just started calling and e-mailing people, telling them what a great job they did."

It's no accident that the Bal Harbour location, with its faux-skylight effect and mid-century-modern furnishings, is a nod to that architectural era. The couple is devoted to the period—Elie has been snapping up mid-century-modern pieces in Miami's Design District for years—and when they had the chance to expand their design studio with a bona-fide architectural wonder on Fifth Avenue, they leaped at it. In 2001 Tahari purchased the Gordon Bunshaft-designed 510 Fifth Avenue not only for its floor-to-ceiling glass windows, but also because the building boasts two treasures: The ground-floor vault (the building opened as a branch of Manufacturers' Trust Company in 1954) and the glorious gold sculpture by Harry Bertioia that