

NIGHT SHIFT

DESIGNING MAY BE IN HER GENES BUT KATIE ERMILIO IS CARVING OUT A PATH THAT'S ALL HER OWN.

It might be tempting to look at a Katie Ermilio dress and focus on the nipped-in waist or calf-skimming hemline, two design traits often associated with the iconic wardrobe of Grace Kelly. It's even more tempting to do so once you learn that Katie's grandfather was once the Princess of Monaco's personal clothier. But if you've ever slipped into one of her pieces and twirled in front of a mirror, you'd see that despite her love of feminine silhouettes, her designs offer modern day princesses like Hollywood clients Michelle Williams and Taylor Swift a palatable twist on the saccharine evening look of yesteryear. The Philadelphia-native's use of modern fabrications (like her floral wool lace developed in-house) and the gentle infusion of sportswear (cashmere funnel neck sweaters and satin jeans) prove her aesthetic is not just unique, it's mesmerising. Here, the 30-year old designer talks about her latest collection and why you'd sooner find her in jeans than a floor-grazing gown.

YOU'VE SAID YOU LIKE TO LET THE FABRIC DO THE TALKING. TELL US ABOUT THAT.

I would say silk faille and double faced satin are trademarks of my brand although I do love working with coloured fur, I've used it in almost every collection. [For FW15] I developed a navy netted lace and a wool lace. They worked so well for the collection because they were the perfect canvas for the midnight navy Swarovski crystal pearls I used to hand embellish the pieces. All production is made in New York City. My textiles are sourced from France and Italy and my cashmere sweaters are knitted in Georgia. It is very important that I work with American manufacturers. The Ermilio brand has been domestically produced for more than one hundred years and I intend to honour the legacy.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH A NEW SEASON?

In short, I am constantly designing. Even when I'm not physically sketching or creating samples I'm thinking about colours and outfits and draping. It's something I never fully turn off. I don't really work from a mood board or a single source of inspiration. I suppose the best way to articulate it is I start with the first piece and build upon that piece to bring the collection together, much like building a wardrobe.

DO YOU FIND IT A CHALLENGE TO DESIGN EVENING WEAR IN A CLIMATE THAT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CASUAL?

I'm a feminist and minimalist at heart. When I'm

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designing, my looks are a balance of the two and I design pieces that can be worn from day to night and purchased with the intention of wearing them for life. It's something that just comes naturally for me.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST DRESS YOU EVER MADE FOR YOURSELF?

It was for my eighth grade dance. It was a mint green strapless baby doll in a stunning silk georgette.

ARE YOU A JEANS OR A DRESS KIND OF GIRL?

Jeans for sure! I could live in jeans, sneakers, and an oversized sweater every day in the winter.



The designer, here, spent her formative years learning the tricks of the trade at her father's custom clothing shop. Below: Her grandfather was Grace Kelly's personal clothier.



Katie Ermilio's FW15 collection, available in Doha at Per Lei Couture.

