



Commune's Work at  
Hollywood Trading Company...



... and at Ammo.

# Designing a Commune

By Rose Apodaca

**LOS ANGELES** — When Claudia Poccia, senior vice president and general manager of Stila, looked to boost the beauty brand's overall image, she ventured outside parent company Estée Lauder. But she had a tall order: a single agency that could do printed materials, product packaging and in-store interiors while maintaining a delicate balance between Stila's past and future.

"The brand is so iconically visual," Poccia noted. "We had to ensure we had the right team that understood the brand's natural evolution while staying true to its DNA, to our core audience."

Enter Commune. The design collective is led by four fashion and arts veterans, each with a fat Rolodex of equally creative friends — artisans, art directors, publicists, event planners — keen on moonlighting on new opportunities.

California-bred siblings Pam and Ramin Shamshiri have provided production design and project management, respectively, for clients as disparate as Nike, Lexus, Tommy Hilfiger, Philip Morris Co., Spike Jonze, Kohl's and the Bronx Zoo. As an interior designer, Pam Shamshiri has worked with architects Frank Gehry and Ray and Finn Kappe.

Steven Johanknecht's 17-year-long résumé includes stints at Banana Republic, Donna Karan and Barneys New York as head of retail design, and directing interior projects for Studio Sofield, Peter Marino and Andréé Putman. He's also consulted for Gucci, Jil Stuart, Bergdorf Goodman and Jeffrey, among others.

His friend and Commune co-worker, Roman Alonso, is another New York expat, whom Johanknecht has known since their days at

Barneys. After years as director of publicity for the retailer, then for Isaac Mizrahi, Alonso entered the art book arena as co-publisher and co-editor of Greybull Publishing.

Johanknecht and Alonso were there when Stila launched at Barneys, and that bode in their favor, admitted Poccia. "What I loved most is they didn't come in saying we're going to change everything. They showed a respect for the brand and a spirit to really collaborate. Yes, we're part of a large company. But we're a small brand."

The name, Alonso noted, "is not about hippies. It's about a commune in the Bauhaus sense, a collective of like-minded, creative people that will only grow." With a nod and a wink, the creative ensemble brandishes black T-shirts emblazoned with the word "communists," provocatively tweaking the widely held notion of the word.

The chance to collaborate on projects both behemoth and boutique is what brings them together. For the cult denim shop Hollywood Trading Company, Commune blended the Wild West with high-tech. For the restaurant and bar Ammo, it managed to retain the vibe so loved by the likes of Maggie Gyllenhaal and local film editors when it was overhauled.

So impressed with the new look of his neighborhood haunt, Ammo, Quiksilver vice president of creative Steve Jones recently invited Commune to reimagine the trade show presence of the surf giant's junior power brand, Roxy.

And for something totally different, Commune is designing the furnishings for a major luxe residential-hotel project in Los Angeles and Palm Springs.