

# ON THE TOWN



Maria Pinto wears her leather Morgan coat (price on request) and silk Georges dress (\$1,385). Pinto's silk Blanche dress (at left; \$4,050) is embellished with sequins.

## IN CHICAGO

### Ready for Her Close-Up

When the Chicago-based women's wear designer **Maria Pinto** opened her first retail shop in the city's West Loop neighborhood last summer, she wanted to create a place where, as she describes it, "I could keep my head clear." She is referring not only to her tranquil pearl-gray boutique, one wall of which is covered with a mural replicating

her trademark lacework, but also to the fact that she has decided to stay in Chicago, her hometown. "I have my own world here," she says. "I love the independence this store and this city give me. My entire collection is here—it can be seen all at once." Racks of intricately detailed dresses and tops (\$275–\$5,000) fill her 2,100-square-



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foot shop, conceived by Chicago interior designer Scott Heuvelhorst and architect Elissa Scrafano; Pinto's spring 2009 collection of accessories is available at Saks Fifth Avenue and Barneys New York, and her full ready-to-wear line is at Takashimaya New York and selected retailers across the country. Pinto, whose name has recently been linked with that of First Lady Michelle Obama (a client for five years), is not new to the world of women's fashion and accessories. In 1991, Pinto's first accessories collection debuted at Bergdorf Goodman, and in 1998, Dawn Mello, who at the time was president of Bergdorf Goodman, discovered Pinto's ready-to-wear creations and started featuring her evening collection. But even after some

successful years and numerous awards—including the most coveted in her hometown, the Gold Coast Fashion Award, in 1998—Pinto decided to take, as she calls the self-imposed interim, “a sabbatical from work and from designing.” She relaunched her company in 2004; last year she was commissioned to design costumes for the Joffrey Ballet. When asked to describe the effects her clothes have on her clients, Pinto says: “I want the women who wear my clothes, whether it's my day or evening wear, to feel lifted in spirit. I want them to be able to say, ‘This dress makes me feel like I am a better version of myself.’” *135 North Jefferson Street; 312-648-1350; mariapinto.com.*

D.M.