

4 Top Valley Fashion Designers

Written by Written by Cassandra Weinman/Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

With unrivaled talent and unparalleled creations, these four Valley designers are taking the fashion world by storm and redefining Arizona as a destination for style.



Angela Johnson of Angela Johnson Designs

With an infectious sense of humor and eye for vintage pieces, Angela Johnson's creations are imbued with an inherent sense of playfulness. While her designs effervesce, the meticulous way in which they are crafted and her astute attention to detail leaves no doubt that Johnson is a true professional. The Scottsdale native has garnered accolades for her dedication to fashion, winning multiple awards including Artist of the Year from the Scottsdale Cultural Council. As a pioneer for eco-friendly clothing, her use of thrifted and recycled T-shirts is not only fashionable but environmentally responsible. Whether saving the earth or designing the hottest T-shirt ball gowns, Johnson is a regular Wonder Woman.

I was inspired by my grandmother to become a designer. She loved clothing that was unique and held on to everything from the 1940's until she died, and I used to play in her closets as a child.

My ultimate goal is for my line to be big enough that it would be my only source of income. Right now, I also teach fashion design to supplement my income. Because I make everything out of recycled T-shirts, it's impossible to mass produce so it's reached its maximum size until I can figure out some way to make more of them quicker and cheaper.

Fashion has inspired my life because it's always been a way to express myself.

My biggest influences are current trends, music, pop culture and my sense of humor.

My favorite piece I've ever designed is the T-shirt ball gown because it became the inspiration for my entire line of clothing and remains a staple in my line year after year.

I would describe my personal style as youthful, casual, classic with some avant-garde thrown in.

My favorite item in my closet is either a T-shirt party dress I made out of my old T-shirts or one of my grandmother's vintage dresses.

Angela Johnson Designs www.angelajohnsondesigns.com.



Julia Winter of Jewel Ya

There is nothing more feminine than glittering jewels dangling from dainty chains and, as one of Arizona's premier jewelry designers, Julia Winter's designs are the epitome of womanly design. Although she comes from a hefty corporate background, Winter's comprehension and manipulation of natural metals and both precious and semi-precious stones have made her creations a smashing success. Through her Jewel Ya brand, she is able to provide customers with one-of-a-kind hand-hammered earrings and necklaces that are simultaneously delicate and bold. As her popularity soars, retailers from stores across the nation clamor for Winter's addictively inimitable pieces.

My favorite part of my job is meeting and talking with clients about how to wear my designs.

If I weren't a designer, I would be a mom. I love being with my two boys, Will and Mac.

My ultimate goal is to grow my business to a larger national company with availability in more than 100 boutiques.

Fashion has inspired my life because it adds a touch of style to clothing and allows each person to express himself or herself in a different way. I prefer simplicity and having options with each design.

In 10 years I hope that I will have met my business goals and have my boys happily in college.

My favorite piece I've ever designed is a necklace that is also a belt. It can be worn five or six different ways and always makes a statement.

I would describe my personal style as classic and simple.

Jewel Ya www.jewelya.com.

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Alina Samasiuk of iuk iuk

From the start, founder and designer of iuk iuk, Alina Samasiuk was a couturier. After learning to sew, crochet and create patterns during her youth, the Belarus native followed her passion to bring both flair and philanthropy into the world of fashion. "I believe it is not just about making money for one individual but also about supporting the local community and the domestic economy," Samasiuk says. "I want to use my success and creativity to help others." As her burgeoning label grows, this Valley-based fashion darling continues to inspire with her unique, modern designs and enlightened perspective.

I was inspired by my grandmother, my parents, people around me, Yves Saint Laurent, Coco Chanel, Alexander McQueen and Issey Miyake to become a designer.

My favorite part of my job is figuring out how to bring my ideas into a physical object. I enjoy all the steps from sketching of the garment to technical drawings, sample making and seeing it on a model.

If I weren't a designer, I would do something else in fine arts, languages or diplomatic relations.

My biggest influence is being in love, change, travel and people.

My favorite piece I've ever designed is the two-piece garment of a dress and a skirt-apron-jacket that can be worn in eight or more different ways.

My favorite items in my closet are solid-fitting jeans, men's dress shirts and a black motorcycle jacket. I am still dreaming about a couple Alexander McQueen and Rodarte pieces that are only in the closet when I close my eyes.

iuk iuk www.alinasamasiuk.com.



Joy Li of Joy Li Collections

With nearly 25 years of fashion experience under her couture belt, Joy Li has successfully navigated one of business's toughest industries. Her work with companies like Liz Claiborne, Carole Little and Guess has helped her develop a style that is synonymous with haute design. Reinforcing the mantra that women should wear the clothes and not let the clothes wear them, her self-named label produces pieces that highlight each woman's curves without hindering the fabric's natural movement. Every collection created by this fashion maven is thoughtfully modern while remaining effortlessly timeless. From her professional pieces to weekend prêt-a-porter, Li captivates audiences in Arizona and abroad with her simplicity and dedication to fine fashion.

I was inspired by my 5th grade art teacher to become a designer.

My favorite part of my job is seeing my vision come to life and making people happy.

If I weren't a designer, I would be a dancer.

My ultimate goal is to contribute funds and love to children in need.

Fashion has inspired my life because you learn to see the beauty in your everyday life and translate it into something that is shared with others.

My biggest influence is people who live dedicated to their passion.

In 10 years I hope that I will have made a difference.

My favorite piece I've ever designed is the T-shirt my sister wore during her breast cancer recovery.

I would describe my personal style as active and purposeful.

My favorite item in my closet is my 100 percent cotton underwear.

Joy Li Collections www.joyli.net.