

Stephanie Johnson

recording artist and creator of Ivy Shades sunglasses

Hometown: Originally Los Angeles, now Houston

Age: 27

Education: She started writing rhymes at 14 and eventually worked with Master P., Slim Thug and Brooke Valentine. She also earned an accounting degree from the University of Houston.

Loves: Subway, her Bible and her shades

For a closer look at a pair of Ivy's designs, check out page 19!

It sounds like a cliché, but the best way to describe Stephanie Johnson, also known as "Ivy Shades," is a combination of sweet and street. This Southern eyewear designer—who started making and wearing custom shades to separate herself from other rappers—sprinkles "yes, ma'am's" into her conversation while pushing a rap single called "BBO" (it stands for "Bad B*tches Only").

It's not what you think, though: Ivy says she wants to empower women through her songs, her sunglasses and her struggle. Check her out.

—Mavis Baah

How a marketing tool became a business

"When I would wear my sunglasses to the clubs, women would literally buy them off of my face. In 2010, I decided to release an entire line. ... I have a degree in accounting and I worked in corporate America back in the day when I graduated from college, so that taught me the basic necessities of running a company to prevent myself from taking losses."

Building her brand

"After about six months, the orders were so crazy it forced me to hire a staff and get a warehouse. I have a marketing team, I have my PR person, I have a street team, I have a bookkeeper now, I have a CPA that basically does all of the big stuff for me because I'm unable to do it. I would like to do my own accounting but I have no time! In six months, I'm shipping to Africa and Spain and it's like, 'Oh my god, how do they know about me in Spain?'"

The magic formula

"My formula that I've been using is God + faith + grind =

success. It can't be anyone else but God. ... I went to bed at 3:30 this morning, I got up at about 7:45 a.m. I go to Starbucks every morning and sometimes go for a jog. Right now my line is coming out. ... If I was not working on my new line, I'd be at the studio. Pretty much, I'm designing or recording."

One-of-a-kind designs

"I don't want to look like anyone else and I want to catch people's attention. All (the sunglasses) are produced in Houston. I do a lot of custom orders ... it's from the heart. Why have a machine do it?"

Getting rid of bad energy

"Before I changed my name to Ivy Shades, I was P.I.—Poison Ivy—and that was in 2009. I've only been Ivy Shades since 2010, and at the time I was signed to a label and I was in a group. And the young lady I was in the group with was sleeping with the CEO. We recorded 62 songs, and our publicist got us on tour. We were in magazines ... and once we broke up, they killed it; he stopped talking to me and her. But I had nothing to do with that. I felt really bad and I wanted to stop (using the name) because it killed my spirit. (I said) I don't want to be Poison Ivy anymore; that's bad energy."

What 'BBO' really means

"My single is 'BBO': Bad B*tches Only. Everyone is a BBO in their own way. I feel like I'm a Bad B because I have a degree. ... I have my own company. I'm a designer. I'm a recording artist. And I still make it happen at the end of the day. I may not sleep a lot but I don't complain about it. I get up, I work my tail off, and I do what I need to do." 

Listen to Ivy's anthems "BBO" and "Super Chick" and check out her new sunglasses line, "Candy," on ivyshades.com.