

Keren Craig- Cruising the Red Carpet

Written by Interview by Corbin Chamberlin

“Marchesa” is the answer often heard on the red carpet when celebrities like Penelope Cruz, Reese Witherspoon, Jennifer Lopez and Halle Berry are asked, “Who are you wearing?” Keren Craig and Georgina Chapman formed Marchesa in 2004, and, in the years since, the name has become synonymous with star-quality evening wear and stunning party dresses. At a fashion event at Neiman Marcus in Scottsdale, *AFM* sat down with Craig of the design duo to talk about her inspirations, her defining moment and how she was destined to design dresses.



When did your love affair with fashion begin?

Always. My mother always laughs [about the fact that] I have an evening wear company. She never ever got me to wear a pair of trousers in my life. I only wanted to wear party dresses in the middle of the day.

I understand that the inspiration for your latest collection comes from “Madame Butterfly.” What was it about the play that inspired you?

It was the love story; romanticism and sadness at the same time. We take in from all different places. It’s not necessarily directly influenced by one thing; there is always an element that comes up more.

You named your company after the divine socialite Marchesa Luisa Casati. Why her?

She fascinated me. I read “Infinite Variety: The Life and Legend of the Marchesa Casati” by Michael Orlando Yaccarino. I just thought she was such an incredible character. She wanted to be a living work of art. So interesting. She was a frustrated artist. She got a divorce, she was so wild and outrageous. [She was] ahead for her time. I just think that is very inspirational for those times, when women were supposed to stay home and watch the kids, and that’s it.

The Marchesa woman wears your amazing gowns by night. What does she do by day?

She is the socialite and the business woman. The amazing thing for us is when we do our trunk shows and meet our customers. The first trunk show we did, we were so surprised by the diversity of the customers. You think we would only have a customer of certain age, but it was not like that at all. It was a girl getting her prom dress or a 65- to 70-year-old woman buying the same dress.

Your fall collection is so much more embellished than the season before. Is there a reason for this?

It changes season to season. It all depends on Georgina and my mood. A couple of seasons before, in the fall, we did virtually no beading at all, but feathers. It’s all about what feels right at the moment.

Marchesa has been all over the red carpet. Who are you most excited to see your dresses on?

We are so lucky, it’s impossible to say just one. It’s amazing the people we are able to dress.

Are you used to seeing celebrities or do you still pinch yourself?

We still pinch ourselves, absolutely! We are so lucky to have become friends with tons these girls. It’s like working with your friends.

Has there been an iconic dress or a moment that marks a high point in your career?

It was our first-ever red carpet dress; we dressed Renee Zellweger in London for the “Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason” premiere. The next morning, I went to the newspaper stand and it was on the cover of every single paper in England. Unbelievable! That will remain one of our favorites; it did so much for our career.

What should every woman have in her closet this winter?

A party dress—you always need a party dress. A beautiful little black dress.