



Editors Note: *This story appeared recently in a Milwaukee newspaper featuring a local graduate. It is reprinted here with permission from the Journal Sentinel.*

Growing up in the 300-person town of Madrid, Neb., Shanel Regier always knew she wanted to do something related to art.

Though her hometown was no hub for the arts, Regier took three art classes while in high school, and it turned out to be the only training she had before she left for Milwaukee.

While a student at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, Regier started as a painting major but ended up studying sculpture. In the process, she began playing with deconstructing clothing and making “wearable art” for everyday and special occasions.

Two years after graduating from MIAD in 2003, she started her own clothing design company in Milwaukee, where she now creates all types of clothes for all kinds of clients.

What does she do? Regier, 31, runs her own clothing design business, Shanel Regier LLC, where she makes custom-designed clothes, including wedding dresses, prom dresses, rehearsal dinner dresses and knit dresses.

What advice would you give to aspiring fashion designers? One thing she credits her success to is sewing as often as she could. Regier said aspiring designers should gain as much hands-on experience as possible, even if it’s just sewing on their own or a part-time job. It needn’t be a fashion job, Regier said. Even working at a dry cleaners could be helpful. You’ll learn about fabric content, which can help with learning construction of clothing and developing an eye for design.

“Nowadays, if someone is going to school for fashion, they don’t focus on how to make things yourself. Now everything is on the computer. So in that case, sketching would be helpful - a

storyboard, anything - to be able to express your idea for a collection to someone," Regier said. How do you stay unique in a constantly changing industry where trends are everything? Regier says she's not focused on staying current with the latest trends. There's always so much going on with competitors trying to start the next trend that she says a clothing designer just can't worry about those things.

"I'm not concerned with what's popular now or in six months," Regier said. "I make things that can stay in someone's wardrobe and be relevant and present in the future. So they can wear it now, in a year or 10 years from now." For her, every project has to be made with love.

"I won't take a project on just to make money," Regier said. "There has to be that connection, and I have to feel like I'm going to make that person happy with that purchase." What do you find most rewarding? "I enjoy being able to connect with the fabric and equipment," Regier said. "I love trying to figure out what design works best for (the client) and knowing that they're walking out of the door with a garment they truly love, fitting the way they want it to fit." With every project, Regier says, she has a "very rewarding relationship" with the materials she works with - from the patterns to the fabrics to the sewing machine.

"What makes a garment so special is the combination of the right fabric, texture and perfect design," Regier said. "You can have perfect fabric with an intricate design, or an intricate pattern with a simple design.

It's about finding that right balance." What is the most challenging part of your job? Trying to be creative, doing the fittings, promotions and just doing everything yourself, Regier said. Most of her design inspiration comes from various fabrics, but it takes time for her to find the best one for the project she has in mind.

Working with clients can also be challenging. Meeting a client for the first time, Regier usually can tell right away if they will be a good match for the design they have in mind. If she doesn't feel comfortable making a certain design, or the customer isn't sure what they want, sometimes it's best to walk away.

"They don't want to get stuck with something they don't like, and I don't want to make something they're not going to like," Regier said. "If they don't like it, then the end product is not going to be a good product. It has to be made with love."

- Marissa Evans