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that one day T-shirts would rule the fashion landscape. Now, his vision is becoming a distinct reality. "It's always been my philosophy that T-shirts should be in the centerpiece of fashion...and, if you look at the role Ts have taken in fashion as of late, they are certainly getting closer," he says. "The T-shirt is the most basic wardrobe staple—it's versatile, sexy and timeless, making it the easiest item to wear from day to night."

In what Alterman calls "premium basics," Alternative Apparel Ts combine the brand's signature softness, innovative washes and premium fabrics—a mixture of cotton, polyester and rayon—to provide an ideal fit for any occasion. "Our Ts can be worn everywhere—from the gym to the office, New York runways to Hollywood premieres," he says. One of the most popular styles is the "burn-out," which looks and feels like vintage and fits like a glove. But how, in a saturated market, does Alternative continue to grow in the ever-changing face of fashion? "It's about staying fresh and pushing the envelope," Alterman says.

Consider one recent initiative: Alterman formed a partnership with Bill Hallman, and now the company's first flagship store operates in Virginia-Highland, adjacent to Hallman's boutique. The new store carries Alternative's entire collection, consisting of more than 125 colors and styles for women and men.

Another Atlanta-based company that's making strides in the T-shirt industry, and which also recently found a home in Bill Hallman's repertoire, is Karma. Founded by Eduard Davis and Antoinette King, the 1-year-old collection for women already has made a name for itself on a national scale, finding the largest percentage of its marketplace

in Los Angeles and Atlanta. "Fashion-wise, Atlanta's come a long way...I get a lot of compliments just being from here," Davis says. "That's why we decided to base [Karma's] operations here."

But what makes Karma, which retails for more than \$100 per shirt, such a hot commodity? Aside from its signature inside-out seams, burned-out and rust-treated washes, and tongue-in-cheek graphics, "We have the perfect couture T-shirt, and you know it by the touch and

the feel...society is more relaxed, hip and dressed-down, so people want nicer quality T-shirts," Davis says. In fact, he likens the popularity of T-shirts to that of premium denim.

"There's room for hundreds of labels.

I see denim and T-shirts, for the next seven years, really flourishing," he says.

Like denim, it seems that for a T-shirt company to distinguish itself among many takes something special. For Josh Podoll, it's his 3-year-old organic cotton and silkscreen collection for women and men that created a niche for itself. "Customers have enjoyed that my ideas are hand-drawn, and therefore more personal than some graphics,"

Podoll says. And being based in Los Angeles, Podoll's

seen firsthand an increase in the T-shirt's demand. "Californians have been wearing T-shirts year-round and for all occasions for a while now," he says. "The rest of the country seems to be catching on to the idea they can be elevated with the addition of a blazer or other accessories."

Recounting the T's existence in popular culture, it seems Hollywood's prowess for trendsetting has played a dominant role in what the rest of the country is wearing. And, in our digital society, celebrity presence is even more omnipotent now than it was in the '50s. They start the trends, and in turn, create a wave of universal demand.

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adam+eve; Intermix, Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue

Alternative Apparel; alternativeapparel.com

American Apparel; americanapparel.net

James Perse; eluxury.com

Gap; Gap and gap.com

Karma; P Valentine, French Kiss, Mitzi & Romano T., Taste, Atlanta Beach and Bill Hallman

Josh Podoll; revolveclothing.com

High-profile stars like Brad Pitt, Demi Moore, Jessica and Ashlee Simpson, Ashton Kutcher, Jessica Alba, Lindsay Lohan, Jake Gyllenhaal, Naomi Watts, Kim Basinger, and Nick Lachey have all been spotted in their Ts from Alternative Apparel, Karma, James Perse, Rebel Yell, Ed Hardy, Grail and more. Even Hanes recently jumped on the star bandwagon. In an effort to elevate their stock, they've brought on icons like Kevin Bacon and Marisa Tomei to promote their basics. Clearly, cotton seems to be the fabric of choice.

But even with Hollywood setting the style curve, there's one figure that seems to have more influence on public opinion than most: Oprah Winfrey. The queen of all media has established herself as a go-to gal for the latest and greatest products, and this time she's paying special attention to designer Adam Lippes. Why? His ultra-soft basic Ts have Winfrey singing his praises, and for good reason. "Adam+eve was born from my quest for this perfect T-shirt," Lippes says. "To create a line of wearable yet luxurious cotton basics, a way to fuse fashion with the perfect white T." What's Winfrey's favorite? The white, long-sleeve V-neck.

Lippes' appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* only further increased the demand for his basic and luxurious Ts, which are made of pima cotton and 100-percent Japanese silk, respectively. Adam+eve is now available in more than 125 stores in eight countries, and locally at Intermix, Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.

Since becoming socially acceptable in 1955, the T-shirt's grown to become one of the most significant fashions of all time—sharing the stage with Parisian couture, filling celebrity wardrobes, and closing the gap between trend-setting and following Americans. From the success of adam+eve to the overwhelming popularity of specialized Ts, the great American staple has come a long way since James Dean's day. And while decades pass and styles shift, one thing remains: Versatility coupled with visibility brings the evolution of the T-shirt full circle. —KIMBERLY DAVIS