

# WHAT'S IN STORE

BY PETER J. WOLF PORTRAIT BY JOHN HALL

ANYONE CAN MAKE YOU LOOK GOOD IN CLOTHES. SARAH AND CHARLES WALKER OF PASSAGE WANT YOU TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEM, TOO.

IT WAS AFTER SPENDING MORE THAN SEVEN HOURS IN THE car on a trip to Bisbee, AZ, that Sarah and Charles Walker settled on a name for their venture. Sarah had been flipping through the dictionary in search of something inspirational. She'd gotten as far as the D's.

"I said 'Okay, I'll flip it open one more time,'" she recalls. "I flipped to 'P' and saw 'passage,' and thought, 'That's it! It's a journey. That's what it means.'"

Although that *a ha!* happened more than three years ago, the journey continues today with Passage now open in its original location after a year-long renovation and "vault room" addition—an interior space clad in hand-waxed (by the Walkers, naturally) steel sheets, where clients can enjoy private showings. Sound like your typical Phoenix fashion boutique? Hardly, but then Passage is not exactly a boutique. (A boutique, explains Charles, "is a place that houses one line from somebody's collection.") With a mix of striking, hand-tailored high fashion, artisan-made denim, beautifully rugged "work wear," and meticulously crafted jewelry—all set against a backdrop of antique mining gear—Passage falls pretty well outside of any single definition. Even the Walkers struggle to explain their creation. Charles says, "we've discovered it's a shop for men and women."

So it's a shop, but more than anything Passage is an experience that starts with the 4,500-pound entry doors (designed and built by Charles) epitomizing what the Walkers call their "Industrial Medieval" aesthetic. "They pull kind of easily," Charles says with some surprise in his voice, "but they still have that great little creak—that's my favorite part about them." Beyond these doors is a world of fashion unlike anything most of us have ever experienced.

Let's start with the denim. Passage is perhaps the only place in the state to carry selvedge denim. Don't know what selvedge denim is? The Walkers can tell you, and you'd better make

yourself at home if you opt for the "long version." According to Sarah, "Charles researched denim for about two years before we even committed to a pair." The same scrupulous research goes into everything brought into Passage. "The work has to be quality, the detail has to be quality," notes Charles; but there's more: "it still has to have a story that fits what we're doing here. We look for things that have hand-tailored quality, an artisanal quality to them ... and we look for things the designer has put everything into. That's the bottom line."

Looking beyond trends, the Walkers feel that the "story" behind designs makes each piece something special. "I feel good about it if I know that a person is getting an investment piece," says Charles. Nothing at Passage is mass-produced, and most of the designers can be found in only a handful of locations across the country.

Take celebrity designer Kai Kühne, for example. "The press loves him to death, but," Charles notes, "very few stores stock him." You know where this is going: Passage stocks Kai Kühne—and lots of other designers people don't usually expect to find in Phoenix. For Sarah and Charles Walker, though, that's the whole point. They could be in Los Angeles or New York, but they "love being part of the fabric of Phoenix." And besides, what's a journey without a few surprises?

**More: 4400 N. Central Ave., Phoenix, AZ; 602.279.1272; [www.passage4400.com](http://www.passage4400.com)**

At the time of this writing, the Walkers are giddy because this month, they will begin stocking the hard-to-get creations of another New York designer: Giddy. To find out what all the excitement is all about, go to Passage and have a chat with Sarah or Charles.



Passage owners Charles and Sarah Walker, about to embark on another journey with a new member of their family.