

Filipina designer Josie Natori among self-made immigrant millionaires in US

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While some people may see their immigrant status as an obstacle, US-based Filipina Josie Natori has always viewed it as one of her biggest assets.



Filipina designer Josie Natori wearing a Josie Indo Stripe Maxi Dress from her Spring Summer 2012 line **Photo courtesy of Josie Natori**

"Natori is unique in the design world, because of its East-meets-West aesthetic. All of that is due to my background and heritage," the 64-year-old Natori Company founder and CEO was quoted in an [article](#) by finance publication Kiplinger, which was posted on Yahoo! on November 9.

With her Natori Company generating \$150 million in retail sales in 2011, Josie Natori was first in a list of seven self-made immigrant millionaires in the United States.

Kiplinger's Andrea Browne wrote that for many immigrants who come to the US in pursuit of the American Dream, "their unique skills and fresh perspectives lead them to entrepreneurship."

In 1964, Natori moved from the Philippines to New York to attend Manhattanville College, the article said. "The cold winters, the food and the sense of humor were just different. I was very homesick," Natori told Kiplinger. She earned her [economics](#) degree and worked for Bache & Company on Wall Street. In 1971, she moved to Merrill Lynch. Browne wrote that climbing the corporate ladder wasn't enough for Natori, who became a US citizen in 1974.

"While I loved the [corporate] culture, I also had a very strong desire to build something myself," Natori told Kiplinger.

After her son was born in 1976, Natori and her husband Ken began brainstorming ideas for starting her own business. Their ideas ranged from opening a car wash to running a McDonald's franchise, the article said. "It was by chance in 1977, however, that she would become a high-end women's sleepwear designer after showing a nightgown (made from what was originally a hand-embroidered blouse) to a buyer at Bloomingdale's," Browne wrote.

Since then, the company has grown to include around 400 employees. Natori heads the company as CEO, with her husband as chairman and her son, Kenneth, as vice president of finance and e-commerce.

"There is no better place in the world for an immigrant to succeed than in the US. Follow your dream and make it happen," Natori shared her advice to immigrant entrepreneurs in the article.

Referring to a June report from the [Fiscal](#) Policy Institute's Immigration Research Initiative, Browne noted that more than one in six small business owners in the US is an immigrant.

FPI said immigrants are 13 percent of the population and 16 percent of the labor force. FPI also reported that immigrant women are more likely than US-born women to be business owners. "In general, women have made modest progress since 1990 toward closing the gender gap in business ownership, with immigrant women leading the way," the [report](#) said.

Along with Natori, Kiplinger's list includes:

- Jamaican Lowell Hawthorne, founder and CEO of Golden Krust Caribbean Bakery and Grill which generated \$100 million in revenue in 2011;
- Austrian Arnold Schwarzenegger, Hollywood actor and former California governor who is worth an estimated \$300 million;
- Indian Shama Kabani, founder and CEO of the Marketing Zen Group which had around \$1 million in annual sales in 2011;

- Russian Sergey Brin, whose [net worth](#) is now \$22.5 billion as co-founder and director of special projects at Google;
- Salvadoran Carlos Castro, president and CEO of Todos Supermarket, which made \$15.9 million in 2011; and
- Salvadoran Jose Wilfredo Flores, owner and founder of W Concrete, which brought in \$6.6 million in 2011.

–Carmela G. Lapeña/KG, GMA News