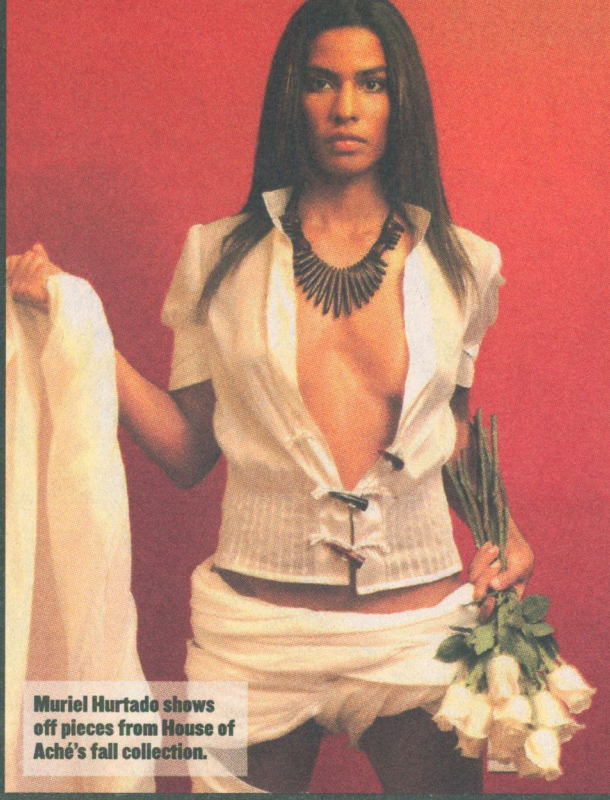
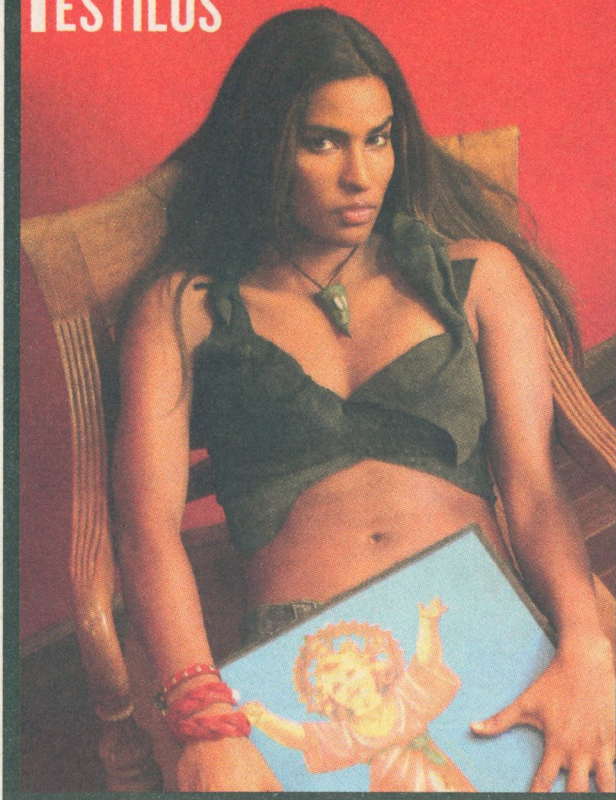


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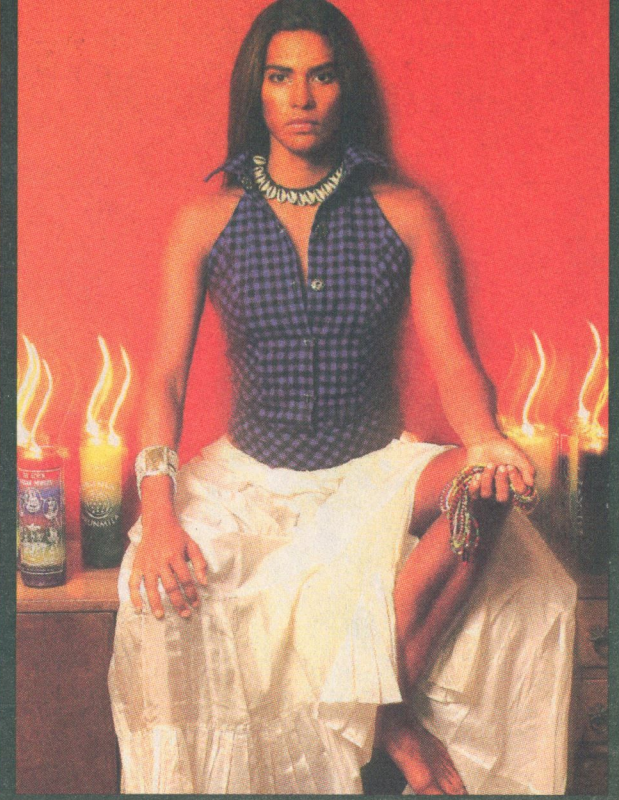
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VIVA NEW YORK



Muriel Hurtado shows off pieces from House of Aché's fall collection.



JORGE SARMIENTO

BY DENNIS SEBAYAN

FELIPE AVALOS BELIEVES THAT A WOMAN'S FASHION choice comes down to a feeling.

"It's not about making women look beautiful. We want to make a woman *feel* beautiful," said Avalos, who is working with his girlfriend, Lena Viddo, on their soon-to-be-released House of Aché clothing line.

House of Aché was inspired by the designers' *santería*-steeped upbringing and aims to give women comfortable, sexy clothes that also make a cultural statement.

Avalos' father was a *santero*, and Lena participated when her family gave "floral offerings to the gods." The word *aché* refers to the energy and power of the Orishas, the *santería* gods.

The apple didn't fall very far from the tree for Avalos, 43, who grew up surrounded also by clothes. "My father was a clothing manufacturer. My mother had boutiques. I went to college to become a lawyer, but I ended up in the clothing business."

With 15 years experience—including a stint running a private-label manufacturing company—a ready-to-wear line is a big step for Avalos.

"When I set out to do this lifestyle line for Latinos, when I envisaged this Latina customer, I kept thinking about Lena," Avalos said of his love and muse.

Viddo, 39, has worked as a painter, artist and nightlife promoter specializing in fashion events for 15 years. She

LABOR OF LOVE

House of Aché clothing line stretches all the way to Cuba



Felipe Avalos and Lena Viddo.

is well aware of Latinos' growing role in the arts, fashion and entertainment worlds. Yet she wants to offer the Latino sensibility to all women, not just Latinas.

The House of Aché sportswear line, which debuts this fall, will offer woven shirts, jackets, sweaters and t-shirts embossed with Afro-Caribbean images such as amulets and gems with bright, vibrant colors.

"I think people gravitate towards Latinos for style," said Viddo, who grew up in Washington, D.C., and now lives in SoHo.

"There are Latinos, then there are those who wish they were," added Avalos.

The collection, with items ranging from \$75-\$175, comes with a fitting tagline: "Blessed be the wearer."

The couple agrees that House of Aché represents everything they stand for. "This is what Lena and I do 24 hours a day," Avalos said. "We want a line that, when someone puts it on, they are going to wrap themselves in a labor of our love."

As they put the finishing touches on the line, which at the close of this edition was being readied for a preview show, House of Aché received the *bendición* from their own sanctioned *santeros*.

"Blessed be the wearer," said Avalos. "We want wearers to be blessed in what they're wearing." **vny**