

Underneath glow of fashion lie women with business grit

By STEVE BARNABY

The fashion world is to some a dreamland filled with glamorous people and beautiful things.

The victim of soap opera novels and made-for-television films, the fashion industry, while maintaining its deceptive "Hollywood" facade, is in reality a multi-million dollar worldwide business.

Those close to the business know what it takes to make fashions the lucrative business that it has proven to be.

The metropolitan Detroit area has at least two such persons who are examples of not only women in fashion, but

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—Sally Birnkrant (Sabrina)

more importantly, women in the business of fashion.

"Behind my crazy flamboyant front, I'm an astute, disciplined woman," says Sally Birnkrant, more popularly known as Sabrina, who has owned a fashion apparel shop in Birmingham since 1971.

Earlier this year, she opened a similar shop in Houston, Tex.

The flashy, costume jewelry press releases used to promote her establishments defy the logic of business sense. They appeal to the illusion that is the fashion world.

But upon closer investigation, a

much different Sabrina evolves from the press image which portrays her as "a young, pretty, flamboyant, high-energy, witty, zany, crazy redhead."

After taking a stab at Broadway, she returned to her native Birmingham when she was 21-years-old and went to work for J.L. Hudson.

After being interviewed by several vice presidents, she finally was hired by one.

"He told me that for the first six months I should keep my ears, eyes and mind open—and my mouth shut," she recalls.

She did, and six months later she was a buyer for Hudson's Studio boutique, traveling to New York and California to fulfill her duties.

By the time she turned 24, in 1969, she had moved to Atlanta for a two-year stint with Davisons as a public relations director.

By 1971, after stockpiling her fashion experience, Ms. Birnkrant went out on her own and opened a 1,500 square foot shop.

"I had returned to Michigan to start business because my family was there and I knew people at the banks and stores," she says. But the realities of the business world taught her that it takes more than friends and security to make a successful business.

"Today, less naive, I know that ones friends rarely become one's customers. The public finds out about you if you have something special to offer."

But while maintaining the show business atmosphere to her shop, she had to suffer through the recession three years ago when "business was terrible."

But it was her business sense, rather than the show biz side of Ms. Birnkrant, which saved the day. In July 1974, she moved across the street to the Bloomfield Plaza and opened a 4,500 square foot store which increased its business by \$200,000 the first year.

SHARRON KOZMA, of West Bloomfield, is another woman in fashion who has transformed the glamor into a sound business investment. In her case, the investment is a career with B. Siegel as the fashion director.

Formerly a model, she has worked through the years with Madelyn Coe at Detroit's Renaissance Center and at Hudson's to learn the business side of fashion.

Presently she is working with the store's employees aiding them in techniques of selling the new fashions. As her job develops, she will be coordinating fashion shows, window displays, press coverage and advertising techniques.

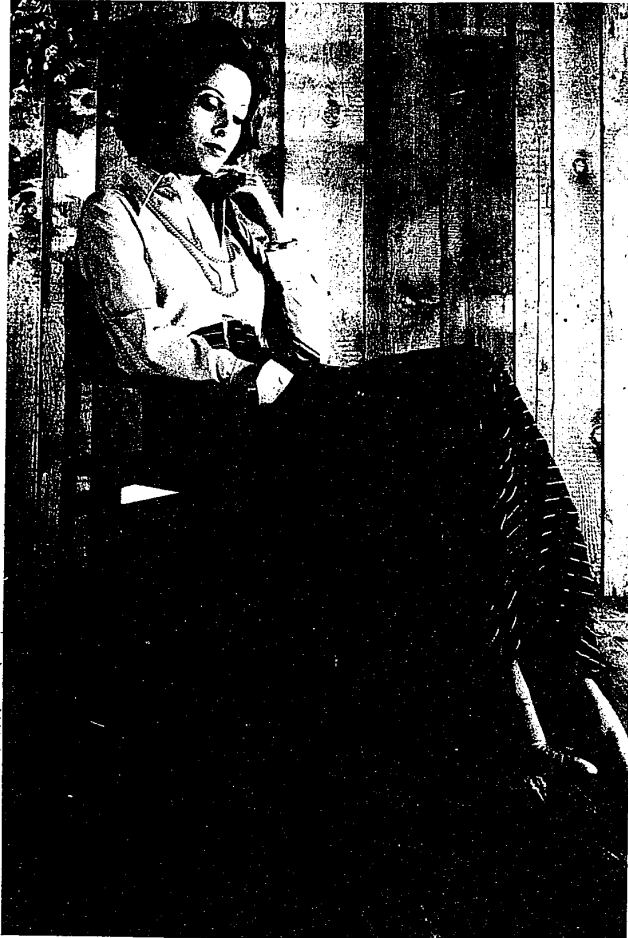
While admitting that it is an exciting kind of work, she admits that her training was. For persons who want to get into this line of work, formal education is lacking, she says.

For men, she says, it is even more difficult to break into the fashion directorships.

"Everyone wishing to get into this line of work has to work hard, but for men it is even tougher. I know of only one man in this area who does such work and he is one in one million," she says.

Married for 16 years and with two children, Mrs. Kozma has learned that a woman can, indeed, mix a career with family life and meet success at both ends.

"With the girls growing older, 12 and 8-years-old things seem to be working out very well. Although if they were younger, I might have encountered some problems in taking on a job such as this," she says.



Sharron Kozma of West Bloomfield is another woman in fashion who has transformed the glamor into a sound business investment.



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