

RESTING IN ELEGANCE

# Slip into something a little more luxurious

Comfort is key for Jane Hall's robes and sleepwear

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**T**HE world may be full of people who lounge in T-shirts and comfy pajamas, but Jane Hall still believes there's a place for robes.

Not the vampy Victoria's Secret kind, says Hall, who doesn't do feathers or cute little designs. Her robes are elegant and stylishly fitted in rich colors and patterns; they're masterpieces her customers across the globe adore.

"This isn't high fashion," says the designer, who owns Carlton Hall, a specialty robe and sleepwear company based in southwest Houston. "When people buy a robe, they aren't buying a trend. They want comfort and something to cuddle up in. What sells mine is the fabric and the fit."

Hall sells more than 8,000 robes annually to luxury retailers, including Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue and boutiques in 30 U.S. cities. She uses unusual fabrics — burnout velvet, drapery prints and rare silks — not typical for loungewear, but washable and soft against the skin.

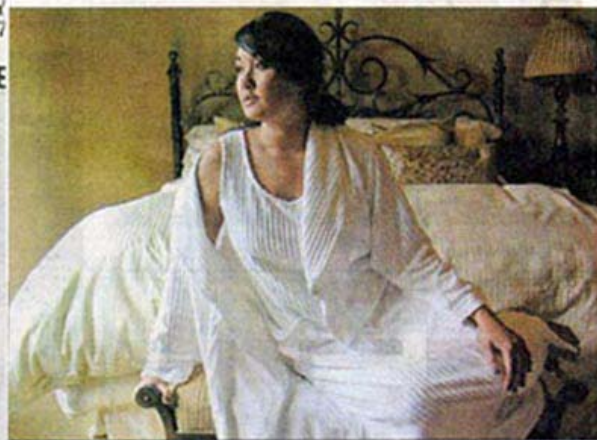
Most of her robes are \$120-\$180, although her most upscale pieces, which incorporate jewels and hand-painted silk, are \$1,500-\$1,800. (Her silk-velvet caftans are popular at Saks in Saudi Arabia.)

"I wanted a niche that no one in Houston was doing," Hall said. "I wasn't thinking of the world."

Her signature (and most popular) design — a robe with an attached wide belt — was originally created at a customer's request. It sells no matter what fabric it's in, she said.

With a staff of five, Hall produces and distributes each piece from Houston, although it would be cheaper to manufacture overseas. Hall says she won't forsake quality or variety to save money.

"My customers are spoiled because they get pieces in two or three weeks. If I had to do mass production overseas, it



CARLTON HALL

## Best of spa designs

Jane Hall's white terry chenille robe and matching gown were named best of spawear at the International Lingerie Awards in New York in 2006.

would take four months."

Like many designers, Hall grew up sewing. She enjoyed it so much, her parents refused to allow her to take her sewing machine to college, fearing she would spend more time sewing than studying. Hall quickly found another machine and began earning money sewing clothes for classmates.

After earning her

bachelor's degree in business from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, she set up a dressmaking business in the back of a local fabric store. When the store's owner died in a plane crash, Hall bought the business and hired five more dressmakers.

She moved to Houston in 1989 with her husband, businessman Jack Hall, and once again found her niche.

She sold her first loungewear — a pair of tuxedo pajamas and a cotton satreen robe — to a boutique in Baton Rouge, La., in 1991. She's designed for a few celebrities over the years, including Ethel Kennedy (who wanted a cotton seersucker robe) and Pia Zadora (who bought pajamas). One of her silk robes also made an appearance on the soap opera *General Hospital*.

Business has been good — doubling since 1997, when Hall founded Amanda Kich, a lower-priced sleepwear line named for her son, Richard, 21, and daughter, Amanda, 14. Last year, her Carlton Hall chenille robe and matching gown received the award for best spa design at the International Lingerie Awards in New York. She also created a reversible plush, unisex robe that's "the only robe my 21-year-old son went crazy about."

According to NPD Group, a marketing analysis firm, robe sales have increased by about 10 percent in the last two years, with the average price at \$18.

That's good news to Hall, but she says, "My customer doesn't want the Wal-Mart or JC Penney robe. They want better fit, better quality. You cannot make a robe for \$18 that will last."

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**PHENOMENON:** Robe and lingerie designer Jane Hall's company, Carlton Hall, sells its designs in chic hotels, spas and lingerie stores around the globe.



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