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Tuesday, October 02, 2007

## A PLUS SIZE PARTY

LEE LEE'S VALISE

New York Fashion Week may be long over in Bryant Park, but the party didn't stop there. A week later, Brooklyn boutique Lee Lee's Valise celebrated the beauty of curvy girls with an unofficial "Plus Size Fashion Week" party.

Some of the most prominent plus designers in the fashion industry were present at the two-day event, which previewed the Spring/Summer lines of Anna Scholz, Jessica Svoboda, Darren Trentacosta, and Tadashi. The mood was fun and festive, like a night out with your best girlfriends. As plus-size patrons sipped champagne, they laughed with the designers, traded their favorite style tips, and caught up on gossip.

And that's exactly how storeowner **Lisa Dolan** likes it.

"Women love coming here because they finally feel comfortable. No one's crying or upset and no one feels ashamed. It's a fun, communal feeling," Dolan says.

Originally in the restaurant business, Dolan quit her full-time job to fill what she saw as a void in the plus-size market. She opened **Lee Lee's Valise**, just a few short months ago, with the hopes of giving plus-size women more choices and options for chic, trendy clothes.

"I knew I wasn't alone in wanting fashion-forward clothes that fit me," she recalls. "I would walk by store windows always saying 'I wish that could fit me.' Like a lot of plus-size women, I would settle for "safe," boring clothes. But I wanted fun and trendy things too!"

The boutique is named after Lisa Dolan's childhood nickname, "Lee Lee," and her infamous vintage suitcase, the valise. Dolan has outfitted the store as a vintage wonderland, complete with furniture from the 1910's, '20s, '30s and '40s. The center point of the store is a classic sitting and dressing area, where women congregate to share success stories of their fabulous finds. Dolan is always nearby to offer encouragement.

"I really wanted the store to have the authentic look of a 1940's boutique. But more than that, I wanted it to feel like a store in that era, back when people cared about service and everyone knew each other's name."

Apparently her approach is popular. According to Dolan, patrons line up outside the store early, often with a story to tell or news to catch up on. Dolan, who has no formal fashion training, also serves as the store's personal stylist, putting aside special finds for returning customers, and buyer, seeking out the coolest and most fashionable designers she can find to stock the store, which caters to women sizes 10-28.

### Designer Showcase

Among those designers is German native Anna Scholz. The talented designer, who began her fashion career as a plus size model, focused her spring collection on the concept of "dress dressing."

"I have a few pants and tops in the collection," says Scholz, while showing an eager customer a glamorous empire-waist dress.

"But I really think women need that special dress that stands out on its own."

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Indeed. Evening-inspired maxi dresses in interesting prints are a best seller, with bold colors like orange, red, and black, and blue. Another hit? Scholz's jersey wrap dresses, which can be found at Neiman Marcus, Harrods or [www.annascholz.com](http://www.annascholz.com). They are must-have staple for any plus sized woman's closet because of their versatility and trendy ease. Scholz offered clear advice for the plus-size woman looking to stock up for the season. "Be daring and experiment. Basically, enjoy clothes again!"

Denim designer Jessica Svoboda, who's stylish jeans can be found at Neiman's, Nordstrom's or her own website, [www.svobodastyle.com](http://www.svobodastyle.com), echoed a similar feeling. "I tell everyone, accept that you can wear what's in style. If it's available in your size, wear it and break the mold."

For more information on Lee Lee's Valise, visit [www.leeleesvalise.com](http://www.leeleesvalise.com).

By Keisha Crosby

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