



The boutique's black-and-yellow wall art is by Chicago artist lefty OUT there.

# I WANT IT ALL

VMR, Chicago's luxury women's boutique on Oak Street, expands its footprint—and its highly edited mix of designer clothing and accessories.

*By Hilary Boyajian / Photography by Greg Chmiel and Y.O! Photography*

On any given day at VMR's new store on Oak Street, you're likely to find owner Tina Kourasis and Creative Director Mark Gill playing dress-up with the merchandise. Today, the fashion-forward friends are examining a black, fringe-trimmed Balmain dress and an Isabel Marant double-breasted metallic blazer, a potential pairing for a longtime client. And since VMR moved its digs in April from a seventh-floor space at 34 E. Oak St. to its current street-level home at 49 E. Oak St., tucked away between Escada and Lalique, there's a lot more to play with.

At more than 2,000 square feet, and with a custom new design courtesy of Chicago interior designer Marshall Erb, the atmosphere is as fashionable as the clothes—ranging from denim and streetwear to luxe designer womenswear and accessories—hanging from powder-coated black racks by black velvet hangers from Italy. “We knew that this space had to convey how our brand has progressed over the last five years, from minimalist to something more directional,” says Kourasis. “We have many designers that are described as ‘disruptive,’ and we wanted the new space to express that point of view.” For those of us who don't sit front row at Fashion Week, think labels like Off-White c/o Virgil Abloh, Y/Project and Yeezy.

It's not an entirely a brand-new direction for VMR, which has always had a reputation for mixing envelope-pushing designers like Unravel Project and Dsquared2 in with labels that reflect a softer sensibility like Ellery, N21, Rachel Zoe and Zimmermann. Since 2013, VMR had styled clients by appointment only from a private showroom. But when Kourasis and Gill opened a pop-up shop at the Waldorf Astoria last year, the street-level retail experience instigated the move to a more visible Gold Coast storefront with regular hours, open to all. It took a full year to find the perfect location—just a half-block east of the old showroom in the former Colletti Gallery space. The gallery's black-and-white checkered marble floor is the only pre-existing feature that remains, and was the inspiration for the boutique's dramatic artwork by Chicago street artist Lefty Out There (aka Franco Campanella), who was commissioned to tag the space with his signature amorphic blobs and abstract squiggles in black, white and canary yellow.

Graphic is a good way to describe some of VMR's edgiest looks. In the front room, statement pieces from Fendi and Antonio Berardi get top billing. (And check out the Lefty Out There x RtA custom leather jackets designed exclusively for VMR, each one hand-painted

Creative Director Mark Gill in VMR's accessories salon



Tina Kourasis, owner of VMR on Oak Street



A fall 2018 look by Nili Lotan



A fall 2018 look by Isabel Marant



A prefall 2018 look by Off-White c/o Virgil Abloh



with his artwork.) There's also a stunning shoes and accessories salon boasting sporty, pointed-toe booties by Yeezy and buttery leather bags by Balmain, not to mention a private fitting area for one-on-one styling and appointments with VMR's expert tailor. You see, Kourasis and Gill know a thing or two about retail, and that layout plays an important role. Before VMR, Gill sharpened his sartorial skills in New York as a personal stylist and as a record-breaking salesperson at Jil Sander.

"We both felt a void in Chicago for *real* clothes—multifunctional pieces you can wear over and over again," says Kourasis of VMR's early days. "It's easy to find a dress for a black-tie event, but what about day-to-day? The department stores have so much inventory that it becomes visually overwhelming. We wanted to use Mark's special eye to simplify the whole process, and I wanted to select the designers based on personal experience and research, research, research." These days, the duo travels to Paris six times a year, sitting front and center at Fashion Week, surveying the street style scene and visiting showrooms. In June, they had 18 appointments in three days in preparation for fall, including meetings with Parisian label Giamba and Philosophy di Lorenzo Serafini out of Italy, two labels they've recently picked up. New York is on the pair's schedule twice a year, too, for denim brands like Frame and Current/Elliott, and Gill's favorite designer, Tomas Maier.

And because Kourasis knows her clients like to run around town in more than Lululemon, an edgy athleisure collection from Australian brand P.E. Nation has been added to VMR's offerings as well for customers looking for that street-meets-sportswear vibe. "I feel like we are ahead of the game in terms of understanding how people want to dress right now," says Kourasis confidently, hanging a black fluted-sleeve blouse by Berardi. "There are countless cases where we have introduced designers two years before they land at Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue or Nordstrom." With a growing e-commerce presence on Farfetch, the London-based luxury fashion source, and more hush-hush designer collaborations in the works, she'll get no argument here.

"We are in the business of selling clothes. We're not going to sell you an art project or the must-have trend of the moment," adds Kourasis, unfolding a matte black shopping bag punched-up with VMR's new electric-yellow logo and 'I Want It All' brazenly printed on the inside. "We will help you identify your aesthetic and build your wardrobe with the pieces we hand-select in Paris. But we're not stuffy. VMR is fun, fresh and stress-free. Our clients, who become our friends, make themselves at home." 

VMR, 49 E. Oak St., 312.330.3778, vmrchicago.com