

Love

LANGUAGES

Brittany Peltz Buerstedde pirouettes into new personal and professional passions

By Michele Meyer | Photography by Angela Howard

Though only 29 years old, Brittany Peltz Buerstedde has led many lives. Her first chapter was as a figure skater. She dedicated nine years to training, spending five away from her family in order to work with the coaches of Olympic silver medalists Nancy Kerrigan and Paul Wylie. Then, at age 15, injuries and subsequent surgeries forced her to quit.

“Skating was my first love, the language through which I expressed myself,” she says. “When I had to stop, I was devastated. My physical healing took a year, and my emotional healing far longer.”

Her parents, billionaire businessman Nelson Peltz and former model Claudia Heffner Peltz, taught her to carry on—to find something else she was ardent about and pour body and soul into it.

While pursuing figure skating, Brittany became enamored with fashion and design. She’d often work with a costumer to create outfits that would bring her character to life on the ice, selecting everything from fabrics to sequins. This experience gave her a taste of the creative process, but it would take entering yet another phase of life—that of marriage and motherhood—for Brittany to unleash every facet of her interests and skills.

While studying at New York University, the then 22-year-old attended a birthday party at the Mondrian SoHo’s lounge. There she spotted Franz-Ferdinand Buerstedde, a German-Austrian



BRITTANY PELTZ BUERSTEDDE WEARS AN OSCAR DE LA RENTA GOWN AND GIANVITO ROSSI SHOES AS SHE RUNS THROUGH HER FAMILY'S PALM BEACH HOME. HER DAUGHTERS, LILA AND EVA, WEAR LEAH + RAE DRESSES.



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infection. “But I felt I might lose her,” he says. “When I got there, my nose was dripping, I was sweating, and I had a fever. But she couldn’t have been more loving, caring, and embracing.”

From that point on, the two were inseparable. “Nobody saw this coming,” Franz says. “I was the eternal bachelor.”

After a two-year courtship, Brittany, then 24, and Franz married at sunset at her parents’ Palm Beach estate, Montsorrel, in April 2014. A honeymoon followed in South Africa and Mauritius.

Soon afterward, Brittany embarked on yet another chapter. As one of eight children, she always knew she wanted to be a mother. “Once I found my husband, we couldn’t wait to start a family,” she says. Within a year of the wedding, Brittany and Franz welcomed Eva, now 4, followed by Lila, 2. By Brittany’s own admission, she’s hoping to have “at least” four children. “She’d have a million kids if she could,” adds Franz.

Empowered by this new role, Brittany felt ready for fresh challenges. “For me, having kids was beginning all over,” she says. “It’s been an opportunity to put myself out there in a way I never had before.”

Professionally, that new challenge came in a familiar package. Having struggled to find children’s clothing that fit her aesthetic and allowed her daughters to play, Brittany decided to try her hand at fashion design. In February 2018, she launched Leah + Rae, a collection of children’s clothes named in honor of her daughters’ middle names. “I’d had a burning need to be creative but didn’t know how to express it,” she recalls. “Fashion was a new beginning.”

Harking back to her days as a figure skater, Brittany sought to make beautiful pieces that allowed for movement and expression. Most importantly, she wanted her collection to reflect the needs and spirit of her ultimate muses.

14 years her senior and managing director at Rhône Capital, a global mergers and acquisitions firm.

“It’s a very funny New York story, and so cinematic,” she says of their meeting in December 2011. “On a rainy night, something drew me to Franz. When you find love, you know it.”

He in turn was attracted to her drive, directness, and maturity. On their first date, she cut him off after one tequila, saying, “I believe you’ve had enough. Now I want you to focus on me.”

“It was aggressive but I was impressed,” says Franz.

For their fourth date, Franz had promised to meet Brittany’s family in Palm Beach—an engagement he almost cancelled due to an ear



CAROLINA HERRERA SKIRT;
LOUIS VUITTON BOOTS.
OPPOSITE PAGE: ON BRIT-
TANY: ROSIE ASSOULIN DRESS.
ON EVA AND LILA: LEAH + RAE.

“I love watching her build her dream and become a real businesswoman of her own.” —*Nelson Peltz*

“Skating costumes definitely informed my design principles and belief that clothes should inspire movement and play, especially when it comes to children,” says Brittany. “Like me, my daughters are both princesses and tomboys. They love big, beautiful dresses but also want to go down slides at full speed. And I want their clothes to be subtle to allow their personalities to shine.”

Brittany’s own approach to fashion echoes that of her daughters. She often sports a daytime look of Isabel Marant skinny jeans and white T-shirts, paired with an Yves Saint Laurent moto jacket. When it’s time to unleash her feminine side in the evening, she turns to sexy Courrèges minis and billowing “fairy-tale” Valentino and Giambattista Valli gowns.

Her daily uniform helps her keep up with the demands of her career. This season, she’s expanded her collection from 11 to 24 styles, including items for girls, boys, and mothers. She picks fabrics at European mills, designs the line, presents it to retail buyers, hires models, attends photo shoots, oversees shipping, greets customers at trunk shows, and obsessively arranges it all on racks at her SoHo Manhattan showroom. “I’m a perfectionist—some might say a control freak,” she admits. “I have my hands in everything at all times. Fashion design is a lot of work. You have to love it.”

The same fortitude she applied to figure skating carries her through the long hours. “You’re alone on the ice, being watched and judged,” Franz says. “She still has the inner strength and drive of a competitor.”

Committing herself to skating helped her find fulfillment and pride as a child and young woman; she wants to encourage the little ones who don her designs to feel the same way. Kind reminders of love and courage permeate the Leah + Rae line. “One of a Kind” is sewn in silver thread on leggings, and an organic cotton T-shirt has “Hero” stitched over the heart. “I want to remind all children to celebrate their inner hero and beautiful intricacies,” she says.

Her own sources of joy, not just design inspiration, are her daughters and husband. With a schedule built around her girls, Brittany awakes at 6 a.m. to her favorite alarm—her daughters jumping on her bed. “That’s much more energizing than a cup of coffee,” she jokes.

“Her ability to juggle so many things and still focus on details amazes me,” says Franz. “She pulls out her laptop after the girls’ bedtime and works. She’ll say, ‘I’ll be right there,’ and four hours later she sneaks into bed.”

Brittany comes by this work ethic honestly, having heeded the examples of her parents. Though now a successful activist investor, her father got his start delivering fruits and vegetables for his own father’s business. “My dad taught us the value of hard work, not through empty words but through actions,” Brittany says. “He worked hard while being a devoted family man.”

For Nelson Peltz, this admiration is more than mutual. “Brittany has always approached life with great passion and determination,” he says. “What I admire most is her work ethic and go-getter attitude—she

doesn’t take no for an answer and somehow makes it all happen. I love watching her build her dream and become a real businesswoman of her own. When she decided to start her business, she wanted to do things the right way and knew exactly what she wanted—a brand that stood for quality over quantity, which is why she designs and sources everything by hand. I was very impressed by her decision to produce everything in Manhattan; I believe we need more companies like this. I am so very proud of her in every way from being a devoted mother, wife, and now a businesswoman.”

Though Brittany and her family travel the world, Montsorrel is dear to her heart. She enjoys spending part of the summer in Palm Beach, where her daughters adore being with their grandparents—and playing in the pool. She thanks her father for “teaching the girls the power of love, laughter, and ice cream.”

The holiday season is another time well-spent at Montsorrel. Brittany and her family visit every December—marking important milestones like Lila’s birthday—and stay through January to celebrate the new year with her parents. “It’s so special coming back each holiday

with our girls and feeling the love and magic of our wedding day,” she says.

Himself a globetrotter since childhood, Franz has long been drawn to travel. That’s why Brittany feels especially lucky that their paths crossed on that stormy night in Manhattan, setting in motion the confluence of events that would lead her to her most rewarding personal and professional chapters so far. Says Brittany, “I like to tell him, ‘You had to search the whole world before you found me.’”

Now that’s a happy ending—cinematic or otherwise. ◀◀



ALL OF BRITTANY'S CLOTHING PROVIDED COURTESY OF SAKS FIFTH AVENUE.