



exacting stages. "We want our customer to look back two or three years down the road and say, 'My gosh, this piece is still beautiful,'" says Kaufman.

Another hallmark of their design is its body-skimming verve and scissor-sharp cut. So meticulous are the pair about the female form that they have been known to consult *Gray's Anatomy*, the medical text, in their midtown Manhattan atelier. There is a contradiction inherent in their clothing, and not merely because each piece is the brainchild of two people. For despite their common vision, Kaufman, 39, and Franco, 38, are very different beings. Kaufman mostly dresses head to toe in black, while Franco opts for a crisp white shirt and distressed jeans. Kaufman is loquacious. Franco is the man of few words.

"That is the yin and the yang," he says, simply. It is this dynamic that creates the incredible tension obvious in their clothes. A skirt can be at once supersexy and conservative. Materials are often raw, yet the construction of each garment is rigorously refined, explicitly aware of sensuality and shape, with a few hand-cut steel sequins thrown in for good measure. Old-fashioned tailoring sensibilities are in evidence, but there is also a high-tech sophistication, seen, for example, in the digitally created tie-dye print of a resort-collection skirt.

For 15 years, Kaufman (right) and Franco toiled at Emanuel and Anne Klein, perfecting their brand of opulent sportswear. KaufmanFranco, their new label, is so seamless, it doesn't even need a space between their names. Left: Safari jacket and capri pants.

For many years, the twosome were the designers behind the legends of other labels, including the Emanuel Ungaro offshoot Emanuel for six years and Anne Klein for another five. As impressive as their credentials are, it is not a designer's résumé that determines whether customers will be besotted with the range. It is the clothing itself. Considering the exquisite detail of a gown assembled from 75 separate pieces or a jacket lined with Swarovski crystals, there is no question that it will be love at first sight. ●

DOUBLE Take

Designing duo Ken Kaufman and Isaac Franco made major labels sing. Now they're doing it for themselves

By Hannah Claire Litman

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, WHILE HE WAS HATCHING A COLLECTION for Pringle of Scotland, New York designer Ken Kaufman was looking for an assistant. In walked Isaac Franco, fresh from the Parsons School of Design, with a spiffy portfolio and unflappable disposition. Kaufman was so impressed that he hired him on the spot. "From that time, we have worked together," says Franco. Up until recently, though, it was always for other people.

Earlier this year, the pair unveiled their eponymous line, KaufmanFranco, a traffic-stopping new addition to Seventh Avenue. Luxury is the thread that connects each piece in their collection, while longevity is the objective. This is achieved by invoking extravagant fabrics — lace, chiffon, feathers and crystals — and ensuring each prototype evolves through several



TIZIANO MAGGI (FASHION)