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# Smile Politely

CHAMPAIGN-URBANA'S ONLINE MAGAZINE



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## Style profile: Belle Noelle

FEATURED ARTICLE

Posted in ARTS by [Kristin McCann](#) on Friday, July 10, 2009 at 6:59 am

Thread by thread, Janelle Burns is making C-U a bit more fashionable with her Belle Noelle women's clothing line.



Janelle and Sons



### Most Recent Arts Comments



yoooo thats surreal!!!!

Posted by makenzie to the entry 'Scott Mutter (1944-2008)' on 01/05/11.



Great review! One of the best reviews on this story that I have read so far.

Posted by RJ Campbell to the entry 'Putting Bumfights behind' on 12/21/10.



I've been trying to think of something to say about this review that doesn't come off as too emotional or naive. This: [T]hey stayed in my head. So that's a warning — they might stay in your head too, in a way you don't want. ...

Posted by Tracy Nectoux to the entry 'Putting Bumfights behind' on 12/17/10.

### Most Popular Arts Articles (60 days)



"The Donna"

Coordinates.

Born in the Caribbean, Came here [Urbana, IL] from NY. Followed husband here for PhD program. Two sons.

What defines 'Belle Noelle'? Where does the name come from?

Classic, flattering, "lady-like", excellent craftsmanship and fabrics and details, details, details. The name is what my first son would have been called if he were a girl.

How long have you worked as a designer?

About eight years on and off.

When did you realize you wanted to be a fashion designer?

I never really knew I wanted to be a fashion designer; it just sort of happened. I did know that I wanted to be around clothing and design in general.

What is a typical workday like for you?

Now, during the summer, I try to wake up before my baby wakes up. If I succeed I go upstairs and sew until he does. My husband makes breakfast, [I] get the kids dressed, go tend the garden, then clean house and either go to the park or library. My husband gets home midday. I usually have sewing lessons until dinner. At 5:30 I cook dinner, eat, hang out for a while, go back upstairs and sew. My husband puts my older son to sleep, I come back down put the baby to sleep, hang out with the husband for a bit, then it's back to sewing until I conk out.

**CHANGING THE WAY C-U LISTENS TO THE RADIO**  
(or possibly not)


Smile Politely Radio

**FRIDAYS 5:30 PM** **90.1 FM WEFT.ORG**

Arts Archives


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2009	<a href="#">Jan</a>	<a href="#">Feb</a>	<a href="#">Mar</a>	<a href="#">Apr</a>	<a href="#">May</a>	<a href="#">Jun</a>	<a href="#">Jul</a>	<a href="#">Aug</a>	<a href="#">Sep</a>	<a href="#">Oct</a>	<a href="#">Nov</a>	<a href="#">Dec</a>
2008	<a href="#">Jan</a>	<a href="#">Feb</a>	<a href="#">Mar</a>	<a href="#">Apr</a>	<a href="#">May</a>	<a href="#">Jun</a>	<a href="#">Jul</a>	<a href="#">Aug</a>	<a href="#">Sep</a>	<a href="#">Oct</a>	<a href="#">Nov</a>	<a href="#">Dec</a>
2007	<a href="#">Jul</a>	<a href="#">Sep</a>	<a href="#">Oct</a>	<a href="#">Nov</a>	<a href="#">Dec</a>							

Most Recent Comments



I find it unconscionable that "Better Off Now", the 2010 Blues Blast 'Song of the Year' written and recorded by Champaign's own Kilborn Alley Blues Band, is no where to be found on this list. There is absolutely no excuse for this omission. None. Not only did...

By Josh to the entry 'Top 25 Local Songs 2010 on 01/06/11.



Those are awesome. Now, if you could only get some magnets for <http://www.consolidatedfoodservice.com> machines, that would be amazing!

By Kingsley to the entry 'Things You Should Never Buy on 01/06/11.

Most Popular Articles (14 days)

What's your design process like?

I start from the fabric. Thankfully I have a stash of fabric that I brought with me from NY. I have a definite fabric addiction. I'll look at the fabric and have an idea of what I want to do with it. I'll drape on a mannequin, then I draft the pattern and sew up the muslin at which point I'll hate it. I'll ask my husband for his opinion, even though he could care less about fashion, but he always has good points and sometimes I listen to them. I'll leave it overnight and go to sleep where in my dreams the answer for how to fix it will come to me (seriously). The next morning I'll draft and construct the final design. I usually listen to jazz while sewing because songs with words will distract me. If I know I'm not going to be in the zone, I'll put a movie on in the background. Usually cheesy 80's movies or a musical that I've seen a million times.

What is the first thing you designed professionally?

The "Bella Top" (right). I made it put it on a mannequin and took the picture in my apartment hallway. I sold so many I refuse to sew anymore of them.

Who can wear your fashions?

Anyone who is confident and likes compliments!

What is the benefit of working as an independent designer as compared to working for a particular company?

Of course having the final say on every decision, but try getting some medical insurance and you might change your mind about working under someone else. Unfortunately, I found that I am allergic to bosses and stereotypical fashion types.



What are your goals for the future of Belle Noelle?

Since moving to Champaign and doing the stay-at-home mom thing, this has become more of a hobby than a business so I struggle with that a lot. I have just started to write out my "five year plan", so I'm gonna have to get back to you on that. Part of the difficulty is that I don't know where my family and I will end up after my husband completes his program and that will affect my business as well.

What is a 'fashionista', (& do you consider yourself to be one)?

I think a fashionista is someone who follows the trends and lives and breathes fashion. My younger self would fit into this category, but not anymore. I walk around looking pretty crappy nowadays...[laughs].

What do you wish people would understand about working in the fashion industry?

That it takes a lot of money to make money. Like most things, it's not nearly as glamorous as it seems and as a fashion designer just starting out, you're clients will always be better dressed than you because you will never have time to make anything for yourself and when you do, you'll be too tired to get dressed.

What advice do you have for aspiring fashion designers in the Midwest?

The same advice I would give a fashion designer anywhere. Be realistic about your start-up costs, save your receipts, do your taxes, figure out your fabric sources, who is going to do your production, who you want to market to and how you are going to market yourself and schedule your time wisely.



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Favorite fabric?

I have two. Linen and silk-wool.

What inspires you?

Old movies, people-watching, my mood at the moment.

Some say shoes make the outfit; others say hair. What do you say?

I say the outfit makes the outfit.

Favorite accessory?

Huge earrings in all colors and shapes.

Heel or flats?

In NY heels; in Urbana, flats.

I won't leave the house without...

My kids even if I want to.

Most stylish city?

Can't pick just one. London and Tokyo for street fashion, Paris and Milan for elegance and high fashion.

Last thing you read?

Everything I read nowadays is sewing related so it was probably *Draping for Apparel Design* by Helen Joseph-Armstrong, The last novel I read was *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones.

Fashion magazine?

*Vogue Italia*

Movie?

*Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*

Item in your closet you couldn't live without?

Vintage 1950's halter dress found in a consignment shop. Well made and makes "the girls" look perky.

What's fashionable about bicycle riding? (Janelle & her family get around town almost entirely by bicycle.)

It's timeless, green, billowing dresses and hair, fenders and a basket, tight thighs and calves and almost more than enough accessories to keep you interested for a minute. I love this site for all things bicycle chic...

[www.ridingpretty.blogspot.com](http://www.ridingpretty.blogspot.com)

The most fashionable or favorite part about living in Champaign-Urbana?

I don't really get out much so let's just say I haven't found it yet. Favorite Part? The trees during the Spring, bike friendly for the most part.

Five years from now, what do you hope to be doing?

Getting at least seven hours of sleep a night, not touching baby poop on a daily basis and still working for myself.

Summer recipe you'd like to share?



Mushrooms, corn cut from the cob, zucchini sauteed in olive oil. Salt and Pepper. Fresh Parsley. Rice cooked in vegetable broth instead of water. Combine rice and vegetables. Top with toasted pinenuts and parmesean. Eat. Delish.



Yum.

*And now, for your moment of zen a la James Lipton:*

What is your favorite word?

Décolletage

What is your least favorite word?

Actually

What turns you on creatively, spiritually or emotionally?

Music

What turns you off?

Blandness

What is your favorite curse word?

Motherfuck!

What sound or noise do you love?

My kids laughing

What sound or noise do you hate?

Lawnmowers

What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

Doctor

What profession would you not like to do?

Anything featured on "Dirty Jobs"

If Heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive at the Pearly Gates?

It's ok, I forgive you.

—

If I may offer a few final words, as a happy owner of two Belle Noelle dresses, I have found them to be beautifully chic, comfortable and easy to care for—a combination that is — at least from my experiences in various years of retail work — difficult to find. As well, I think it speaks volumes to Janelle's professionalism that she is interested in designing for women of all shapes. As a 'petite' sized woman, the opportunity to have a dress tailored to my specific proportions was so helpful, and Janelle's knowledge base and warm personality made the process absolutely enjoyable. She really cared about making the dresses something I loved

and felt good in.

Those interested in learning more about Janelle's work can find her most weekends at Urbana's Market at the Square, contact her directly via e-mail (she is currently accepting custom orders), or visit her Etsy shop or blogs:

[www.bellenoelle.etsy.com](http://www.bellenoelle.etsy.com) [Etsy — “the world's most vibrant handmade marketplace” — is an online store where people are able to buy and sell handmade or vintage items, art and supplies. Belle Noelle was recently featured on the front page of the main Etsy site!]

[www.bellenoelleonline.blogspot.com](http://www.bellenoelleonline.blogspot.com)

[www.sulkinginillinois.blogspot.com](http://www.sulkinginillinois.blogspot.com) [Where Janelle has been chronicling her life since her move from NY to Champaign two years ago.]

Janelle also offers private and group sewing lessons. She teaches beginner to advanced from her home studio seven days a week in two hour sessions. (Lessons are \$15/hour). To schedule, please contact Janelle at [bellenoelleonline@gmail.com](mailto:bellenoelleonline@gmail.com)



5 comments

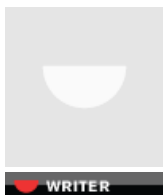


Tony C

07/10/09 at 07:10

#1

Kristin - You did take best dressed the other night at our place, which is no small feat considering that meant you out fashioned Claire. Was a very pretty golden yellow dress.



Anna Barnes

07/10/09 at 07:47

#2

Saw her booth at Market at the Square earlier this year. Great fabric, great colors, great designs.

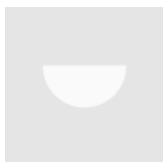


Debra Rawlings

07/11/09 at 07:32

#3

I can recommend her as a teacher—have been taking lessons since May and enjoy every minute of them.



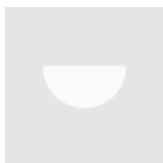
Designer Store

07/14/09 at 07:33

#4

Nice post!

Now a days lot of designs have arrived in to [men & womens fashion](#) style. But one of the key items every men & woman should have is a pair of jeans that flatters your figure and can be dressed up or down.



Amy

07/15/09 at 07:50

#5

All this, and she has a fantastic sense of humor and one of the best laughs I've ever heard. Great feature on a super-cool CU transplant.