

commerce

retailing

entrepreneurship

keeping track

business

startups

investments

capital

Making Busy Look Good

NIC+ZOE's Dorian Lightbown

CHERYL FENTON **writer**

let's face it. You make busy look good. You zip through full calendars in style, seamlessly transitioning from career-boosting presentations to after-school parent-teacher conferences to cocktail hours for your most loved philanthropic endeavors.

Little did you know, you and your fellow do-it-all superwomen are the muse for long-time Weston resident Dorian Lightbown's designer knitwear line.

"My inspiration for starting NIC+ZOE came from all the women I would see working in Weston. [My son and daughter] Nick and Zoë's doctors, teachers, librarians. They were all working women who wanted to look professional but didn't want to wear a black suit," explains Lightbown, founder and COO of NIC+ZOE. This knitwear company boasts distinctive colors and patterns, feminine textures, and soft neutrals. What's your pleasure? A signature swirl dress, a lazy day tunic and soft Wonderstretch pant, or a cozy cropped cardi atop a flirt skirt? They have it all.

Widely recognized as one of the leading knitwear designers in women's apparel today, Lightbown wanted to shake the notion that a jam-packed day required outfit changes. Who has time for that?

After studying apparel design at New York City's Pratt Institute, earning a BFA at Rhode Island School of Design, and walking a knitwear design career path from Mast Industries (The



COURTESY NIC+ZOE

*Zoë Chatfield-Taylor
and Dorian Lightbown*

business “incredibly passionate and dedicated”

Limited) to Sigrid Olsen, she found few lines balanced comfort with style. Going from a full day through to evening just wasn't possible.

Taking matters into her own hands, she launched NIC+ZOE in 2005. When the first collection shipped Spring 2006, busy style-minded women everywhere heaved a collective sigh.

“Every collection is designed to dress women for all aspects of their lives, eliminating the need for an outfit change in the middle of their busy day,” Lightbown has said of her label. She believes this should be a driving factor when building your wardrobe. Read: It's possible to

reclaim your inner power and femininity. You can be a working mom and still be sexy.

Perhaps it was her own working mom status that gave birth to this idea. She even named the brand after her two children, Nicholas and Zoë, as a testament to how family and work can happily come together.

“My earliest memories are of being put to bed, Van Morrison being put on her stereo, and [mom] working into the night,” says daughter Zoë Chatfield-Taylor, who lives in Dorchester and is planning her September wedding to her Weston High sweetheart. “She is incredibly



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NIC+ZOE

business “all designers love to start a new season”

passionate and dedicated. I learned at an early age that fashion isn't necessarily the fantasy that everyone thinks it is. It's hard work. At some point I realized that most households got *The Boston Globe* in the mail, not *Women's Wear Daily*.”

“Zoë loved it,” says Lightbown of the family life and career collision. “When she was younger she thought it was so cool she could wear something with her name in the back. Nick is still wondering what happened to the ‘K.’”

Together Again

A 17-year-old high school senior when NIC+ZOE first began, Chatfield-Taylor is back in the fold. The knitwear company became even more close-knit when she joined the team in 2009.

After a year of studying at University of Connecticut, she moved to Los Angeles to attend the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising. Upon graduation, she moved back east to work at NIC+ZOE.

“It was too close to me with my mother's profession to consider working in fashion initially,” Chatfield-Taylor explains. “It took stepping away from that world and feeling lost at UCONN to

want to study something that I loved and could truly apply to the workplace. I realized I wanted to be in the industry.”

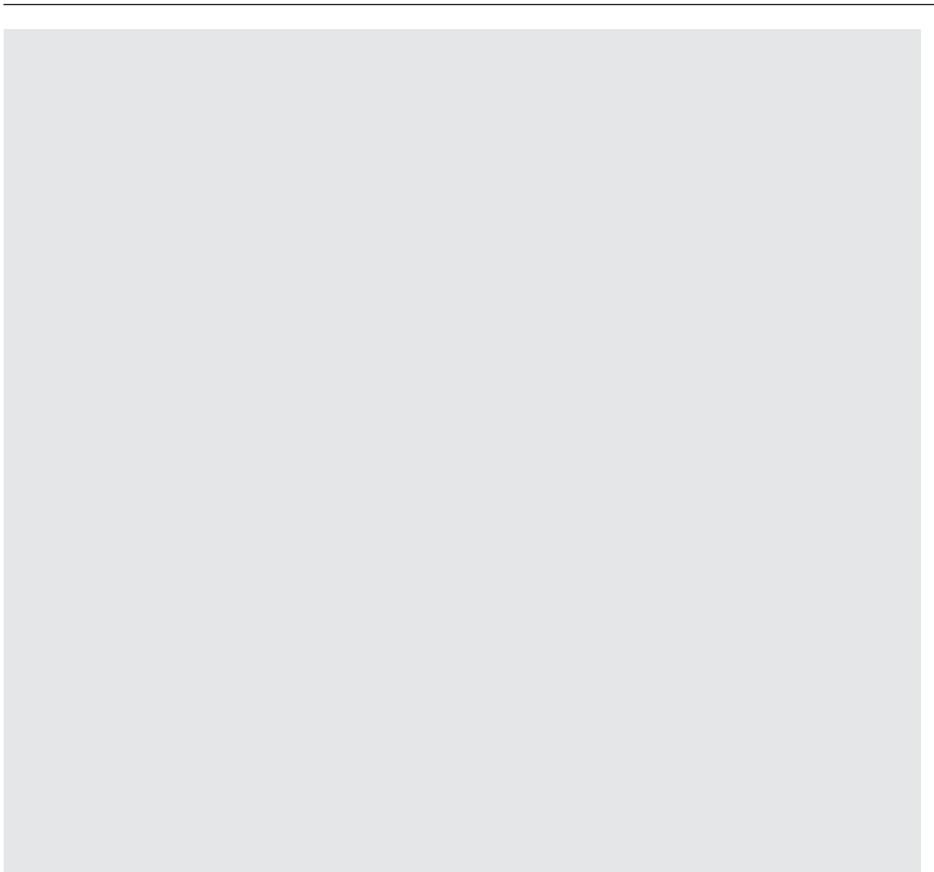
As Director of Merchandising, she works closely with the product, from guiding the design team in their needs for each collection to getting the line ready for market. She also works closely with her mother, a mom-daughter dynamic that others in NIC+ZOE have called endearing.

“We trust each other, and it feels very natural,” Chatfield-Taylor continues. “We partner on a consistent basis to develop the collections and work together almost every day.”

Collection Inspiration

For Lightbown, style-comfort connection is a four-letter word—knit. She manipulates textures and yarn to create innovative 12-month knits that are as cozy as you need them to be in New England winters, yet equally as appealing in warmer seasons.

“I love knits,” she says. There's a sense of irony when you learn Lightbown's southpaw status meant hand-knitting lessons from her grandmother usually ended with frustrated backward knits. “They add so much style to one's wardrobe and are so comfortable to wear. The NIC+ZOE woman lives in knits because they move with you, go effortlessly from desk to dinner and coffee to cocktails, and are timeless. Knits never go out of style and will always be the first thing women reach for in their closets.”



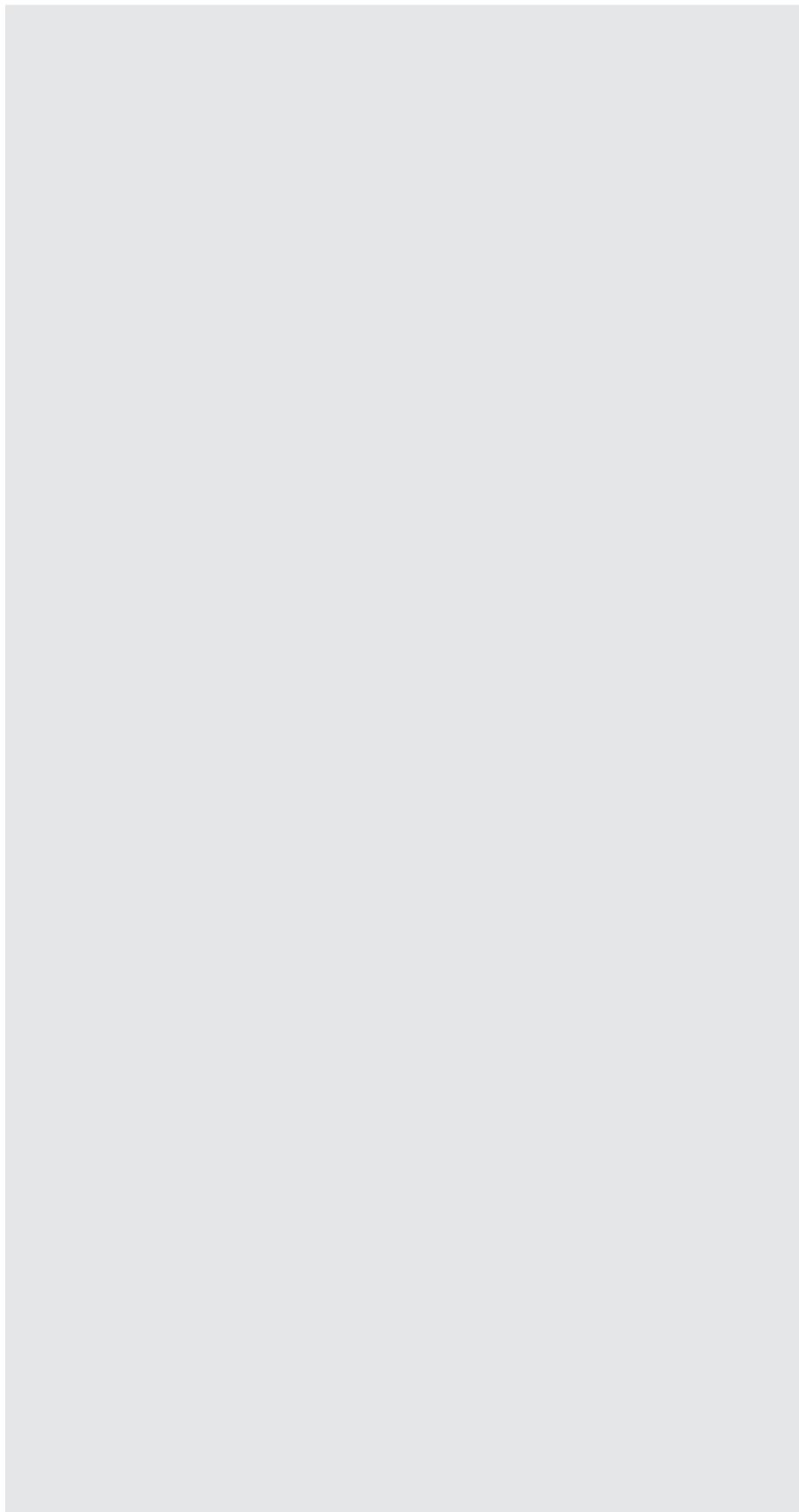
**“We strive to show the
world that Boston fashion
is more than red shorts
and boat shoes.”**

– Dorian Lightbown

Although a showroom in New York City’s Fashion District is where they show off to buyers and editors, Natick is Lightbown’s creative playground. As the company’s headquarters, this location houses the design studio, corporate offices, and distribution center. The team of ten designers and four technical designers brainstorms collections with the excitement of each being their very first.

“I think all designers love to start a new season,” says Lightbown. “I start with inspiration. It can be a picture, a vintage dress, an article, a new show. Something that catches your eye that looks new and fresh. It starts a spark.”

Collections are given clever and revealing names, such as Tundra Wrap, Winter 2014’s playful interpretation of a Russian tundra experience with a punk inspiration, or this spring’s Tribal Nouveau, full of deep impact lines with pops of fire and nectarine. They recently also introduced “colored neutrals,” NIC+ZOE’s version of the basics. Everyone knows beige and khaki, but Lightbown created a sand shell and mushroom as her take on those.



business “people are taking notice”

Visually drawn to designers with a feminine edge (think McQueen, Alberta Ferretti, and Valentino), Lightbown herself lives in NIC+ZOE.

“I usually get dressed thinking about new proportions, pairings, or color mixes that we’re working on for the coming seasons. We love to ‘live’ in what we are designing,” she admits, noting her favorite piece was the Antibes Skirt of years past. Chatfield-Taylor, on the other hand, loves their denim tops and knit jackets, as well as the newly designed Drift Away pant. “They’re perfect for the office, but feel like you could do yoga in them,” she says.

Tomorrow’s NIC+ZOE

While locals find pieces at Nordstrom and Lord & Taylor or smaller retailers such as Wellesley’s Irresistibles or Bessie Blue in Belmont, NIC+ZOE now has its first brick-and-mortar store in the Shops at The Prudential. This temporary 2,800-square-foot space is known as “a learning laboratory.” Not only can you fill your closet with their collection of signature



COURTESY OF NIC+ZOE

twirl dresses, popular Audrey tops, and graphic grid pants, but this is also a test spot for the line’s newest concepts. The Home Collection is one such recent addition, creating pillows and throws from yarns and textures from current collections.

It’s clear that, with all this fashion-forward growth and development, people are taking notice. NIC+ZOE was in the limelight recently when it was tapped by The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce as one of the top ten small businesses of 2014.

“It was such an honor,” says Lightbown. “With the launch of our Prudential Center pop-up store, we’re bringing NIC+ZOE into the city.” And not a moment too soon, as we are poised on the heels of summer. “We strive to show the world that Boston fashion is more than red shorts and boat shoes.” [WV](#)