

Fabulosity- Angela Johnson: Queen of the Tee's

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Everyone has that one vintage t-shirt - the one with your favorite 80's band or travel destination? Can you imagine wearing it to a black-tie soiree? Never...until now.



Angela Johnson, a local valley designer, takes these familiar articles out of our closets along with collected others and makes them into ball gowns and such. When I first heard about Angela's work, I was hesitant. T-shirt ball gowns? I could only imagine a "Zoolander" like experience. I was so wrong. When I went to my first show years ago, I was amazed. Johnson recently showed at Scottsdale Fashion Week. The invitation to the show was labeled "Broads, Dames and Bomber Girls" a collection inspired by 1940's pin up girls. The show started with a couple of swing dancers to set the mood. One of the first to show was this amazing red floor length corseted gown. Skirts with lovely ruffles, and bat winged mini dresses. The entire collection was so well fitted and flattering.

Angela Johnson's new collection is perfect for women who don't want the typical cocktail dress. Women who want to make a statement at the gala or just want to look amazing at the grocery store. Angela Johnson designs for the tasteful rebel in all of us.

What was the inspiration for your new collection?

1940's military pinup. The line is called Broads, Dames and Bomber Girls.

Where did the idea of using recycled materials come from?

Originally, I had a clothing line called Monkeywrench when I lived in LA that I mass produced. When I had to move back to Arizona for family reasons, I had to close down that line because of the lack of industry resources, contractors, manufacturers, wholesale fabrics, etc. in Arizona. So, I changed over to start producing one of a kind items for private clients instead. The idea to create everything out of recycled T-shirts came shortly after I realized how tough the one-of-a-kind private order business is. I tried to figure out how I could create something that was sort of in between mass produced and one-of-a-kind while utilizing what was locally available to me instead of trying to source fabrics from LA. That's when I came up with idea of using recycled T-shirts as fabric for my line. That way, I could create a set of pieces for a line each season and make standard patterns in standard sizes like in mass production, but they would be one-of-a-kind because each dress would be made out of different T-shirts. The first thing I created like this was the T-shirt Ballgown that is now the staple piece in my line each season. It was an instant hit when I created it back in 2001 and it remains my best seller to this day.

Who is the Angela Johnson buyer?

My customers vary so much. My intended target customer is a junior customer who has an "indie" style with an appreciation for the rockabilly, punk inspired lifestyle and wants to stand out from the crowd. But, my line attracts all ages of people with vast personal styles. I've created custom T-shirt Ballgowns for proms, weddings, special events, high end fundraisers for everyone from high school students to Grandmothers.

What is it like to be a designer in Arizona?

It's tough because you don't have all of the resources you need to operate a real clothing line. In cities like LA and NY you have wholesale fabric vendors, pattern makers, graders/marker makers, cutters, sewing contractors and sales reps at your finger tips. In Arizona you have none of that and it's expensive to travel to LA every time you need something. When I had my Monkeywrench line in LA, I was literally downtown in the LA garment district a few times a week taking my garments through the production process. I can't do that from here.

What can we expect from your next collection?

I have no idea yet. I only create one line a year so I'll start thinking of next year's line in a couple of months. Right now, I'm filling orders on the current line and working on special orders. For example, I'm currently trying to design new uniforms for the Roller Derby team The Coffin Draggers.

When you're not in your studio sewing, where can we find you?

I teach fashion classes at Mesa Community College and I am a speaker for the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising, so between those jobs and my line, I keep busy working. If I'm not working, I'm enjoying the company of my husband and my kids. We go to the skate park, First Fridays, art shows, museums, fashion events and hang out with friends.

What music do you listen to while creating?

My 2 year old daughter is usually sitting in my studio with me while I'm creating, so we are usually watching cartoons to keep her happy. Basically, the music in my ears is Spongebob's incessant cackling!

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