



Made to Measure

Fashion designer Geraldine Connon has been working from her Larne design studio and dressing women in Northern Ireland for over thirty years. Here she talks to Margaret Connolly about her all-consuming passion for fashion.



I love beautiful clothes, what can I say? I absolutely love designing and making clothes and I always have. Over the years my enthusiasm has never faltered and I imagine I will keep pushing myself to the next level designing flattering clothes women love wearing for many more years to come.'

After completing a course in fashion design from the University of Ulster, Geraldine went on to work in the costume department at The Lyric Theatre and even did a three month teaching stint back on the fashion course from which she graduated. However, Geraldine was determined to follow her dream and establish herself as a fashion designer.

'I was so driven to design and make clothes,' explains Geraldine. 'You could say that it is in my blood really. My great grandfather was a Russian Jew called Philip Lepar (Leopold) who immigrated to Belfast with his wife Rose Patchinski. A tailor by trade, he set up business in Belfast in 1899 under the name of Leopold & Son. A great aunt on my mother's side was also a skilled tailoress.'

Geraldine's grandfather died in 1954, but none of his immediate offspring, Geraldine's grandmother, nor her mother followed in his footsteps. However, Geraldine who taught herself how to sew and make clothes, has a natural talent and as she says herself 'it was just in her' and as the years have proven, nothing or nobody was going to stop her following this career path.

'When I started out everyone wanted to be a fashion designer. The Emanuel's had hit the headlines for Princess Diana's wedding gown and everyone was full of aspiration even though being a fashion designer wasn't held in the regard that it is today. Yes, it was great to see, but I wasn't just caught up in the excitement of the time, I knew this was the only career for me. From the moment my parents bought me my first sewing machine I was hooked.'

Not wanting to leave Northern Ireland and her family, Geraldine opened her studio in Larne (where she is still based today) and began building up her fashion business through word of mouth. Within no time at all she was working day and night creating clothes for her expanding client base.

Geraldine enjoys a loyal following of clients from the UK and Ireland. These women return to her time and time again because they are assured of a bespoke, one-off creation, tailored to make them look and feel amazing.

'I have learned to work with all manner of fabrics over the years and I offer the designing of the widest variety of clothing from intricate wedding dresses and occasional gowns to a perfectly tailored trouser suit.'





‘Being a fashion designer appears to be a glamorous job when you see that 15 minute catwalk show, but running a private design business, without compromise, is enduring hard work. However, it took a hold of me and I haven’t been able to let go and this is what I do every moment of every day.’

‘Work has always come first for me and to an extent it always will. I’ve been married to Miguel, a Portuguese sculptor, for three and a half years now. He understands my passion and can relate to it, but then he is not the typical male.’

‘It has taken me a long time to find someone who could put up with me! Miguel and I suit each other. We are both free spirits and we respect each other’s time to be creative and do what we both love. Miguel often offers his opinion on the clothes I am designing, his thoughts are always constructive, but then he is genuinely interested.’

As well as her client commissions, Geraldine produces an inspirational catwalk presentation once a year. 2013 launches her New Collection which is shown exclusively in NW this month, titled ‘Diva Seduction’.

‘This new collection is everything that I love, inspired by the women whom I dress. It is total elegance in couture clothes - embracing the opulence of fashion in the fabrics, the cut and the ultimate style. The days of competing as a designer in Northern Ireland with the well known international designers, have levelled out now for me. Years of cultivating my skills in the cut, so to speak, the understanding of the female form; and having access to the highest quality fabrics worldwide, has secured my spot in the fashion arena.’

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‘I recently returned from New York a few weeks ago and happened to notice Sandra Bullock on the Front Cover of American Vogue dressed in sequins. This amused me in the fact that it was one of my chosen cloths for my new collection.’

Geraldine has shown her collections selectively at many fashion events in Northern Ireland over her years in business and has enjoyed working with many highly talented people.

Diva Seduction gave her the opportunity to work with local modelling agencies ACA and Maureen Martin, and her ‘dream team’, closest friends, beauty artist Oonagh Boman, fashion photographer Jim Crone and hairdresser Shane Bennett.

‘The love of the art of beauty in all things and a shared desire of striving for perfection has given Shane and I the opportunities to work together for at least 13 years now. Shane in his role as global ambassador for Goldwell hair products has afforded me the chance to design Collections for numerous International Shows.’

I love wowing people at the catwalk shows, it is essential for self expression and feeds my soul, but in the real world I work in the business of designing and dressing my clients. Discerning, independent and extremely fashion conscious damsels, who when they take the time to come for fittings, expect and receive my full attention.’

