

# Good Fit or By Design: Ericka Engelman Couture

By Lisa Crawford Watson

Contrary to popular culture, we are not what we wear. Yet, although appearances can be deceiving, how we dress tends to tell others how we see ourselves and how we hope to be seen. We have been taught to dress for the occasion, socialized to dress for success, acculturated to dress for ourselves. What we wear may not influence who we are, but it can affect how we feel about ourselves.

If it fit, if it flattered? If it felt good, we might, too. Long before reality television began telling women what was wrong with their wardrobes, Ericka Engleman was making them right. One of the few if not only couture fashion designers on the Peninsula, Engleman's renown stems less from her exceptional ability to sew and more from her talent for tailoring every garment to suit the particulars of each patron. Not unlike a poet or a painter, the artistry lies in the editing until the composition fits.

"The cornerstones of our business, our guiding principles" said Engleman, who has been designing, creating and tailoring everything from a business suit to a bridal gown for the past 26 years; "are fit, positivity and caring. Our work is all about giving clients the best fit for their bodies, their personalities, their styles and their dreams, in a positive and caring environment. We have no bad mirrors and no perfect bodies; only the ability to accentuate the positive."

As a couture house, Engelman presents her own designs and those of an experienced staff. It is a kind of artistry destined for the bride seeking that special, custom gown that reflects her sense of self and suits her occasion. Most special is the fact that she can have the dress she imagines in her size, designed with her shape and style in mind, and all the details that make it hers.

"This is a salon," said Engleman, "where women can feel comfortable and accepted, where a woman's shape, whatever it is, is honored and relished. This is the atmosphere we've worked on creating since we opened the salon 26 years ago."

At Ericka Engelman Couture, whether you can see it or you can't, if you can dream it, the designer and her staff can do it.



"Our job," said Studio Manager Agnieszka Kazmierczak, "is to create the 'Ah Ha' moment. We don't mass produce, so everything we create belongs to the client who ordered it. And that means it has to fit her. A \$5,000 garment that doesn't fit will look like a \$50 suit. But a \$50 suit that fits perfectly can look like a million dollars."

Couture, says Kazmierczak, means the garment is unique, extremely well made, beautifully styled and ideal for the person who wears it. When she walks into a room, all eyes are trained not merely on her garment but on the effect of her appearance. Her apparel is exclusive, personalized and exceptional on her. Which is surely what every bride, bridesmaid, mother-of-the-bride, mother-of-the-groom, guest hopes for.

"In America," said Kazmierczak, "women tend to hide their flaws. In

Europe, women accentuate their best features. It's a subtle shift in attitude, a more positive approach to dressing. Ready-to-wear clothing is rarely ready to wear; it can't be cut to fit everyone. So whether the garment already exists or is just an idea, we are ready and able to make it yours. When it really matters, such as a wedding, you deserve special attention."

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