



Photos courtesy Tea Collection

**Bright graphics** invite customers into Tea Collection's first brick-and-mortar at Santana Row in San Jose. The shop aims to build brand awareness of the collection, which sells children's clothing.

FIRST LOOK

# TEA BRINGS ITS CHILDREN'S APPAREL TO SAN JOSE

By Nerissa Pacio Itchon

Bucking the massive store-closure trend and declarations that retail is dead, San Francisco's Tea Collection has opened its first brick-and-mortar boutique in San Jose's tony Santana Row — 16 years after the launch of the travel-inspired children's wear brand.

"The timing was right, the space was right, everything kind of lined up and we're finally ready," says Emily Meyer, chief creative officer who started Tea out of her Palo Alto apartment with co-founder Leigh Rawdon in 2002. "We have enough experience and wisdom under our belts to be confident in some ways and ready to grow and learn in other ways."

The 650-square-foot space, formerly occupied by Maker's Market, will serve as a retail lab as opposed to an official flagship, says Ansley McMillan, director of business development. Its main purpose will be building brand awareness.

"We'll be doing a lot of testing and learning here," McMillan says on the store's recent opening day. "We're excited to get feedback from our customers. We don't have it all ironed out. I've told all the sales associates and the manager: This will not be like working for Gap!"

Known for quality textiles and bold, modern graphics, Tea Collection began in wholesale, focused on layette, and has since grown into a full-fledged children's wear business with 70 full-time employees at its Potrero Hill headquarters.

The newborn, toddler, boys, girls and tweens clothing designs are available in sizes 0 to 16. Inspired by cultures from around the world, the apparel is sold in 350 boutiques nationwide, 45 Nordstrom department stores and Tea's own catalog and web shop.

With Tea's roots in Silicon Valley, the Santana Row loca-



Tea Collection

**Tea Collection co-founders**

Emily Meyer (left) and Leigh Rawdon.

**Tea Collection:** 378 Santana Row, Suite 1110, San Jose. [www.teacollection.com](http://www.teacollection.com).

tion was ideal, says McMillan, because of the high-traffic mix of tourists and locals and the leisurely, nontraditional mall atmosphere.

"We wanted to find a place where people could relax, have a bite to eat, mosey around, find new brands, explore and pop in," McMillan says.

Inside the store, the brand captures its characteristically playful and modern point of view with its decor. Framed mantras "Let's explore the world outside our door" and "United we run, jump and stand" bedeck white walls. A 3-D wooden world map that Meyer sourced on Etsy pops against a chartreuse backdrop, and simple metal and plywood fixtures showcase the clothing's bold and colorful prints.

"We wanted the space to have an openness and to feel warm," says Meyer. "What I really love is the eclectic mash-up of the old world facade in one of the colors of our signature color palette, and modern details like the back wall with languages expressing different

greetings from around the world."

In stock for the opening are collaborations with Native American artists for the brand's fall campaign exploring ethnic communities within the United States.

Mother-daughter-grandmother collective J Growing Thunder translated intricate beadwork into graphic prints on T-shirts, polos and dresses. Painter and sculptor Jeffery Gibson reinterpreted his vibrant geometric patterns on layered dresses and tunics. Pieces in the collection range from \$29.50 to \$35.50.

The store carries an edited selection of size 0 to 8 clothing, but does not offer the tween collections; however, anything on the e-commerce site can be ordered in store with free shipping, Meyer says.

Those on the hunt for interesting gifts will find a curated selection of books, Mary Meyer plush toys and stylish third-party accessories, such as the classic Sophie La Giraffe teether and Loulou Lollipop muslin blankets and eco-friendly pacifier clips.

Even amid tech-centric Santana Row, where Tesla, Amazon Books and Bonobos have turned traditional retail on its head, Tea plans to take a decidedly offline approach, offering in-store events such as an old-fashioned lemonade stand to benefit the Global Fund for Children, coloring stations for kids and complimentary gift wrapping.

"We will always have our highly engaged social-media community on Facebook, Instagram and on our website," says Meyer. "But the refreshing part is getting back to having eye contact, shaking hands, giving out hugs and celebrating in person together."

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