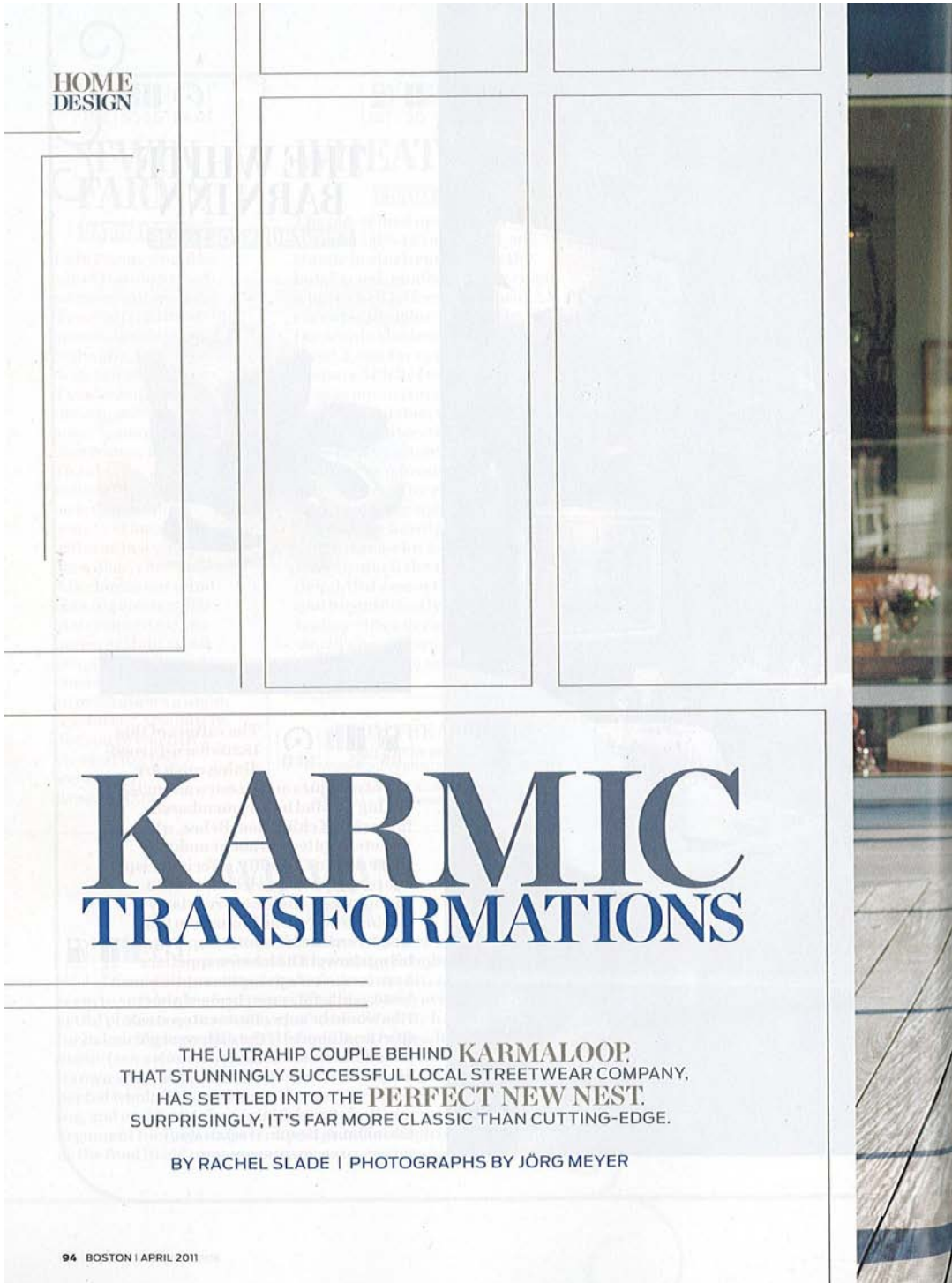


# Boston

A dark blue Boston Red Sox baseball cap with a red 'B' logo is positioned in front of the word 'Boston'.

April 2011



HOME  
DESIGN

## KARMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

THE ULTRAHIP COUPLE BEHIND KARMALoop,  
THAT STUNNINGLY SUCCESSFUL LOCAL STREETWEAR COMPANY,  
HAS SETTLED INTO THE PERFECT NEW NEST.  
SURPRISINGLY, IT'S FAR MORE CLASSIC THAN CUTTING-EDGE.

BY RACHEL SLADE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY JÖRG MEYER



Karmaloop cofounder  
Dina Selkoe takes in a  
view of the city.

# S

Sometimes, being outrageously cool is a work in progress. Just ask husband-and-wife team Dina and Greg Selkoe, who together founded Karmaloop, the ridiculously successful Boston-based clothing empire (projected sales this year of \$120 million) that outfits the hippest of hipsters across the planet. Yes, the planet.

Relaxing on the couch in their new condo on the 19th floor of the Back Bay's Clarendon building, Dina listens while Greg talks intensely and quickly—his light eyes flashing—about the business. “Karmaloop reps verge culture,” says Greg (who also just happens to be on the board of the Kanye West Foundation). *Verge* culture? “It’s cut-and-paste culture, with lots of influence from Asia,” he explains. Vergers “all live online, with many influences...everything from Indian bongo music to hip-hop to anime. They mix it up and make it their own.”

Mixing things up and making them their own is something the Selkoes know plenty about. Six months ago (and just six days before

their daughter, Beatrix, was born), Greg and Dina moved from their very contemporary Downtown Crossing loft to the Back Bay, and drastically shifted their living style from what Dina calls “sharp edges” modern to classical. But what about the schism between their company’s target audience and the conservative aesthetic that pervades their new place? Dina isn’t embarrassed to acknowledge that she and Greg are growing up. “This is a longtime home,” she says, glancing at Beatrix, who’s on the other side of the upholstered Ralph Lauren bed. “It feels a little more mature.” Meanwhile Greg, who has been listening in, starts talking again—about how he and Dina met, the evolution of Karmaloop, and how all of the above conspired to land the Selkoes precisely where they are right now.



The story begins in the '80s, when Dina and Greg were at Brookline High together. (They were friends who never dated, but he secretly categorized her as marriage material.) It wasn't until years later that Greg decided he wanted to spend more time with her, and invented a reason to: He showed up at her house one day and invited himself inside, claiming that he needed to call his mom. “Had I known him better, I would’ve known it was a ruse,” says Dina.



Above, from top, the bedroom, outfitted in Ralph Lauren designs; the informal dining area. Right, Dina and Beatrix in the nursery.





Greg takes a breather among some of Boston's tallest landmarks on the Selkoes' 19th-floor roof deck.



At the time, Greg was selling ads for a friend's electronic music magazine, which covered skateboarding, DJs, and hip-hop. He noticed that all the heroes of the genre were wearing similar gear. "It was very futuristic stuff, a lot like *The Jetsons*," he says. "All the celebrities who were wearing this stuff lived in L.A. or New York, and so that's where the [stores offering it] were. I figured you could really make a business selling it if you could get it out to the rest of the country."

Running on instinct, he convinced a friend to partner with him on Karmaloop, an online-only clothing retailer. Within a year that partner had begged off—but Dina was there to pick up the slack. "I was in law school and would mail packages on my way to class," she says. "It was actually kind of cute. We'd come home and get excited. There'd be, like, two orders and we'd think, Oh my God! How did they find us?"

Initially, a lot of brands didn't want to work with Karmaloop because the company was launched on the heels of the dotcom crash. "About 95 percent of them shut the door in my face," says Greg.

Still, they pressed on, using his parents' basement as a warehouse, turning everyone they knew into a potential mark, maxing out the credit cards, and cashing in retirement accounts. "The initial investment was \$45,000. My entire net worth went into the business," Greg says, recalling that things got pretty tense. "At one point, Dina and I together were \$2 million in debt." Not

surprisingly, all of the above made their first years of marriage anything but easy. There was even talk of hocking Dina's engagement ring.

But the sales started coming—by 2006, the Selkoes had broken even. And they kept coming: Unique monthly visits to Karmaloop's website soared to 4 million, and KarmaloopTV became the 18th most popular channel on YouTube, with 270 million views to date. That success led to negotiations with a number of cable operators for a Karmaloop channel. The couple had arrived, no question. Now it was time to find the perfect place to come home to.

They decided to look for digs that would be ideal for raising kids. But instead of staying funky, they wanted to go traditional. After looking first at several townhouses on Beacon Hill, Greg was immediately sold when he laid eyes on the Clarendon building. "I know you want to be in Beacon Hill," he told Dina by cell phone from the sales office of the high-rise, "but you gotta take a look at this building." She reluctantly indulged him—then fell in love with the views and the incredible roof deck, which overlooks the Hancock, Trinity Church, and essentially all of Cambridge.

They bought two units before the building was finished, and Dina then set about designing the interior layout on her own. She created a huge open kitchen/living/dining area and detailed it with thick moldings and walnut and oak flooring.

The two rooms that have received the most

attention so far are the nursery, complete with Beatrix Potter wallpaper, and the master closet—which started out as a hallway of doors that Dina reconfigured into a massive room with enough space for the hundreds of Karmaloop shoes, bags, and jackets the couple has collected over the years.

Dina's design for the master bedroom seemed great in theory, but now she thinks it's a bit overscaled. "It looks like you should be doing ballet in here," she says. So to finish the job, she's planning to bring in New York interior designer Alexa Hampton, the queen of traditional Manhattanite upscale living.

No matter how many twists and turns through the wilds of cosmopolitan coolness their lives have taken, however, one option they've never considered is moving elsewhere—even though Greg has found it hard to convince some of the employees he brings from L.A. and New York to stay in Boston. His answer to the problem is every bit as forward-thinking as you'd expect: He's creating a nonprofit dedicated to keeping the city's innovators right here. **E**

**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

**Inside the Karmaloop empire**  
DECEMBER 2007  
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**Meet Ben and Tonya Mezrich**  
OCTOBER 2010  
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