



IN-STORE **Curating Cool**

NINA GARDUNO MAKES L.A. MEN MORE FASHIONABLE — IN SPITE OF THEMSELVES.  
BY SANDRA BALLENTINE

**1. Nina Garduno**, the vice president for men's fashion at Ron Herman Fred Segal (8100 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles), is more than a store buyer. She's a curator of cool who has made a career of nurturing cutting-edge designers whom most L.A. men wouldn't have dreamed of wearing when she started over 20 years ago. Garduno cuddles their creations just as lovingly. She and her team, including the head men's-wear buyer, Brett Brooks, "are very hands-on," she says. "You have to handle the clothes, nurse them. There's no way I could work for a company that made me work with paper." These days she splits her time between Ron Herman and her own fledgling retail venture, Freecity Supershop (3868 Cross Creek Road, Malibu, Calif.), which sells everything from hand-screened T-shirts to teepees.

**2. Garduno has a lot** of firsts under her belt. She was one of the first American retailers to buy men's wear by Dries Van Noten, Helmut Lang, Costume National and Thom Browne, whose detachable-bustle jacket (\$3,000 at Ron Herman) is shown here. "His clothes are about fit, not fashion," she says. "A supercool guy can wear it because he knows it's fashion, and a conservative gentleman can wear it and not even know it's fashion." Bustle notwithstanding.

**3. She also has** some interesting things hanging from her belt. These hand-beaded fetishes (\$700 for the three pieces at Freecity Supershop) are part of a collection of Native American objects culled by a pal, the fashion maven and publisher

Lisa Eisner, and sold under the name Greybull Nation.

**4. It takes a visionary** to know one. Garduno's an avid fan of the trend forecaster DeeDee Gordon, who tracks the mood of modern youth with Look-Look, a nonprofit magazine that publishes Web submissions by writers, photographers and artists who are 30 and under (\$6 at www.look-lookmagazine.com).

**5. The Los Angeles** designer Scott Sternberg showed Garduno his line, Band of Outsiders, two years ago, and it has become a



Ron Herman staple. "I love the clothes — they're a little bit punk and a little bit English public school boy." This tie is \$126.

**6. A fortuitous meeting** in Paris turned her on to the London-based design team Kaufmann.Stanley Switzerland. "They make Swiss-inspired sweaters, fine-cotton T-shirts and underwear, as well as perfect belts and bags." This weekender is \$580 at Ron Herman.

**7. The buyer is a** custom-tee fanatic and favors Simeon Farrar, a "wicked talented" English artist who works on canvas as well as cotton. This hand-stitched design is \$330 at Ron Herman.

**8. "Authenticity"** and "originality" are key, right down to fragrance. A Macassar ebony vial of scent from L'Oeil du Vert, a line of custom natural fragrances blended by the Los Angeles-based perfumer Haley Alexander van Oosten, starts at \$1,500 (at Freecity Supershop).

**9. Garduno collaborated** with Larry Leight of Oliver Peoples on the Freecity Eyewear by Mosley Tribes aviator sunglasses (\$290 at both stores). "For me, aviators aren't fashion; that's what makes them so great."

**10. She admired** the work of the bicoastal jeweler Stuart England enough to ask him to make her wedding ring. "I'm really attracted to the layers of meaning in his designs. For example, this piece" — \$925 at Ron Herman — "is based on 'The Scarlet Pimpernel.'"

**11. When not** buying, displaying and selling clothes, Brett Brooks makes music compilations under his Invisible DJ Records label. His "Compilation 1" is \$25 at Ron Herman.

**12. The high priestess** of the new has a soft spot for old records. She spins vintage vinyl on a "freakishly beautiful" turntable by Rega (\$1,230 at Freecity Supershop). "It's romantic and nostalgic to hear how music sounded before digital perfection." ■