

PEPI 'BERTINI' GONZALEZ BLENDS CLASSIC STYLE WITH ARTISTIC FLAIR AT HIS GABLES MENSWEAR SHOP



PHOTOS BY CHARLES TRAINOR, JR. / HERALD STAFF

MILAN

FASHION

The Price Of Beauty
Even in a weak economy, beauty treatments from waxing to Botox to tooth-whitening are thriving. 2K.

ETHNIC EXPLORER

Mediterranean Morsels
Chef Anthony Mansolillo interprets the tapas tradition at Café Ibiza. 4K.



INSIDE

ON MIRACLE MILE

BY ASHLEY FANTZ
afantz@herald.com

On a summer Saturday morning when most men sport flip-flops and shorts, Pepi "Bertini" Gonzalez dresses.

A white Canali button-down brightened by orange and eggshell-blue windowpane checks. A big-knot, zoot-suit short, Canali tie double stitched in orange with a bohemian lattice of flowers. Creaseless navy Zanella pants cinched by a vintage alligator belt. Bresciani navy socks tucked in Bruno Magli bench-made penny loafers. Annoyed by a stray thread on his tie, Gonzalez twists and folds it out of sight, showing off custom-made gray pearl cuff links.

Such serious fashion accomplishment might suggest Gonzalez is a serious guy. Not exactly.

"We want a happy ambience here!" he exclaims of his men's clothing boutique, Pepi Bertini, on Coral Gables' Miracle Mile. "This

is a show, it really is."

He speed-walks to the rear of the store and back again. Reaching to adjust a mannequin, he twirls around 90 degrees to head for a nearby building. He bounces up several flights of stairs and bursts into rooms where tailors work on the finest menswear in the world, including Gonzalez's own label.

"Everything must be

happy. If I am not happy, if I do not smile, then the customers will not buy a ticket to come see the show, you understand?"

For 10 years, Gonzalez has outfitted men who demand perfection, sometimes with very loud tantrums. Men who would recognize Canali or Casual Male blindfolded based solely on how the fabric feels in their moisturized palms.

Men like Oscar Feldenkreis, president of Perry Ellis International. Secure enough to wear pink, Feldenkreis brings along his dog, a Maltese named Sushi (who favors pink collars), to pick up Daddy's basics: six \$2,000 Canali suits, a gaggle of Canali ties in firecracker shades and enough custom-made shirts to clothe the Miami Dolphins roster.

"Bottom line," says Feldenkreis. "Pepi knows clothes are art."

Gonzalez also knows art, naming his own clothing

PLEASE SEE PEPI, 3K



ART OF FASHION: Pepi Bertini Gonzalez sells menswear—and paintings.

COMMENTARY



ANA VECIANA-SUAREZ

aveciانا@herald.com

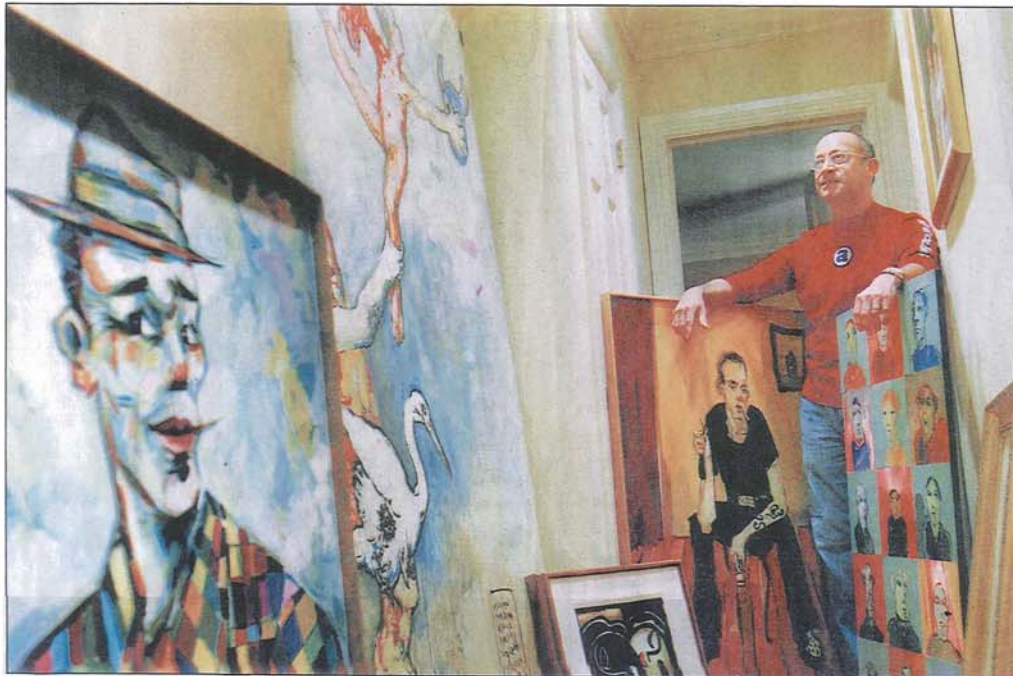
There's a crack in Abercrombie's mirror (and logic)

I just checked my son's closet and counted two Abercrombie & Fitch items. I wonder if he should have any.

Let me explain. A&F, that edgy, irreverent retailer for the 25-and-under set, has just been sued by nine Asian, black and Hispanic plaintiffs who claim that the company gives white employees preferences by hiring more of them and then assigning them to high-profile work on the retail floor. The lawsuit in U.S. District Court

PLEASE SEE ANA, 2K

PEPI 'BERTINI' GONZALEZ BLENDS CLASSIC STYLE WITH ARTISTIC FLAIR AT HIS GABLES MENSWEAR SHOP



MIRACLES ON MIRACLE MILE

PEPI FROM TK

company Modigliani for the Italian painter and sculptor and selling works by artists he admires. A self-described "deal hunter," he's constantly looking for images that stir him — a Venetian street painter's work, a movie print in Manhattan's Soho, a figurine in a Kendall supermarket.

Feldenkreis has bought nine paintings from Gonzalez. "I am not a middleman or a dealer," the clothier says. "If someone is in the store and they like something, then I tell the artist about the customer and the customer about the artist. Galleries, you know, they make people uncomfortable. Here they have a friendly place, no pressures."

FUERTES PAINTINGS

Several Jesus Fuertes paintings hang at Pepi Bertini, their cubist lines accenting a display of Xacus shirts cut in trendy, slimming lines. The Cuban painter's works usually sell for \$40,000 and up. Not far from a Fuertes sits a ceramic cat bought at Publix for \$15.

"Pepi has a sensibility, a feeling, for how things should go together," said Fuertes, who met Gonzalez when the clothier made him shirts 10 years ago.

Fuertes has since created paintings for the shop, including a 6-by-3-foot pop-art-inspired red heart for a Valentine's Day window. It replaced a 10-foot-tall, 1960s painted poster of Federico Fellini's *8½*, a film about the heartache a director endures after losing his inspiration. "I love this," Gonzalez gushes. "I love the beauty and sadness [of the film]. I think of making clothes in that way, all the emotion and passion that goes into every stitch."

Schooled in couture by his clothing-designer father, the Cuban-born Gonzalez, 44, earned popularity at Miami High by selling blue jeans from his car trunk. After attending Miami-Dade Community College, he worked at Miami's posh men's store Franko B. until a client encouraged him to start his own business.

Another helped bankroll the enterprise. (The "Bertini" in the store's name comes from one of his backers; customers assumed it was Pepi's own and began to call him by it.)

It's no wonder clients grow attached. Gonzalez goes out of his way to pamper them. Knowing that no one who buys \$300 shirts wants to trust them to Joe Cleaner Down the Street, he offers hand laundry for all the shirts he sells.

Gonzalez is also known for tending to his clients individually, locking the door and serving food and wine while they peruse the racks.

"I won't go anywhere else," Feldenkreis says. (It's Bertini for dress; casual days are all Ellis, of course.) "For a businessman that travels as much as I do, it's fantastic to have a real clothier."

In case of fashion emergencies, customers have Gonzalez's cellphone number.

Attorney Mike Eidson, president of the Miami City Ballet's board of trustees, was in a D.C. airport en route to Miami when he got word that he'd have to fly on to the Dominican Republic on business. He had nothing to wear and no time to shop. His secretary called Gonzalez. After he landed at Miami International Airport, someone handed him his passport and a new, custom-made, white dress shirt.

"Pepi had my pattern and made me a shirt immediately," marvels Eidson. "I was completely blown away by that kind of service."

Eidson doesn't just buy clothes from Gonzalez; he has purchased a painting through the store and is considering buying another.

Gonzalez manipulates his windows as if they were installations. This year he featured works by German painter and architect Hans Feyrabend, a Miami resident since 1998 whose impressionistic paintings have been exhibited at top galleries in Berlin and Palm Beach. Atlanta artist Clifford Bailey's vibrant portraits of jazz artists are also on display alongside dozens of pieces by little-known artists. Always theme-conscious, this



SENSE OF STYLE: Pepi 'Bertini' Gonzalez, top, surrounds himself with art at home and work. The clothes in his Coral Gables store are displayed alongside paintings by artists he likes.

month's window is deliberately whimsical with a political undercurrent. American and British flags face one another defiantly, drawing the eye to symbols of national pride — baseball and cricket — competing on separate stages.

On the U.S. side, an antique orange and chrome Schwinn that Gonzalez bought in Naples has drawn many guys into the store just to chat about their first bike. There's a baseball glove, a toy Chevy convertible and a vintage Howdy Doody doll's red plaid jacket that matches the mannequin's Canali zip jacket (\$710). A pair of pinstripe Zanella jeans (\$380) await a man who wants to discreetly protest Casual Fridays. Red canvas Chuck Taylors pull the look together. A white linen Canali suit is given a GQ spin with a red-and-white striped Stefano Ricci tie and red Bruno Magli loafers.

The window's most intriguing item is a loafer from a friend whose father is in the Cricket Hall of Fame — a worn scrapbook opened to scores of intimate portraits of the sport's greatest athletes.

"All men are boys," said Gonzalez. "They want to have fun, they want to play. They like feeling large, like heroes."

NO MOTLEY FOOLS

Some men, though, feel large enough. Nearly seven feet tall, Neil Bernstein ducks into the shop. The slender 36-year-old president of a medical staffing company, Bernstein was banished years ago to Big & Tall bell. Feldenkreis recommended that he check out Pepi Bertini.

Eying a reversible cocoa-leather spring jersey Gonzalez made, Bernstein exclaims, "I love this! This is so cool."

"He needs an updated look," says his wife, Julie, a neurologist. "Just no more blue. I open his closet and it's all blue, blue, blue."

Gonzalez hops to it like a five-star waiter, delivering swatch books, hankies, ties and wine glasses of Evian to his new customers. The store CD player kicks on: Ira Gershwin's *Let's Call the Whole Thing Off*

("I say tomatoyto / you say, tomatto...")

Bernstein vetoes maroon shirts and poses in the mirror angling his limbs through a Canali dinner jacket.

"Canali, that's an Italian brand?" Gonzalez knows that left unattended, a deep-pocketed man could easily wind up looking like Elton John.

"They have to be led. If they say, 'I don't want blue,' OK, I leave out blue," he explained. "But I put the outfits together, I design the look. Otherwise, they'll look like" — he mouths the word like profanity in front of a child — "a fool."

Feldenkreis and his wife join their friends at the shop, nibbling on prosciutto and cheese.

Gonzalez swings back and forth like a trapeze artist, keeping their whims aloft.

"Do you have this in a navy?"

"I'm staying away from red."

"I don't care how fine it is, Zegna just never fits me right."

"Does Canali make socks?"

By the time the couples leave three hours later, Feldenkreis has bought a Fuertes painting for an amount greater than most college tuitions. And the Bernsteins are trying to think of extra wall space they might have for a Fuertes still life.

At almost 7 p.m., Gonzalez, who has been attending to customers without break for five hours, straightens his tie and begins to tuck away his swatch books. With an exhausted laugh, he waves a welcome to a man on the street who is staring, mesmerized, at the Schwinn.

Pepi Bertini, 315 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables; 305-461-3374.

THE LOOK

The Look returns next week. Send your South Florida fashion and style news to Shelley Accoca, The Herald, 1 Herald Plaza, Miami, FL 33132-1693 or sacocca@herald.com.