

MANY see Uma Malik (or Maggie, as she is popularly known in business circles) as a social butterfly. But beneath her easy and friendly demeanour is a woman of steel and all that steel personifies—stability and endurance.

Uma came to Canada as a young bride in 1973. Armed with a masters in literature and sociology, she soon began working as a research associate at the University of Western Ontario in London. The work was very demanding and she felt she could not spend as much time as she wanted with her children. So she decided to take two years off to be with them.

ENCOURAGING RESPONSE

In 1984, during a visit to India, Uma met a family friend dealing in readymade garment export who gave her some samples of cotton nightwear and loungewear, which she reluctantly brought back to Canada and forgot about. Clearing out the basement six months later, Uma found the forgotten designs, and, for a lark, called a few boutiques. The response was encouraging and her first order was for 200 pieces.

In 1986, she participated in a trade show in Toronto, a venue where retailers come and

end-of-line designs from her, considering that it usually buys only designer clothing. And all this was accomplished while she still worked from her basement. In 1996, she was able to build her own premises which she now shares with another business company.

Uma has been able to get the Feminine La Flare label into the prestigious La Senza stores, 184 in all throughout the country, where her designs sell like hot cakes. In December 1999, her company supplied La Senza with 40,000 pieces of modern nightwear for the younger clientele. Uma counts it as her biggest achievement. Today Feminine La Flare also boasts of a line called Timeless, which consists of Victorian style antique outfits.

PRESENTING INDIAN IMAGE

Today Uma rides on the waves of success. Uma is a founding member of the New Delhi Pavilion in Ontario, where she is responsible for ensuring quality presentation of Indian culture and art.

Her dream is to see every woman in Canada own at least one Feminine La Flare design. When that happens, she says she will have attained her Nirvana.

The secret of her tremendous success in business? You have to spend money to get

MARKETING THE INDIAN LOOK

UMA MALIK STARTED IN A BASEMENT, BUT TODAY HER DESIGNS FEATURE IN TOP BOUTIQUES IN CANADA, WRITES RENU MEHTA

book orders. Uma's expenses turned out to be higher than the orders she booked, but by now the entrepreneurial spirit was high and she refused to be discouraged.

Uma then decided to return to India where she designed a line of Victorian nightgowns and an exclusive line of daywear by uniquely blending Indian craftsmanship with contemporary Canadian styling.

She then introduced the Feminine La Flare label to exclusive boutiques all over the country. She hired sales representatives in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. The orders started pouring in from prestigious accounts like Eatons, Holt Renfrew and Winners. Uma was especially ecstatic when Winners started buying

the market assessed professionally in order to identify a product and fill a niche, she says. Uma would advise aspiring women entrepreneurs to seek loans from financial institutions, who offer subsidies as well as legal assistance to small businesses.

According to Uma, the three key words to success in the readymade garment business are costing, timing and quality.

UMA MALIK—KEEPING TABS ON MARKET TRENDS

