

Couturiers who make the cut



Ralph Barrera AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Julia Plume keeps it simple, from the tunic dress, above, to the cobalt swing dress, below.

Julia Plume

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www.juliaplume.com

Her story: The New Zealand-born Plume moved to Austin in 2005 with her boyfriend after a stint in California. (Her dad is from Colorado and her mom is from New Zealand.) She skipped pursuing a career in sports psychology to take on fashion. After taking a pattern design class at the Austin School of Fashion Design, she started the Julia Plume line with an initial 12 pieces.

Selections from her fall collection – there are dresses, jackets, pants and knit tunics – are available at Austin boutiques C. Jane and The Garden Room.

The newly married Plume, 24, works out of



Incubator; the winner will be announced Nov. 10.

“I just want to get to the point where it’s profitable,” she says. “The store owners seem to want more Austin people doing this kind of thing. So they are receptive to it.” That means finding a sales representative to market her goods and a manufacturing facility in Texas. “I want to be able to do this full time,” Plume says. “That’s my aim for next year.”

To keep her fashion dreams going, Plume works at a Web site design company, helps a friend with a recycling business and teaches at the Austin School of Fashion Design. She designs in her spare time.

What she has learned about the industry: “There’s much more to it than you think,” Plume says. “There’s more to it than sewing and selling a few things. It’s much different than ‘Project Runway.’”

Her niche: Simple, unexpected but wearable fabrics.

What people are saying: “Her fabrics are gorgeous,” says Julie Copp, owner of C. Jane. “This cobalt blue swing dress – it just flew out of here.

By Marques G. Harper

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Austin is ripe with fresh design talent, and it’s a savvy crop.

Encouraged by homegrown national success stories such as the award-winning jewelry design team of Anthony Nak, new clothing and accessory labels are on the fashion-forward track. Today’s designers have learned they need more than talent or an appearance on a hit reality show such as ‘Project Runway’ to succeed in fashion.

New Austin labels such as Herff Christiansen, Julia Plume and Sophie Grace – each has been in the industry for a year or less – are being rolled out slowly as their owners and designers raise money, win clients and build label buzz to fund their lines of dresses, tops, jackets, pants and bags.

“There are young designers who jump in with 20 pieces to go to market,” says Randi Christiansen, taking a break weeks ago from designing the label Herff Christiansen’s next three seasons.

Going into debt to start a fashion label wasn’t an option for Christiansen or her business partner.

“It worries us,” Christiansen says. “That’s why we started the way we did. This is crunch time. We’re working toward going to market this fall, if not, next spring.”

Anthony Miller, chairman of fashion and accessory design for the renowned Savannah College of Art and Design, tells newcomers they have to make smart choices when stepping foot into the competitive fashion world. “You have to have the basic talent,” he says. “You have to be business savvy. It’s about being responsible and managing a business.”

Austin’s newest designers are keeping all