

# Job protection

■ Necessity is the mother of invention for an Omaha designer who entertains, but not just in any old thing.

By CHRIS CHRISTEN

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Mary Anne Vaccaro is living in an invisible world these days.

She's making party aprons from clear vinyl.

Flashback to Thanksgiving 2006. Vaccaro was hosting a dinner party and putting the final touches on her table when her guests started to arrive. On her way to the door, she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror.

"I have spent my life making beautiful things with beautiful fabrics and embellishments," the couture designer said from her Omaha studio. "So how does it happen that I look in the mirror and see that I look horrible?"

Her hostess apron was stained and wrinkled. Worse yet, it clashed with her outfit.

At 11 p.m., after everyone had gone home, Vaccaro went into her workroom. Her eyes landed on a piece of clear vinyl, which she had been experimenting with for placemats. She held the vinyl up to her body and an idea clicked. What if she made a clear apron from it? She grabbed her scissors and cut out a pattern. She added ribbon ties, a pocket and embellishments. Cute and functional, she thought.

January 2007, Vaccaro attended a trade show in Atlanta at the invitation of two designer friends from Texas. She was intent on marketing a line of designer placemats—until she showed her friends the apron one night over cocktails. "They said, 'Give up the placemats and go with the aprons.'"

Her life has been a whirlwind since. "Sit down! Jump up! I have turned into this frantic woman" trying to establish a brand, make a quality product in large quantities, and market it nationwide. "I can't even sign my name without stopping to do something."

The pace, she says, "is like doing three Ak-Sar-Ben Balls at once."

For several months, Vaccaro worked almost secretly in her studio. "I have had so many ventures in my life . . . I didn't want to say anything about the apron project."

As she got serious about making the aprons, "Everything became clear in my life. I even got rimless glasses." And business cards printed on clear plastic.

She combed the world, via the Internet, to find the perfect materials: clear, supple vinyl; glue that dries clear; thread that looks invisible on vinyl.

"I found this guy in Taiwan at 2 a.m. who would make neck fasteners for me. But I had to order 6,000 pieces—and that was just the test lot," Vaccaro recalls.



Vaccaro . . . creator of the Invisible Apron.

## Where to find it

The Invisible Apron is available at Gadgeteer and The Afternoon in Omaha and Confluence in Bellevue. Or order online at [www.invisibleapron.com](http://www.invisibleapron.com). Classic apron styles are \$39.95; dressier versions dotted with Swarovski crystals are \$49.95 and \$119.95.

"Thank goodness they worked." She fashioned a ring from one of the fasteners. "It's my commitment ring."

Hundreds of other details go into establishing a venture of this sort: patents and trademarks; storage for items that must be ordered in bulk; and the biggest eye-opener, shipping fees, which can more than double the cost of an order.

"There's all of this stuff that I never considered," Vaccaro says. "And everything has to be prepaid."

Friends Kelly Diekmann, a graphic designer, and Jim Scholtz, a photographer, helped create a Web site and other marketing materials.

Photographing clear aprons for brochures and displays proved to be a "nightmare," Vaccaro recalls. It's tough, she says, to make the invisible visible in front of a camera.

"My past came to the present," says Vaccaro, who has worked as a fashion copy writer, layout artist and designer.

The result: A cleverly conceived product that looks great with anything you wear and wipes clean with a damp cloth.

"It's about efficiency in the minute-mentality world," Vaccaro says. Early sales have been encouraging.

"I've sold to boutiques and catalogs across the country. When it comes to my apron, it's what you don't see that you get."



Detective Hilgert and Mary Anne Vaccaro inspect Treesje handbag, \$635; Lodi's patent wallet, \$169, both from Von Maur; Springstreet lipstick, \$22. Vaccaro, an expert on style, wears an original Invisible Apron (See story, Page 15). Hilgert's plaid sportcoat, \$995, by Etro Milano at Rossi Clothiers. Suzette awaits the arrival of her counsel in a Marc by Marc Jacobs print dress, \$298, with coordinating jacket, \$498 (featured on the cover), from Von Maur. Gold cuff bracelet, \$18, and amber ring, \$10, from Nebraska Clothing Company. Also shown: Ella Moss strapless dress, \$225, from Togs; Ororo silver patent peep-toe pumps, \$300, and other shoes from Deniz at Rockbrook Village.