Talented area students sketch creative bridal gown designs

By KATHRYN RIDDLE

The dream of nearly every little girl is her wedding dress, a fanciful creation of her imagination whether it be demure or sophisticated, billowy or sleek to convey an ethereal presence on her special day.

Interpreting such intangible fantasies is the challenge of wedding dress designers. We recently interviewed four young woman designers/artists about today’s bridal gown trends and the inspiration behind them.

With the KSU annual Fashion Show approaching on April 16, Liz Opaczewski and Holly Thompson, senior design students at the Kent State School of Fashion Design & Merchandising, are making dresses from their designs. They are using luxurious fabrics purchased in New York City at Mood, the designer fabric house featured on Project Runway. Such expeditions are integral to the fashion design program at Kent, recently ranked third in the country and 13th in the world.

From the time she was a little girl, Liz sketched doll clothes and learned how to sew by taking classes at a Jo-Ann Fabric store near her home in Tolaola. She loves lace and details such as beading — she described working at a bridal shop doing beadwork as “almost a fantasy world, every little girl’s dream.” Inspirations for her design concepts are recorded in her croquis book (the term derived from live model quick sketches). While each of her wedding dress designs is different, Liz incorporates lace and beading, more pronounced perhaps on sleeves, bodice or neckline and then repeated on hemlines, skirt panels or the edge of a long veil. Her preferred fabric is silk/satin in shades ranging from crisp white, ivory, clotted cream and champagne.

Holly began quilting as a child and learned hand-embroidery from her paternal grandmother. She has technical skills and patience, she said, in creating something. Last summer, Holly interned at Anne Gregory for the Bride, a designer bridal boutique in West Liberty, Pa., near her home in Pittsburgh. One of her challenges there was to alter a size 14 bridal gown to fit a size 6 bride-to-be. Holly said that
she practically remade the dress that required both re-hauling and hand-sewing to reattach the appliquéd hemline.

"One of my strengths is to step back and design for other people," said Holly who uses frosted glass as inspiration for her wedding dress collection. Through her internship Holly discovered that the trend is for a bride-to-be to have multiple dresses for her wedding. Holly's collection features dresses for the engagement and rehearsal dinners, a gown for the wedding ceremony and one for the reception. The fabrics Holly bought at Mood were silk Duchess satin and Alençon lace that she will embellish with Czech crystals.

Nino Bejanishvili and Anne-Marie Gurko are recent graduates of Ursuline College where they are pursuing master's degrees in liberal studies.

A native of the country Georgia, Nino Bejanishvili studied for two years at its Institute of Fashion Design before coming to the United States. Having completed her undergraduate studies, Nino is working on her master's degree to fulfill requirements to teach in the fashion department at Ursuline as an adjunct professor. Nino's drawing talent was encouraged by her parents who subsequently arranged sewing lessons for their daughter.

Fabric itself, said Nino, "is my inspiration, in how it feels in my hand, how it drapes on a mannequin." Fabrications she prefers for her designs include silk, chiffon, embroidered taffeta and lace, which currently is quite popular, in color variations of white, cream and beige. Nino finds inspiration in classic, timeless designs such as those by Balenciaga.

Anne-Marie Gurko, also an Ursuline alumna now studying for her master's degree to teach fashion, loves designs by Betsey Johnson, and finds inspiration as well from "Breakfast at Tiffany's." She believes that the "wedding dress should be different, extravagant, maybe playful." Anne-Marie's designs incorporate ruffles, layers, and lace. One of her designs features a square neckline evocative of Audrey Hepburn's "Holly Golightly little black dress," and a satin sheath with a removable bollowy organza skirt, the perfect solution for the reception after the wedding ceremony.

Sketches photographed by Kathryn Riddle.

Sketch by Holly Thompson

Sketch by Nino Bejanishvili