

## Living the Dream in Clear Lake

Rockets legend Olajuwon sets up fashion headquarters in Clear Lake mansion

By **Joy Sewing** Updated 7:53 am, Monday, February 18, 2013

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Former Houston Rockets center and future Hall of Famer Hakeem Olajuwon poses for a portrait Friday, April 11, 2008, in Houston. ( Brett Coomer / Chronicle )

**Hakeem Olajuwon** could have easily launched his luxury clothing and accessories line in the Galleria and fit right in with the area's upscale retail offerings.

The basketball legend had a different dream for his DR34M collection.

Olajuwon has set up his fashion headquarters and a showroom at the historic **Jim West Mansion** in Clear Lake. The 70,000-square-foot estate on his 43-acre property is situated with a front-door view of the lake and a backyard glimpse of **Johnson Space Center**.

"It would not make the same impact (at the Galleria)," Olajuwon said. "The mansion is a dream for any designer or brand to have this address to house their collections. I feel so blessed to have this opportunity to showcase my brand at an Italian renaissance mansion."

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Olajuwon and Ibrahim Arch, his company's vice president, have meticulously transformed the once deteriorating property into a majestic palace with rich interiors and finishings that complement the brand's wide assortment of men's sportswear, custom suiting and leather goods for both men and women.

They took great care to maintain the integrity of the mansion while giving it a modern face lift. The great room is likely one of the most impressive entry ways of any luxury store from **Louis Vuitton** to Hermès. Visitors step up into a palatial space flanked by large, dark columns and mahogany wood floors that reflect natural light from front hallway windows. Many of the room's accessories, from the wide, spiraling chandelier to the ceiling rafters, are original pieces that were part of décor when West resided here.

At every turn, the **NBA** legend's own style is apparent from Middle Eastern furnishing accents to his comfy yellow floral chair, custom made for him by former mayor **Bob Lanier**.

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Leather goods, from the \$5,000 Italian "Emanuela" woven patent-leather bag to Olajuwon's supple leather sneakers, are displayed beautifully with perfect lighting. He commissioned an artist to add gold-leaf accents throughout the mansion. They're one of many elegant touches.

The renovation of the mansion took a year and half, with the help of local companies including **DSK Construction**, Fixtures International, **Texas Facility Service Systems**, Betty Draperies, **Sparkle Sign Co.**, artists **James Perez** and **Rapheal Cueto** and Lighting in Luxury.

"It's a huge investment for the brand, yet it's the best use of the property," Arch said. "We want to be home-grown in Houston, right here at the mansion. This allows us to grow organically."

Visitors can migrate from the great room to the custom men's tailoring room (formerly the West library) where they can peruse a selection of **Thomas Mason** and Dormeuil fabrics for custom suiting and browse ready-to-wear pieces, including cashmere sweaters. His American-made suits take four to six weeks to complete and on-site tailoring is available.

At the east end of the hallway is the impressive leather goods room, featuring black teak lounge furniture designed by Olajuwon himself and the mansion's original marble floor. Cabinets with inset displays showcase women's leather goods from totes and travel bags to messenger styles, all in bright, primary colors. The collection is made in collaboration with handbag designer **Emanuela Frattini**, and prices range from \$500 to \$2,000, with felt iPad cases just \$80.

In the west wing, the DR34M sportswear collection is prominently displayed in a room that features flooring from the Rockets' 1995 NBA championship game at the entry. Customers can select from super-soft "DR34M Shake" T-shirts and "Phi Slama Jama" polos, as well as perfectly crafted replicas of Olajuwon's sneakers. (The DR34 Shake sneaker is \$225.)

Olajuwon has not spared any details, transforming the original breakfast area into a spa room, complete with a line of lotions (\$20-\$45) and fragrant gift box sets (\$95-\$215).

In 2006, the NBA legend purchased the property that was originally built in 1929 and designed by prominent architect **Joseph Finger** for the family of oil, lumber and cattle baron **James Marion West**. His son was millionaire Jim West Jr.

In 2009, Olajuwon began working on a sportswear clothing line that launched in 2011, with the intent of expanding into luxury offerings. He eventually scrapped the original sportswear concept, fine tuned his sourcing options with luxury craftsmen and has re-launched the brand.

The mansion is not only a shopping destination but also will handle the brand's e-commerce business. The future may bring a women's wear line.

"We're starting with a very strong collection of leather goods and accessories for women. We'll see where the future takes us from there," Olajuwon said.

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