

CRITICAL SHOPPER | TOMMY HILFIGER

Spend Some Time, if Nothing Else



The menswear line at the Tommy Hilfiger store on Bleecker Street.
Katie Orlinsky for The New York Times

By Mike Albo

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NO matter what is happening in the rest of the world, people are still shopping along the stretch of precious fashion boutiques on Bleecker Street, in the West Village. I was there the other day, and it was as busy as ever. This little hamlet of cute shops and cupcakeries is not like the rest of the country. It should be rezoned on maps and called the People's Republic of Carrie Bradshaw.

Bleecker has a natural magic that gives stores that extra zing of authenticity that merchants so desperately try to capture for their wares. The quaint street, rustly trees and narrow storefronts make everything in the windows look delectable, buyable, wearable even some flouncy miniskirt in Juicy Couture appears timeless. I bet even the mopey Paul Krugman, winner of the Nobel in economic science and an Op-Ed page columnist for The New York Times, strolls around here on the weekends, sunglasses perched on his head, gossiping with his friends while holding a little shopping bag from Diptyque and iced coffee from Doma.

And in the future, when our currency splinters and pinto beans are used as coinage, people will still walk up and down this street deliriously, buying overpriced purses.

While the dollar still exists, the dapper American designer and unlikely hip-hop fashion mogul Tommy Hilfiger has foisted up a store here, near other famous fashiony first names like Ralph, Cynthia and Marc. Opening in 2007 with the women's collection, the boutique was spiffed up this spring and now offers men's selections as well as some vintage pieces from other labels.

Tommy gives good window. While I stood outside the store, waiting for my friend Carl to show up, passers-by kept stopping and pointing at the three black lacquered mannequins displayed. The male form was dressed in flower printed pants, a green polo and dark blue blazer. "See? Jonathan would so wear that!" said one woman to another. Minutes later, a young man in white sunglasses stopped suddenly, clutched his faux-hawked friend and motioned to the window as if it were a large landscape painting. "*This*. Is the moment. I am wanting," he said.

Carl came, and we stepped inside the store, which is decorated in a mix of dark masculine hues and cheery flower prints. A pink statue of a poodle stands at the door. A dressing area is draped with orange striped curtains and a gleaming chandelier. There is even a small garden out back. This is sort of how I imagine Tom's and Gisele's honeymoon bungalow might have looked, except with them having sex all over it.

Carl, a shoe fanatic, spotted a suede driving moccasin that had a blocky “TH” logo pattern as the tread (\$99). He studied it closely, and it met his discerning approval. I made him try on a white military-style jacket with breast pockets and a cinchable waist (\$228). It looked good on him. I can’t wear white because somehow I will stain the garment within three minutes of putting it on.

The nice young staff members, who mostly seem as if they live way out on the No. 7 line in Cheaperstown, kept reminding us which of these garments were marked down.

Honestly, I had forgotten about Tommy Hilfiger. In 1994, Snoop Dogg famously wore a Tommy Hilfiger shirt on “SNL,” and the label became a hip-hop staple. But it has been more than a decade since the designer’s Mondrian-esque logo has been prominent on the pop culture radar.



Katie Orlinsky for The New York Times

Perusing the store, it’s easy to see how much Mr. Hilfiger has been inspired by his decade-long affair with hip-hop and its tongue-in-cheek swagger. Many of the clothes are bright, eye-catching and playful almost a parody of what rich people wear. A seersucker suit (\$498) hung near seersucker shorts embroidered with little lobsters (\$49). Trousers were covered in a large lobster print (\$148); another pair of shorts came in a green picnic tablecloth print (\$88). It’s as if Thurston Howell III were the designer’s muse.

The women’s selections are equally fun. An orange blazer (\$248) would be an office standout for an aspiring Helen Gurley Brown, and a sheer white polyester beach cover-up by Gottex (\$325) would be nice for an aspiring Seka.

Here and there were more subdued clothes that exemplify Mr. Hilfiger’s talent as a designer. I tried on a dark blue polo with a collar tipped in red (\$78). It had a long body and was made of a cool-weight fabric that draped over my jeans perfectly.

It was refreshing to see a wide range of prices. Mr. Hilfiger seems to be trying to meet customers in the middle. I almost bought the dark blue polo, but I live in Freelance Writer’s Town, which is experiencing a terrible recession.

Many clothes teeter on garishness. A striped shirt with a bright floral print on the inside cuff and collar (\$98) was too in love with its own hidden follies, and a shirt with a white-on-white vine pattern on the shoulders evoked high school prom, Long Beach, 1989. A loud button-down shirt with an eye-searing print of orange and red flowers (\$49.99) would only be right for the brilliant, queeny comedian Paul Lynde if he were still alive. These garments made me worry that Mr. Hilfiger was still designing for his label’s heyday, a time when it was cool to promenade around the Hamptons with a professional umbrella holder.

But other shoppers seemed fine. A man who I thought was waiting patiently for his wife suddenly stood up and grabbed a pair of trousers. “It’s best to wear them with the cuffs rolled up,” a good-looking, bearded salesman said. “Would you like to try them on?”

“Is it a standard size?”

“Um, yes.”

“Then I don’t need to,” the man said, giving them to him to ring up.

What is this strange land? Do they have money to burn here, or is this Denialsville?

TOMMY HILFIGER

375 Bleecker Street (between Perry and Charles Streets); (646) 638-4812.

TOMMY WALKERS With a revised boutique full of his dapper American fantasy fashion, Tommy Hilfiger adds his presence to the Bleecker Street strolling-and-shopping corridor.

EAGER BEAVERS A hovering bright-eyed and bushy-tailed staff is on hand to help you find your way around the mix of vintage, new and marked-down apparel.

RICHIE POOS Even if you can’t afford a cupcake at Magnolia Bakery, the boutiques on Bleecker Street are still worth a visit, if only to temper your economic fears and pretend you have a flush bank account for a day.