

Lafayette 148 Study Tour

July 18th, 2022
Brooklyn Navy Yard
New York, NY

Participants

King Chong, Executive Director of Corporate Relations, Lafayette 148

Kent Daniel, Jean-Marie Eveillard/First Eagle Investment Management Professor of Business, Finance, Columbia Business School (CBS)

Alexandria Darin, Executive MBA Global Candidate, CBS

Nelson Fraiman, Professor of Professional Practice, Decision, Risk, and Operations, CBS; Faculty Director, W. Edwards Deming Center, CBS

Molly Muench, Associate Director, W. Edwards Deming Center, CBS

Deirdre Quinn, Co-founder and CEO, Lafayette 148; Advisory Board Member, W. Edwards Deming Center, CBS

Angela Quintero, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Decision, Risk, and Operations, CBS; Managing Director, W. Edwards Deming Center, CBS

Harry Rice, Account Executive, Lindenmeyr Central

Cindy Salazar, Adjunct Professor, Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)

Zina Sockwell, Associate Director, Jerome A. Chazen Institute, CBS

Laurel Thompson, Executive Assistant to CEO, Lafayette 148

Chris Ventry, Vice President, Retail & Consumer Packaged Goods, SSA & Company

Amir Ziv, Professor of Professional Practice, Accounting, CBS

Pictured left to right: Alexandria Darin, Zina Sockwell, Laurel Thompson, Nelson Fraiman, Amir Ziv, Deirdre Quinn, Kent Daniel, Cindy Salazar, Molly Muench, Angela Quintero, Harry Rice, and Chris Ventry

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**Not pictured: King Chong*





Objectives

On July 18th, 2022, faculty, staff, and current and former students from the Columbia Business School (CBS) visited Lafayette 148's vertical operation at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York City. Organized by the W. Edwards Deming Center and facilitated by the Lafayette 148 team, the visit was hosted by the fashion label's co-founder and CEO, Deirdre Quinn – the newest addition to the Deming Center's advisory board – and gave insight into the fashion label's manufacturing and production methods.

With the objective of bridging theory and practice, the visit provided an inside look at Lafayette 148's operations around design, pattern-making, sewing, photoshoots, showroom, sales, marketing, store design and store planning, as well as insights into its over 40 retail stores located around the world and 250,000 square-foot manufacturing facility in Shantou, China. Additionally, Quinn and her team gave valuable input as to how the company has re-imagined its business model post-COVID and explained the vision behind its branding strategy to capture the designer market.

About

Named after the SoHo street address where it was founded in 1996, Lafayette 148 now occupies 95,000 square feet of the Brooklyn Navy Yard – a modern industrial park that was historically a ship-building and artillery storage facility. This “design-driven” company is a rarity in the fashion industry with its vertical system of operations from the first sketch to the final garment. The label produces four collections

a year from its Brooklyn headquarters and Shantou manufacturing facility – founded in 2002 – with only its fabrics and accessories being outsourced from Italy, California, and New York. Lafayette 148 offers luxury clothing to women with a catalog of about 2,600 SKUs available in 58 sizes (including petite, 00-24, and Asia fit), which are available online, in department stores, and in around 30 retail and 10 outlet stores across the United States, Canada, and China.



Study Tour

The visit to Lafayette 148 gave Columbia faculty, staff, and students an inside look at the headquarters' various areas of production, from the design table, sample rack, photography studio, on-site call center, creative office, and more. Currently working on its 2023 Pre-Fall line to be launched in December of 2022, the company has moved to a hybrid working model due to COVID-19. With nearly 2/3 of staff working remotely at any given time, the team is still able to produce and upload about 25 styles of clothing to the website per day.

Moving to Deirdre Quinn's office, the group was able to speak personally with the CEO about her journey to success in building Lafayette 148. "I created a company that I would want to work in myself," said Quinn of the work culture, which employees described as one that promotes kindness, integrity, and intelligence. "I walk around a lot without

an agenda," continued the CEO, who emphasized the importance of listening and learning on all sides.

According to Quinn, in order to have a successful company, you must prioritize the product, the people, and the rent, which ultimately spurred her move from SoHo to Brooklyn, where she was able to cut costs down from \$90 to \$30 per square foot. Similarly, the CEO noted the importance of building a strong and focused brand, mentioning that abstaining from the men's clothing market, for example, was an intentional choice and strategic business move.

The company's manufacturing facility – established by late Lafayette 148 co-founder Shun Yen Siu in his hometown of Shantou – is also a critical aspect of its strategy. Quinn mentioned that even the construction of the building was customized to suit the company's specific needs, noting that the building design allowed the factory floors to have no

interior columns, which makes for easier organization of the manufacturing space. With 1,200 employees in China and a 350-student school for children of migrant workers, Lafayette 148 has become an integral part of the local community in Shantou.

With regards to the company's response to COVID-19, the CEO admitted that the fashion label did not go unaffected, particularly across wholesale channels. Orders containing approximately 77,000 articles of clothing were canceled at the height of the pandemic, forcing them to adapt their business model by shifting the mix of wholesale and retail sales. Amidst the operational, financial, and workplace safety crises, they are proud to have pivoted their production as an emergency response to the pandemic in 2020, providing 10,000 medical gowns to New York City hospitals. Today, the company is well on the road to recovery, with direct-to-consumer channels now comprising 65% of sales as they expand

their personal stylist network, continue to grow e-commerce, and plan to open several new stores later this year.

When asked about her advice for young women seeking to be executives, Quinn responded with three tips: (1) time-management classes, (2) experience working for various CEOs, and (3) experience working in the industry that they would like to be in.

Sew station at Lafayette 148's
Brooklyn Navy Yard headquarters

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Sample rack of clothes in Lafayette 148's headquarters at the Brooklyn Navy Yard

Material samples laid out while
the design team works

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CBS students and staff speak with Deirdre Quinn, CEO of Lafayette 148, in her office

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Feedback

“It was inspiring to see Deirdre’s vision for quality come to life in a space where the operations at large align with aesthetic detail. We are incredibly happy to have her as part of the Deming Center’s cohort of industry leaders.”

Nelson Fraiman, Professor of Professional Practice and Faculty Director of the Deming Center, Columbia Business School (CBS)

“It is groundbreaking that a fashion company has its own production facility, and I don’t know many others that do.”

Alexandria Darin, Executive MBA Global Candidate, CBS

“It was truly inspiring to listen to Deirdre’s story of how she was able to build a global fashion brand and how agile and flexible her team was in responding to COVID-19’s impact on the industry. Taking a tour of the operations at the Brooklyn Navy Yard was a truly unforgettable experience.”

Cindy Salazar, Adjunct Professor, Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)

