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## Mycra Pac Designer Wear Creating Clothes in Moraga

By *Sophie Braccini*



Customers in Mycra Pac coats "fight" over a bag, as Sharon Huebschwerlen (left, in yellow) looks on  
Photo Sophie Braccini

When Sharon Huebschwerlen walks around her building in the Rheem Center, she makes it a point to greet each and every one of the 21 team members of her "business family." They are all busy creating and marketing the line of Myra Pac outerwear that's put Moraga on the fashion map.

▭ A graduate of Miramonte High School and UC Berkeley, Huebschwerlen spent most of her professional life in the fashion industry as a buyer for large companies such as Casual Corner and Macy's. When the company she was with moved its headquarters to New York, she decided to stay in the Bay Area and create her own trademark. Her idea was to design a high-end travel wear line that was elegant, reversible, water-repellant, and wrinkle free. That was Mycra Pac, and the year was 1991.

▭ Now Huebschwerlen travels the world, studying trends and looking for innovative fabrics. "I create the models, with the team," says the business woman, "and we can count on our suppliers to produce our exclusive brand." Mycra Pac's line is one of the last to be completely manufactured in the US. "Twenty years ago many brands were made in the U.S.," says Huebschwerlen, "we continued that tradition because it allows us to be on top of the quality of the products we manufacture." The colors and prints are made to order by Milliken in North Carolina out of a fabric manufactured by Dupont; the fabric is cut in San Francisco and eleven sewing shops in the Bay Area assemble the garments and accessories.

▭ All in all, 180 jobs rely on Huebschwerlen's business acumen. Mycra Pac offers five different lines a year and participates in fashion trade shows in nine different US locations. Huebschwerlen's biggest customers are Nordstrom's in the US, Holt Renfrew in Canada, Selfridges in England and Isetan in Japan. Mycra Pac can be purchased on-line and in a network of smaller specialty stores all over the country.

▭ At this time, Mycra Pac is working on its Spring 2010 line. "We love colors, innovative designs and creative patterns," says Huebschwerlen, as she shows some of her new creations such as an elegant black faux-fur coat on one side, raincoat on the other, a shocking pink raincoat and one of her best selling items, a long raincoat with a pleated hood. Huebschwerlen believes that what makes her brand unique is the mix of quality and creativity of the offering. "When we sell a coat, it is guaranteed for life," says Huebschwerlen, "we have a few coats come back every year and we're happy to replace them. But our quality is such that we can stand by our products and make this kind of promise."

▭ Like the whole industry, Mycra Pac has now entered the troubled waters of an economy in recession. "The women who buy our products continue to travel and want to do it in style," says Huebschwerlen, "but our small retail stores are hurt by the credit crunch, they lose their lines of credit and we are concerned about the survival of some of them who have been doing business with us since the beginning."

▭ Huebschwerlen is not worried about her own firm. The whole team is getting ready for the semi-annual sale that attracts to Moraga customers from all over California. "I do not want to see my production in discount stores," says Huebschwerlen, "we'd rather sell our previous season's items at a discount to our neighbors and friends."

▭ This year, the spring sale will start on June 10 and last five days. 5000 coats

and accessories will be offered at a 20%- 60% discount from 1 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Wednesday and from 11a.m. to 4 p.m. the four other days.

□ "It is a lot of fun to have people come here every year, the parking at Rheem gets full, and everyone gets super excited," says Huebschwerlen, who expects to sell almost everything this year, like in the years past.

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