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Seamless

Known for her bespoke designs and impeccable alterations, dressmaker **Irina Sigal** serves the needs of brides-to-be and A-list clients alike. *by Leigh Stuart*

Evolution is the name of the game when it comes to longevity in the fashion world. No one knows this better than Irina Sigal, a dressmaker and designer who has honed her focus over the course of three decades to become one of the Philadelphia area's premier names in bridalwear.

"When I started in this business 30 years ago, I was doing simple tasks, like sewing a button or fixing a hem on pants," Sigal recalls. "I would have never dreamed that 30 years later, I would be mainly focused on bridal alterations. It's the most challenging part of this industry, and it's also the area I love most."

Global Influence

In her youth, Russian-born Sigal traveled extensively to fashion hot spots including France, Italy, and other luxe European locales. Those experiences ignited her passion for the high fashion styles for which the region is known. "I learned the basic skills from design school, but was inspired more by studying couture creations from elite designers," she says.

The inspiration for Sigal's sartorial masterpieces came not only from illustrious designers, but also from performance artists. One rather high-profile New Jersey native helped her make a splash on the national stage.

"In 2018, Jon Bon Jovi's wardrobe manager reached out to me because he learned I had a specialty in leather, which I used to do," she shares. "JBj loves leather, and I was hired to create a leather jacket for him, which he wore in concert on his next world tour. Besides the quality and style, his favorite thing about the jacket is that it fit perfectly at the first fitting."

"I have worked on a few more projects with him after that," she continues. "He even gifted one of the jackets back to me after he wore it at an event to keep as a measurement for future collaborations with him."

With each client, the custom creation process begins with the same question: "Would I wear this garment?" In Bon Jovi's case, the answer was a resounding "yes." Sigal even has a picture of the two of them wearing the same jacket.

Married to Fashion

While Sigal's bespoke creations have graced stages all over the world, her current clientele consists of local brides-to-be. She shifted her enterprise's focus to bridal alterations approximately 10 years ago. The result: Business boomed, and it has been growing ever since.

"When I started working mainly with brides, I realized every shop selling bridal gowns was looking for an experienced seamstress," Sigal shares. "There was clearly a shortage of seamstresses with the needed skill set for bridal alterations, and that gave me confidence that my talents were being focused on the best direction."

Sigal's method is unique compared with most seamstresses, who tend to take on a new project by asking the bride-to-be the straightforward question, "What do you want?"

"I do not do that," she says. "I tell the brides what their dress needs and advise them on the alterations. Most brides, especially if they are very young, have no idea what they want or need or how to style their gown. I love

Images courtesy of Irina Sigal.



sharing my expertise to guide them on how to look.

"Brides are at their very best in their beautiful gown," she continues. "Of course they can take their gown to a less expensive place, but the quality of my work far outweighs any savings for inferior workmanship. Many times, brides have come in with dresses they brought to other seamstresses or services because there are so unhappy with the results. I am happy to help them."

Budget is a consideration, of course, but Sigal says high quality and individuality should be paramount.

"Although money is important, it is secondary to maintaining the integrity of the dress and the bride's vision and her personality and comfort level," Sigal says. "Many times, I have passed up hundreds of dollars talking a bride out of an unnecessary alteration. This is how I build a trusting relationship."

For the Love of the Craft

A self-described social butterfly, Sigal loves the human interaction aspect of her work. She relishes the many relationships she has formed with overjoyed clients throughout her career.

"I am a very social person and love



working with my creative employees and my lovely clients," she says. "The wedding business is a happy business,

and our clients come in at the happiest time of their life. I love sharing in that joy and enhancing their bridal experience.

"I enjoy working with people as much as I enjoy working with fabrics," she continues. "It's a fantastic feeling when a bride trusts me to perfect the most important dress [of her life] and making her dream come true."

Sigal's career has brought her many years of beauty and purpose, though she's pleased to say she has many more years ahead of her. As the 60-something dressmaker reflects on her career, she looks toward her next steps with genuine enthusiasm.

"I don't see myself retiring anytime soon, but will perhaps open a school to train future seamstresses," she says. "Bridal dressmakers seem to be a dying breed. The kids coming out of design schools today are focused in only one direction or another, mostly working with a computer or fabric but not with a real person. Individual custom knowledge is everything."

"When I was a student," she continues, "we learned every aspect of sewing from the scratch, be it alterations or custom design, and that is what I would like to share so the art of bridal dressmaking carries on for future generations."

If her past successes are any indication, her next goal will become a reality sooner rather than later. ■



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