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KZ_K Studio Readies New SoHo Space

Minimalist design is central the new location on Great Jones Street that includes a library bar, outdoor terrace and other features.

By [ROSEMARY FEITELBERG](#)  MARCH 31, 2022, 3:07PM



KZ_Studio wants clients to develop their own sense of style. COURTESY OF KZ_K STUDIO



With the upcoming opening of its modernist-inspired space in SoHo, KZ_K Studio caters to consumers keen to develop wardrobes that minimize excessiveness and maximize usefulness.

Founded and run by fashion designer Karolina Zmarlak and her business and life partner Jesse Keyes, the company advocates slow fashion. The Polish-born Zmarlak graduated from the [Fashion Institute of Technology](#) with honors and was a Gen Art Styles competition winner. After selling a signature label to department stores and specialty stores for about seven years, the company relaunched as KZ_K Studio in 2016, focusing on “direct to client” sales, personalized service, and scaled-back wholesale distribution.

For the Great Jones Street studio, Zmarlak and Keyes, a trained architect, have included a design room, showroom, a pattern room, library bar, kitchen nook and outdoor terrace. With a launch event set for April 12, the pair expects the outpost and the neighborhood to be a more “interesting and exciting zone” for people to visit, compared to their former West 29th Street digs.

“Also, there’s an evolution in the environment that we wanted to build within the new space,” Zmarlak said.

In addition to welcoming clients by appointment, the couple will be welcoming industry partners, photographers, designers, neon light designers and other creative friends to the library and bar. Zmarlak and Keyes have worked on short videos highlighting the collection with David Van Keuren and other creatives.

Borrowing from the 1940s, ‘50s and ‘60s, when women would visit ateliers for fittings, wardrobe building and one-on-one attention, KZ_K Studio encourages women to develop their individual taste versus buy into passing trends. “We’re providing clients with direct communication where we care about each of them over time,” Keyes said.

From 2016 to today, the company has built a base of clients from 60 to 1,200 clients. Client relationships proved to be beneficial during the pandemic, as well as the brand’s multifunctional designs including fully-reversible styles, according to the designer. Using many technical Japanese fabrics, the label is manufactured in New York City’s Garment District. “Our clients are part of our own community. They look at us as more than just a brand to buy from. I think they’re invested in our success,” she said.

When the company was wholesaling to stores like [Saks Fifth Avenue](#) and [Neiman Marcus](#) from 2013 to 2016, it sold about 10,000 units annually and is “now catching up to that” through a different revenue structure, he said. With 12 to 14 specialty store doors, KZ_K Studio’s wholesale business accounts for about 30 percent of its overall sales. The remaining 70 percent consists of direct-to-client services such as in-studio sales and stylist collaborations.

As for what the most challenging aspect of business is currently, Zmarlak said, “There are so many. From a creative design perspective, the fashion business and manufacturing high-end ready-to-wear is incredibly labor intensive. Very few people understand that when one single garment is made, it can go through 30, 40 or 50 pairs of hands from the beginning of the fabric [selection] process to the finished garment that we ship to a client. We are competing with some enormous brands that have hundreds of employees. Our quality control and everything about our products just has to be perfected, on-point and stand the test of time.”

The company does pop-up shops, trunk shows, special appearances and private events through its network of stylist collaborators. Returning to in-store events to try to help support sales in June of 2020 was “a game changer,” since shipping products was an issue for many at that point due to Covid, Zmarlak said. Reached at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport Wednesday afternoon, she was en route to a multi-day visit at the specialty store Tootsie’s. There, she will meet-and-greet shoppers and build upon existing relationships for the next few days. The plan is to take part in more than 50 events nationwide this year.

The KZ_K Studio collection retails from \$495 for a reversible silk, charmeuse camisole to a \$2,895 leather parka with \$800 to \$2,000 being the key price range. Outerwear is the leading category, especially convertible and reversible styles, followed by pants, blouses and dresses, Zmarlak said. Washable leathers and shearlings are also offered. KZ_K Studio also has created a capsule collection of made-to-order handbags with 1 Atelier.



A look from KZ_K Studio. COURTESY OF KZ_K STUDIO

As an incentive to spend, consumers and stylists’ clients can receive “try-on packages” to get a closer look at potential purchases at their leisure or through a virtual sessions. Many took to that option during the pandemic and they continue to put it to use, Zmarlak said. Consumers are not obligated to purchase the try-on items before they are shipped, nor are they charged for consultations. There is a fee for alterations, which can be handled digitally or in-person. Stylists, however, have their own models regarding consultation fees.