



**The New York Times**

## **Custom-Made Clothes to Match Your Kicks**



Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times

**BRONX ORIGINALS** Left, Alex Gonzalez helps Erick Orengo choose a shirt.

By **DAVID GONZALEZ**

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MARK SERRANO says he spends 98 percent of his money on sneakers and the rest on food. He looks it. Thin as a skeleton, he sports spotless black Nikes — one of more than 200 pairs he owns.

But collecting every new shoe he likes can pose a problem: how to make the rest of his outfit live up to his footwear, especially given new sneaker styles with hard-to-match metallic finishes in offbeat colors like cranberry and copper.

Problem solved. For a growing number of sneaker fanatics, [Da Bakery](#), a Bronx store specializing in graffiti-inspired clothing, cranks out custom-designed T-shirts, sweaters and hats in identical colors and finishes. Even before Mr. Serrano's new shoes first hit the pavement, the store had stocked up on supplies to print limited edition T-shirts to match them.

"They had the copper foil and they got creative," said Mr. Serrano, 34. "I mean, I hate walking down the street and everybody's wearing the same stuff, or worse, they have sneakers where nothing matches. The colors can be so crazy. But whenever there is a new sneaker, these guys come out with a design."

Da Bakery is the brainchild of Anthony Cabezas and Sandro Figueroa, better known by their respective graffiti names, Beond 69 and Sen 2. They were already manufacturing shirts boasting of the Bronx's distinction as the birthplace of hip-hop, supplying stores in New York, Puerto Rico and Spain. But after seeing how other retailers were cashing in on — if not exploiting — the aesthetics of street culture, they opened their own store last May in a former storefront church on Southern Boulevard near 174th Street.



“When I saw how those copper sneakers were selling, we knew we could do something,” said Mr. Figueroa, 41. “We did a design with our cupcake logo and put it out there. People went crazy. They were lining up even before we opened. They were telling us they couldn’t find anything to match anywhere else.”

Through local buzz and Web sites like [sneakerfiles.com](http://sneakerfiles.com), the duo monitors which shoes are about to go on sale, allowing them to draw new shirt designs and stock up on the right colors and materials.

They limit their sneaker-matching custom work to editions of 36 shirts, which sell for \$25 to \$50 apiece. Many of their customers are regulars who come back for matching sweaters and hats. In a typical week, they said, they sell 100 T-shirts.

“You won’t see any of their styles out in any store,” said Ray Ruiz, 22, a film student who was wearing green and black [LeBron James](#) Nike sneakers and a coordinating shirt. “They always know what people want. And Sen only has to look at a sneaker once to get the colors and design right. I got this shirt after showing him a picture of the shoes on my cellphone.”

The store, a one-stop shop for aerosol artists, has a clean, open look. The wall behind the cash register resembles a pointillist painting; the dots are the tops of hundreds of cans of Montana-brand spray paint. Racks of custom-designed hoodies and sweaters flank the store, while a gallery occupies a nook near the back.

The print shop behind the retail space is cluttered with shirts, cans and a six-armed silk-screen press where the shirts are printed. Beside it, an infrared dryer cures the paint on shirts that roll through it like slices of toast.



**PRINT WORK** An owner of Da Bakery, Sandro Figueroa, silk-screens a shirt.

“It’s like baking cookies,” said Mr. Cabezas, 41. “Or pizzas.”

The store’s name is a nod to Mr. Figueroa’s childhood in Puerto Rico, where he grew up wanting to be a baker. But it also attests to their ability to knock out the shirts.

“We are constantly releasing new product,” Mr. Cabezas said. “When you go to Fordham, Southern or Third, you see the same stuff on all the racks. We got our own designs.”

Having their own press means they can print as many, or as few, of a given design as they like. In the tradition of graffiti artists who riff on pop culture icons, recent designs include “The South Bronx,” rendered in the style of the North Face clothing logo. One popular shirt features a huge tag that reads “What Up, My Name Is” with a blank space beneath it, suitable for customizing with marker or spray paint.

As they near their store’s first anniversary, Mr. Cabezas and Mr. Figueroa are thinking of expanding to other boroughs and perhaps stocking sneakers. They are also exploring the possibility of manufacturing in France or Spain, where Mr. Figueroa often travels to lead graffiti workshops.

In fact, he is so busy that he admits to often leaving the house with shirts that hardly match his scuffed-up sneakers.

“My son actually bought me two pairs of sneakers, saying ‘Daddy, you have to look good!’ ” he said. “Hey, I’m working. I don’t have time to match.”

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