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The stitching hour

Driehaus Awards for Fashion Excellence give Chicago fashion students a reason to stitch till dawn

BY WENDY DONAHUE | Tribune Newspapers

Fashion students get used to pulling all-nighters in the studio as deadlines approach. But heading into the 11th annual Driehaus Awards for Fashion Excellence recently, Maribel Dinwiddie thought she could rest easy, knowing her last loose thread had been tied. Because she wouldn't be graduating until July from the International Academy of Design and Technology, her Driehaus entry was from her junior-year collection. "I had finished it a long time ago," Dinwiddie said. When contest organizers vetted submissions from five Chicago-area fashion schools, Dinwiddie made the cut. But organizers had a "suggestion" for her contest entry, based on the colors of a sunset sky. "They didn't like the bottom of my second look," she said. "They said it wasn't cohesive with the rest of my line. They said, 'Change the purple.'"

No problem. Except her senior collection was due at the same time. So she was up till 5 a.m. the day of the awards, replacing the purple with two tiers of gold chiffon and a dollop of lace on top. "That's fashion school — running to beat the deadline," she said. Her fortitude was rewarded. Among the 25 juniors and seniors whose designs marched down the runway at the Driehaus Awards, Dinwiddie's col-

lection won third place, earning her \$1,500. Laura Lanzerotte, who graduated in May from Dominican University in River Forest, won second place, receiving \$2,500 for a collection inspired by the Robert Frost poem "The Road Not Taken," with its themes of "wanting to choose the right path in life," Lanzerotte said. That resonates for any recent college graduate, said Richard Driehaus, a businessman and philanthropist. Driehaus joined forces with Chicago fashion show veteran Skip Grisham more than a decade ago to create the event. Proceeds from recent years are going toward the build-out of the Driehaus Resource Center within the Chicago Fashion Incubator at Macy's State Street. This year, the \$140,000 raised went to the five fashion schools. "When I graduated from college it was difficult to find employment," Driehaus said at the show, in the South Loop garage that houses his antique car collection. "So I put an ad in the Wall Street Journal. It went something like this: 'Ambitious young graduate of DePaul University seeks position in the financial area.'"

Success in the fashion industry can be equally elusive, he said. "Through this professional fashion show," Driehaus said, "we offer the students real-life experience and exposure."



JOEL WINTERMANTLE/PHOTOS FOR THE TRIBUNE
Clockwise from left: designer Kendra DeKuiper; designs from Agnes Hamerlik; Kimberly Hanna Cho; Stacie Randall; designer Laura Lanzerotte; and designer Maribel Dinwiddie.



Kendra DeKuiper, who graduated in May from Columbia College's fashion program, won first place for a collection inspired by Albert Camus' "The Stranger." "The ideas in the book got me thinking about human growth, self-discovery and living a life of no regret. I compared these ideas to the process of metamorphosis." She'll apply the \$5,000 prize toward launching a fashion collection online while working at a CB2 store. She'd like at some point to open a shop blending fashion and furniture. Columbia College grads

have gone on to New York to work for Oscar de la Renta, Michael Kors, Derek Lam, J.Crew and White House Black Market, as well as Conde Nast. But grads of Chicago's fashion schools are increasingly staying to launch their own brands. "Chicago is a market of fashion entrepreneurs," said Melissa Gamble, lecturer and internship coordinator in fashion studies at Columbia College. Gamble, the city's former fashion czar, lists some Chicago fashion businesses that are thriving, despite a tough economy: Creatures of the Wind, Elda de la

Rosa, Sam Kori George, Lara Miller, Price Walton and Lana Jewelry. Other young brands such as Boris Powell, Horacio Nieto, Elmidae, Zamrie, Miriam Cecilia, Lily & Migs, Anna Brown and Annie Jane Bridal are also gaining footing, she said. "Smaller fashion businesses can get by with alternative means of funding, like crowdsourcing on the Internet," Gamble said. Dinwiddie will use her award money to further her fledgling business Tutu-Madness — "I make tutus that glow in black light and mad-hatter-style tiny top hats. I vend at festivals and

parties. And then I'm working on making upcycled utility belts and harnesses out of jeans and leather, she said. "That's the problem with being a fashion designer — I have a million ideas. I'll see which ones take off." An abundance of ideas is part of the challenge, anyway, said Lanzerotte, who will continue working for Benefit Cosmetics at Macy's State Street while doing freelance design work and creating another collection. "In fashion," Lanzerotte said, "there never is enough time." wdonahue@tribune.com