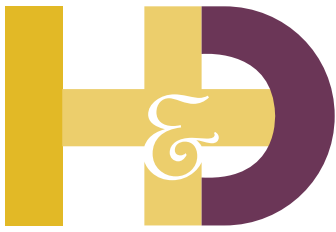




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INTERIORS
EXTERIORS
DETAILS





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42

BAZAAR

MUST HAVE Chic bohemian accessories add laid-back elegance 29

NEW & NOTEWORTHY What's hot and happening on the design scene 32

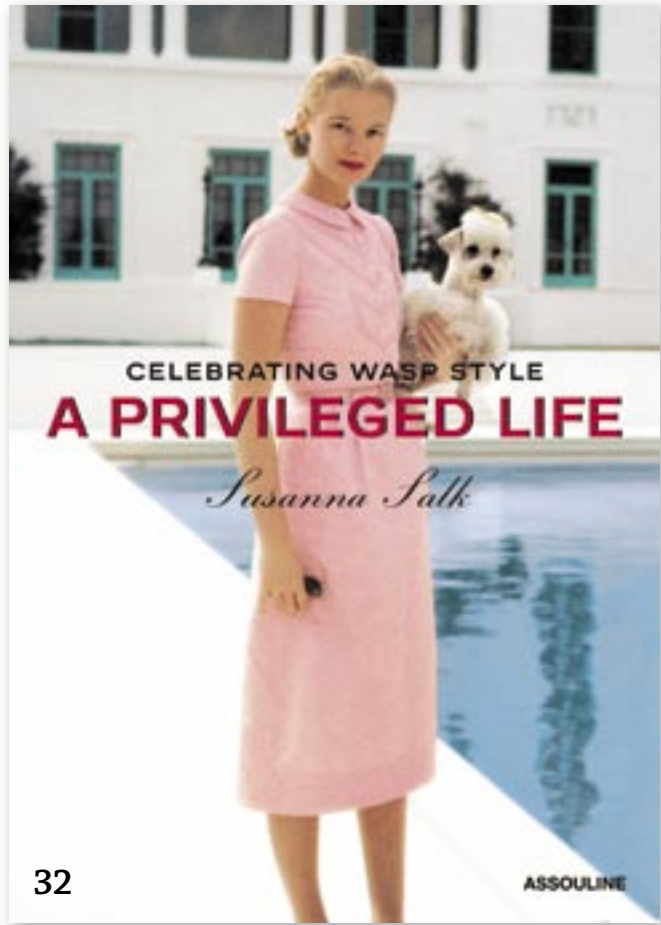
SCOUTING Pretty floral accents and black-and-white graphic patterns 42

TRADE SECRET Bring design trends home with striking bath fixtures 46

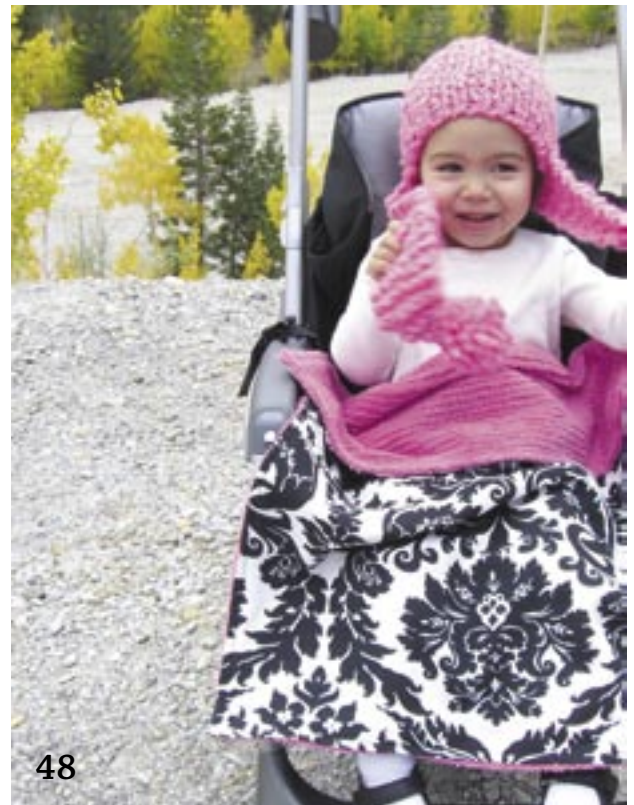
PROFILE Las Vegas-based Plain Zane and Mütze branch out 48

EPICUREAN Gourmet mustards make for the ultimate condiment 50

FINISHING TOUCH Detailed picture frames add a sparkle to any room 52



32



48



Charlene Ayala Gregson, left, and Ashley Sasser Gunson sit with a collection of their handmade baby accessories. For more information about Mütze check out mutzebyashley.com, and for Plain Zane, visit plainzane.com.

When Ashley Sasser Gunson and Charlene Ayala Gregson met in 2003, both were pregnant with their first children and beginning to feather their nests. Ashley had been knitting hats for friends and family, and Charlene was dreaming of putting to use the sewing skills she learned from her mother. Little did they know they would soon be celebrating not only the birth of new babies, but also new businesses.

After Charlene had her daughter, she began tailoring one-of-a-kind baby blankets. When Ashley decided to step up her own production of hand-knit hats with her company Mütze, she inspired her friend to do the same.

“Ashley encouraged me to make my product into a business, so I used my graphic design, advertising and marketing skills to help develop both of our brands,” says Charlene. “Our play-dates became our business meetings.”

Mütze’s hand-knit hats (\$15-\$120) for children and adults are all made with organic cotton, nylon, wool and alpaca yarns. Ashley’s signature piece, the “scarf-hat,” is a cozy cap with two long extensions, insuring the wearer’s neck stays as warm as her noggin.

Charlene’s company, Plain Zane, came about when she became tired of losing one too many blankets as stroller road kill. So she developed the patented “life-saving loop” of her Securi-tie Blanket (\$45-\$120, with matching rattle pillow), which not only secures her baby’s blanket to a stroller or car seat, but also keeps link toys off the ground.

All of Plain Zane’s blankets are constructed using organic materials, washed in eco-friendly detergent and tumble dried before assembly, a quality Charlene says commercial blankets lack. She also has play mats, graphic onesies and burpies in production for spring.

Though the friends maintain separate brands, they do have one collaboration: the Newbie Bundle. Starting at \$110, the parcel is a tiny wooden crate containing a hand-knit hat from Mütze and a coordinating Securi-tie blanket and burpie from Plain Zane.

“Although our styles are slightly different, we respect and admire each other’s designs,” says Charlene. “We stick to what we love, and inspire and help each other along the way—our passion is the driving force of our businesses and our friendship.” **HD**

Baby Love

BY SHELBY ALLISON MCGEE
PHOTOGRAPH BY SABIN ORR