

Ethan Southworth Interview with Designer Alexandra Ni

Ethan Southworth, MetroJacksonville's newest reporter sat down with fashion designer Alexandra Ni about her upcoming show downtown in order to get to know her a little better. Check out the discussion and photos by Urban Angels author Chelleby Starr after the jump!

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Quote

The international fashion label, **ALEXANDRA NI**, will hold its official global launch and first fashion show in Jacksonville, Florida on November 5. The show will feature collections created in Berlin in 2013-2014, and her latest – the spring/summer 2015, which was made entirely in Jacksonville, Florida. The show will offer a display of the fashion artist's aesthetic evolution over the past several years, revealing a versatile but recognizable original style.

In her creations the designer Alexandra Ni reaches out to her extraordinary background. Born and raised in the south of Soviet Kazakhstan in a cross-cultural family of a Siberian mother and a Korean father, Alexandra has been a child of the world ever since, collecting experiences and absorbing influences from every place she visited or lived in. Her fashion represents a harmonious union between Asian sensibilities and European aesthetics. It delicately accentuates femininity and offers the comfort of urban chic wear to a modern woman. **ALEXANDRA NI** utilizes an artistic and artisanal approach, creating limited-edition and one-off, hand-made pieces from high quality natural fabrics.

Though new to Jacksonville, Alexandra Ni is a regular contributor to local charities and events. One of her latest creations was donated to Clean Water Music Fest in Ponte Vedra this year. For this first fashion show in Jacksonville, she collaborates with Rethreaded – a local organization helping women and children who were victimized by the sex trade to start a new life. 20% of all proceeds received after the fashion show will be donated to Rethreaded.

The label – **ALEXANDRA NI** – was founded in Berlin in October 2012. Alexandra Ni currently lives and creates in Jacksonville, Florida. Her creations are worn in Paris, Zurich, Moscow, Oslo, London, and now Northern Florida.

By invitation only. Limited number of tickets will be available at the door.

On Oct. 29, I spoke with fashion Designer Alexandra Ni in the comforts of her humble home-studio in Riverside. Upon my arrival, I realized that jeans and a T-shirt probably weren't appropriate attire for a meeting with a fashion designer. Mrs. Ni was ever elegantly dressed in one of her very own stunning dresses and I had just managed to crawl out of bed that afternoon. To my surprise, Alexandra had also prepared an enticing assortment of treats along with a pot of tea for our gathering.

As Alexandra gave me a tour of her dense studio, I couldn't help but notice all the materials and threads strewn throughout. It was a highly orchestrated mess, such is the home of any determined artist. However, this compact studio was not her primary studio. Alexandra's primary studio and library reside in Berlin, where she got the jump on her career in October 2012.

Alexandra is a jack of all trades and a master of some, from being a banker and a translator, to being a model and talented designer whose works have reached out through Paris, Zurich, Moscow, Oslo, London, and now Northern Florida. She is also fluent in four languages : Russian, French, German, English, along with a familiar grasp on Spanish.



Q. What was your inspiration for this show and collection?

A. About two years ago, I saw a video of a show by one of my top favorite fashion designers, Haider Ackermann, he is a Columbian designer in Belgium. I admire his work for super sharp, flowing, and feminine cut. His impeccable choice and combination of fabrics, his consistency, and his ability to bring out the warrior that lives inside of each woman but keeping it impressively subtle and sensual. He had this incredible show with fabulous music (I think it was two years ago). It was my top overall inspiration for how I wanted to set up this space.

The music really inspired me.

I have many favorite designers but I can't say that I'm very much influenced by them. Our scholastics and aesthetics are very different. For example, one of my favorite designers, Alexander McQueen, was all about female shape as

much as possible, such as accentuated waste lines. However, I'm the opposite. I think I admire him for his precise cuts and incredible patterns, but as a woman I know it isn't always very comfortable to wear. As a designer it's my goal to make sure everything is very feminine and sensual yet comfortable.



Q. When did you know you wanted to be a fashion designer?

A. It's interesting. I was trained in St. Petersburg as an Art Historian, that was my major. But ever since I was a kid, I've wanted to be a designer. I just remember playing with all my dolls and dressing them up and thinking, "That's what I want to be!" That was my dream!

Since I was 12 or 13, I was designing my clothes and my mom, a seamstress, was making them. We lived in the Soviet Union and back then there was nothing. Anything that was available, everyone else wore. So if you wanted something a little more original, you had to make it yourself. It

was then that I started going to libraries and researching through fashion magazines and getting involved with fashion.

Q. What did you do before you became involved with Fashion?

A. When I was about 15 years old, my family moved to Kazakhstan. I spent a lot of time learning new languages and that's also when I got into a lot of history. 8 years later, we moved to Zurich where I worked for a private banking company for 3 years. But I was always yearning for more, I wanted something more enriching and nurturing than that lifestyle. It was then that I went back to St. Petersburg and started a career photography. I was traveling a lot while I was doing photography, and I just remember one night while I was in Egypt, I was thinking and I realized it was fashion that I wanted to do. It was always fashion. It was that year, in September that I moved to Berlin and enrolled into ESMOD International University of Arts for Fashion in Berlin. I remember when I first got into the class, I realized I was the OLDEST person in the entire class. Everyone was fresh out of high school, so around 17 – 18 years old. I was also very intimidated by the machines because of how fast they seemed. I realized I couldn't do anything and the first few months were so difficult for me, not only cos I just moved to a new place, but also because I kept thinking "Do I want to do this? Can I really do this?" But by the second semester I really began to do well, and that's where the start of my fashion training kicked off.



Q. You lived in Berlin? So what brought you to Florida?

A. While I was living in Berlin, it was during one of the coldest and darkest winters in history. It was then I met my husband, who is from Florida, which was clearly very different. When we came back, I initially planned to only stay for 3 months, but I never left. Florida has amazing nature and nature always inspires me and makes me feel grounded and rooted. I will have been here a year in December.

Q. You make all your own clothing? How hard is it work with the materials? Are they all from Berlin?

A. That's a good question because, in fact, it was really easy in Berlin. They have beautiful fabric stores all over the place that were very inexpensive. But over here, it's different. A lot of the fabric stores I go to here are larger but I can only use about half-a-rack's worth of materials there. I have all of my fabrics shipped from either Berlin or New York.

Q. What are your future goals for ALEXANDRA NI?

A. Just to continue what I have now. Now, I just have a very specific clientele. For whom I make pieces out of created collections of limited edition, and I want to keep it this way. I want to keep it exclusive: only good quality fabrics and with good quality labor. Everything is just about custom made because I know everybody is different.

Interview by **Ethan Southworth**

All Photos by **Chelleby Starr**

<https://www.facebook.com/chellebystarr1>



This article can be found at: <http://www.metrojacksonville.com/article/2014-nov-ethan-southworth-interview-with-designer-alexandra-ni>

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