



Big Bang Theory



Bang Bang blasts through the men's market with its kitschy atmosphere and flashy clubwear.

Bang! With one thunderous explosion, according to the scientifically based Big Bang Theory, the universe was created millions of years ago. Twenty-five years ago, the fashion universe was rocked by an equally colossal blast, as the sound of a fulminating fashion explosion pierced the air in the form of a new boutique bursting with young, contemporary and moderate-

ly priced apparel. Aptly named Bang Bang, the shop, located in Flushing, Queens, quickly became a major epicenter among club-goers who yearned to stand out in eye-catching, sexy, I'm-gonna-get-myself-laid-tonight clothes. A quarter-century later, Bang Bang is now a chain of highly successful stores that revolves around an ever-evolving consumer. Brooklyn-born

Jack Menashe, 33-year-old president of the company, explains the success of his stores with his own simple big bang theory: "Fashion, image, a fun shopping environment and very, very competitive prices."

Menashe first joined Bang Bang while still in high school, working alongside his dad, who is still very involved in the company. Initially, only young females felt the fiery blast of the store's clubwear, because Bang Bang began by selling solely to girls who just wanted to have fun. Realizing in 1985 that young men also like to look hot while partying, the

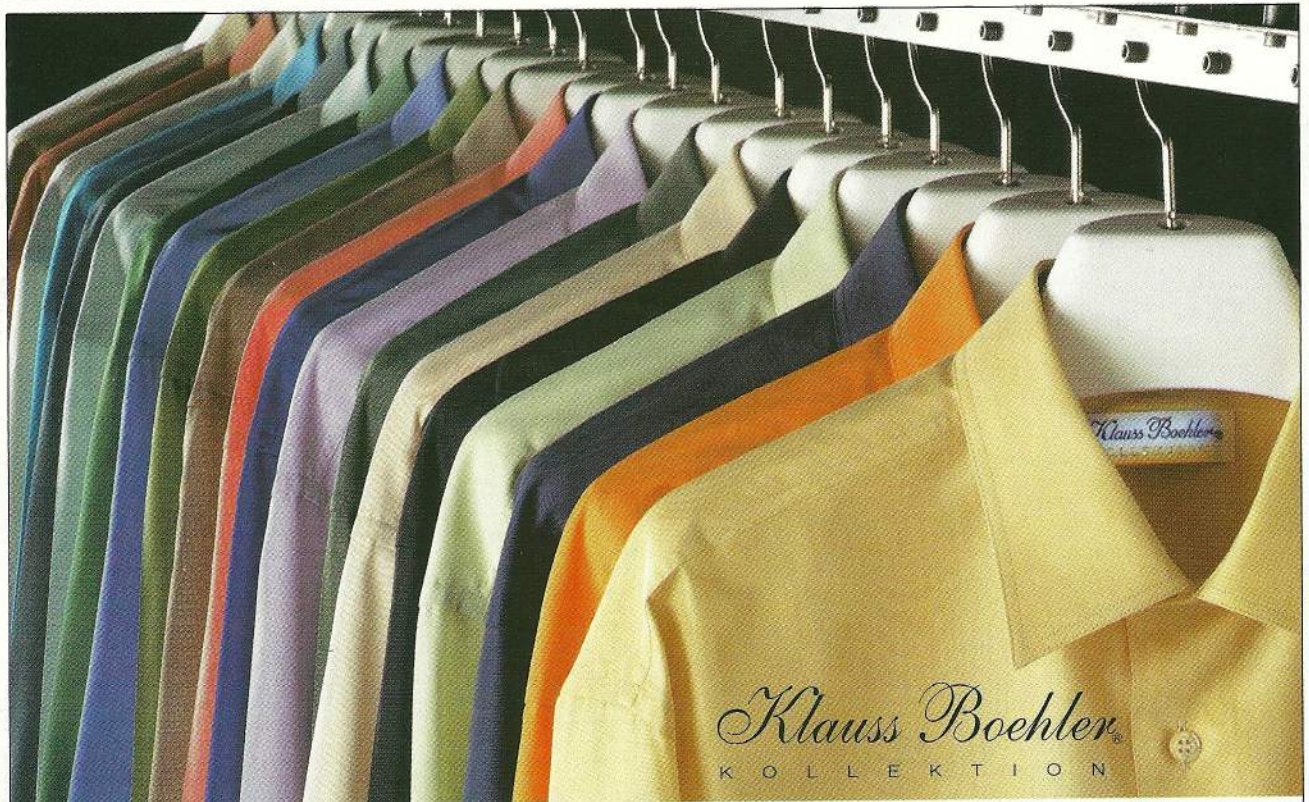


company added menswear into its eclectic mix of sometimes flashy, sometimes trashy, yet always noticeable clothes. Today, 40 percent of Bang Bang's apparel is menswear. Of the nine stores scattered throughout the New York City area, the Bang Bang boutique in Manhattan's Chelsea district, opened in 1998, is the only one that sells exclusively men's clothes. "There was nothing in the area [Chelsea] that gave the consumer what he needed. All the stores there are very expensive, so we thought if we put a store there and gave it our image and our style, it would do well."

Although Menashe declines to disclose any sales figures, he emphatically proclaims that business has been booming, due in large part to knowing his client well. The Bang Bang man, ranging in age from late teens to early 40s, is fashion-forward and confident. He appreciates European flair and, as Menashe describes it, "wants to be able to put on a shirt and feel like a million dollars."

Older consumers might be shy walking in and might think, "What am I going to buy here?!" But once they look at the merchandise, they realize there are a lot of fashion basics that they can supplement their wardrobe with. Once they come in, they always come back."

Exactly what keeps them coming back is a clean, edgy look, consisting of 50 percent tops, 35 percent bottoms, ten percent outerwear and five percent accessories. This season, a plethora of drawstring pants, muscle tank tops and sleeveless fitted shirts are available to bargain—and body-conscious—men, for whom



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a top can never be too tight. In addition, shades of blue, orange and yellow, as well as white, are dominant colors. Colors, especially red and blue, will continue to play a pivotal role at Bang Bang in coming seasons, predicts Menashe. Also on the horizon for next season: a slew of turtlenecks and knits. Silhouettes, however, will remain sleek and slim. "Whenever we get too busy with silhouettes, they don't really sell," Menashe explains.

Looking into his disco ball, Menashe also prophesizes the use of many exciting fabrics, such as leather, suede and snakeskin—all fake, of course. With most retail prices hovering in the \$30s and \$40s, the Bang Bang consumer doesn't lust after reality. He craves a world of fantasy.

And it's precisely this fantasy that has roused some to label Bang Bang as cheesy and devoid of true style. "Well, God bless them," Menashe, who is his own customer, answers critics. "We don't think it's cheesy. We like to be different, because all the stuff that other places have that is also called cheesy was new two years ago. Now everyone and their mother has it hanging on their shelves. They make those clothes look bad, and we don't like to look like all those other guys."

Some of Bang Bang's best-selling labels are Y.M.L.A., UFO and Body Body Wear. But because Bang Bang sells predominantly private labels, business for the chain doesn't revolve around key vendors and brand-names; rather, it's about product development. "We don't necessarily buy by vendor," says Menashe. "We pick our seam by what we feel we want to be happening at Bang Bang, and then go and make it happen. As opposed to listening to vendors, we dictate what we want." This isn't to say that the company isn't on the lookout for other interesting manufacturers. "We're always looking for new, new, new; we're always looking to change," proclaims Menashe.

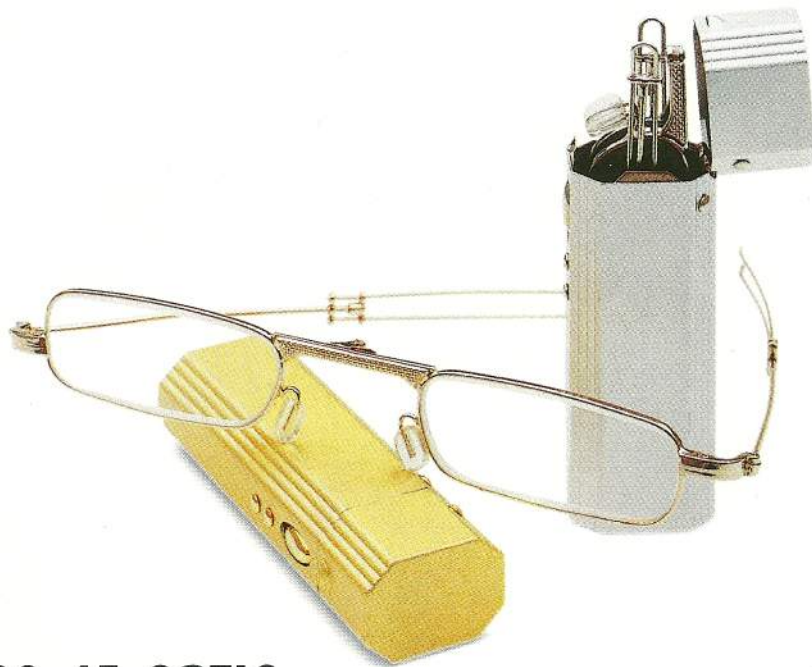
Although Bang Bang may dictate styles to manufacturers, it's the consumer that has the most influence over what individual stores carry. Menashe keeps in constant contact with each store manager to add, eliminate and brainstorm on new styles. As a result, each boutique, which averages 6,000 square feet, is unique, both in what it sells and in its overall design. The menswear-only store serves as a clear example of this

strategy. Windows displaying mannequins in various states of undress; dressing "rooms" that are nothing more than translucent circular curtains; a TV monitor featuring borderline porn; and pounding music create an atmosphere soaked in sex and kitsch. "We understand our customer," remarks Menashe. "We do what we can to make the store a reflection of his lifestyle."

Lifestyle marketing is further employed in the company's promotional efforts. In addition to advertising heavily on dance music radio stations, a great deal of work is done with club promoters, from staging fashion shows and hosting Bang Bang nights at clubs, to offering special club discounts to customers. Indeed, to many, Bang Bang and club-wear have become synonymous.

The Bang Bang universe continues to expand. Just around the corner is the opening of a new flagship store in King of Prussia, PA, and plans to open many more doors nationwide, from Florida to the Left Coast, are also underway. "This is my life," declares Menashe. "The potential for growth is limitless, as long as we keep doing what we know how to do."
—Vadim Liberman

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