

From top: Pammie alligator clutch (\$1,295); Magnolia alligator clutch (from \$1,760); Mercury tote (from \$7,950).



ALEXANDRA KNIGHT

Designer, Alexandra Knight handbags

WHY SHE MATTERS: Knight shook up the accessory world eight years ago when she created a straightforward but luxurious evening clutch made from alligator. Her exclusion of hardware and logos modernized minaudières. Since then her by-appointment atelier has buzzed with clients like Mick Jagger, Elton John and Hilary Swank, who custom-order handbags crafted from python, alligator and ostrich (from \$800).

PEDIGREE: The 38-year-old mother of two spent eight years bouncing from floor to floor of the Condé Nast building in New York as a fashion editor and stylist at *Allure*, *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* before moving back to Houston in 2003.

UP NEXT: A new collection of flip-flops and T-strap leather-soled sandals made with candy-colored python, lizard and alligator (from \$395).

OFF-HOURS: "I'm a big fan of **Tiny Boxwood's** [3614 W. Alabama; 713-622-4224; thompsonhanson.com]. The food and the atmosphere make me feel like I've traveled to another city."

At 3622 Locke Ln.; alexandraknightonline.com.



Dennis Basso lipi cat, lynx, mink and sable coat, \$18,000

KEELE LOYD

Owner, The Little Bird

WHY SHE MATTERS: With Houston's endless stream of black-tie events and fund-raisers, ladies who lunch always need a wardrobe refresher. Enter Loyd, whose vision of glamorous recycling redefines what it means to shop consignment. At The Little Bird, vintage and new Chanel, Balenciaga, Hermès, Yves Saint Laurent, Lanvin and Valentino clothing

comes in daily from all over the world. The 38-year-old meticulously inspects each piece and delivers a tightly edited selection to her airy, light-filled boutique.

PEDIGREE: Loyd cut her fashion teeth at Aspen boutiques Distractions and Imelda's before opening the original Little Bird there in 2007.

OFF-HOURS: "Benjy's



[2424 Dunstan; 713-522-7602; benjys.com] has the best short ribs, hands down."

At 1735 Post Oak Blvd.; thelittlebirdinc.com.

WHY SHE MATTERS: There was a day when status-conscious clothing was a given in a city where recognition reigns supreme. But thanks to Susan Claffy, a lithe 50-year-old with sleek silver-blond hair, a new age of low-key chic has been ushered in. Her boutique Leap is dense with designers known for their sculptural silhouettes, including Maison Martin Margiela, Isabel Marant and Rachel Comey.

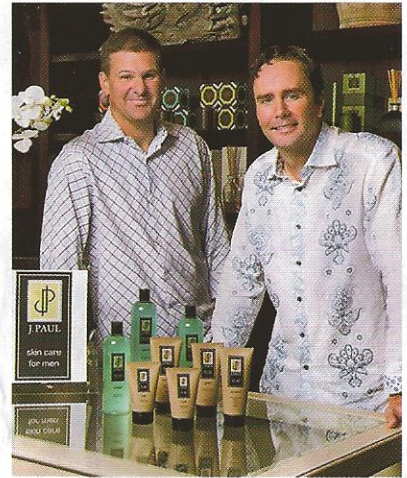


SUSAN CLAFFY

Owner, Leap

JOHN PAUL LOONEY & JOHN PAUL STRONG

Cofounders, J. Paul



WHY THEY MATTER:

The Texas man of yore might pass his entire life without ever moisturizing, and one doubts he would toss back a few beers with his pals bonding over sensitive skin. But John Paul Looney and John Paul Strong are a new breed of Texan, and their skincare line, J. Paul, represents Houston's changing face. Friends since childhood, Looney and Strong, both 44, launched the company in June 2010. Looney, who had spent 15 years as a federal lobbyist on Capitol Hill, says, "My skin was so sensitive that I was reduced to using my wife's hair conditioner to shave. I knew there was a market for products for guys like us." So Looney convinced Strong, a former oil and gas man, to make a drastic career change.

PEDIGREE:

The two spent nearly a year working with a local chemist to perfect their flagship product, called Glide. "We started with hair conditioner and just kept experimenting," says Looney. The result? A creamy glycerol-based shaving lotion (\$24) of jojoba and aloe vera oils that doesn't irritate. Other products include Guard (\$24), a moisturizer, and Wash (\$30), predictably, a cleanser.

OFF-HOURS: Looney likes to take his wife to **Laurenzo's El Tiempo** (5602 Washington Ave.; 713-681-3645; eltiempocantina.com), a true Houston classic for margaritas. Strong can regularly be found eating a hot dog with his three children at **Reliant Stadium** (1 Reliant Park; reliantpark.com), watching the Astros.

For more details, go to jpaullonline.com.

PEDIGREE: Claffy, who has a bachelor's degree in accounting, shelved her pursuit of a master's degree in anthropology to open Leap in 2003, her first foray into retail.

OFF-HOURS: "I love **Vinoteca Poscol** [1609 Westheimer Rd.; 713-529-2797], especially its beet, walnut and goat cheese dish in parchment paper."

At 2314 Bissonnet St.; 713-526-4580.