

# ALWAYS A BRIDESMAID

Atlanta dress designer Katriesa Raines is changing the face of weddings with vintage-themed bridal couture



Olive designer Katriesa Raines channels the '50s and '60s for fresh, vintage bridal fashions.



Olive designer Katriesa Raines with her designs

PHOTOS/SPARK ST. JUDGE

BY SHANNON ALDERMAN

**B**ridesmaids never wear their frilly taffeta frocks after the fateful day they must don the horrid thing in the first place. Once the wedding is finished, so is the dress. Vintage dress designer and wardrobe stylist Katriesa Raines grew tired of this trend and created a line of bridesmaid dresses that can actually be worn to the wedding and beyond. Raines owns Olive, a small, independent label founded in Atlanta. She makes dresses modeled from her favorite era: the '50s and '60s. What started out as a vintage girlie dress-and-handbag line has morphed into a collection of day wear and bridal couture. The Sunday Paper sits down with Raines to chat about her popular bridal dress collection.

STYLE

**Q So, you didn't start out making bridesmaid dresses. What inspired your bridal line?**

**A** Every wedding I was in, I'd hear the same thing: "You can wear this dress again." But I never did. Then, a couple of my girlfriends got married last year, and they couldn't find the dresses they wanted for their bridesmaids. They didn't want to go to David's Bridal or to the mall, so they asked me if I could do it. And in no time, I had four dresses to make at once, as opposed to one dress for one customer. **Was it daunting having to make so many dresses at once?**

I loved it. There is just nothing like seeing your work as a collective in photos that are going to be there forever in somebody's book and life.

**How is the Olive bridal line different from other bridal collections?**

Other places have certain colors that they work with. I can make any color happen. I go out and find all the swatches. The client picks the fabric, the color, the ribbons, the accessories and the desired width of the dresses. And a dress from the eras I choose minimizes any body frame. It nips at the waist and flares out. It is a modern vintage classic look with new fabrics.

**Tell us about the different styles of your dresses and where you can wear these dresses after the wedding.**

The Katie is a strapless, all-season frock that comes with or without a sash. You can wear it to the wedding and then to picnics or cocktail parties. If it were done in a white silk, you could even wear it to the beach with flip-flops. The Abigail has a high V-neck and is bra friendly. This is a really good office dress with or without a jacket. The Ginger is an A-line dress with a rounded neck and a bit of flair, and the Ella has a sophisticated cross-front and a deep V-neck. It's the perfect cocktail-hour dress; this is the one our live model Ashley is wearing. It is beachy, petite, casual and breezy. The Claire is basically the Katie in two parts. Claire is the skirt part that goes great with a pointy-tipped shoe, and after the wedding, the Claire makes a great boot skirt for the fall. Remember, nobody loses in an A-line skirt. The Charlotte is the top part and it comes in a sassy bustier cut. The Faith is a wrap-front, deep V-neck dress that slits down the side.

**Where do the names of the dresses come from?**

These are old-fashioned names that I love that say, "Sweet girl," and Olive was just a name that I liked. I decided that I was going to turn this sweet ol' fashioned name into this hip girl that loves art.

**So, is Olive an alter ego, then?**

In a way. I answer to it. I also like the color olive. It's very calm. It's earthy and it's my basic black. Olive works well with navy, calms down black, brightens up white and works well with pink and orange.

**Who are you targeting with this dress line?**

I am targeting the creative bride, the one who doesn't want to do the mainstream. This is a fun line, and it's fun for the audience, too. It's like a mini-fashion show or a mini-runway show because you never know what the next girl is going to have on.

**Do all bridesmaids dresses have to look the same?**

No, they don't have to be the same. The bouquet can bring the colors together, but you can get too creative and end up not being cohesive. So, I tell my clients, "You don't have to do what I say, but just listen and know I have your best interest in mind."

**How do you stay competitive with wedding couture?**

Classic and ladylike never go out of style when you put on a dress. I think I chose a really good era. The silhouettes are not complicated. All my dresses are lined, and even for the girl who doesn't like to wear dresses she will put mine on and say, "OK, I can do this."

**So, let's say I want to order Olive bridesmaid dresses—my boyfriend is going to freak when he reads this—what do I do?**

The client comes into the studio to meet me. We flip through a portfolio, and I ask the bride to bring magazine pictures that she finds that fit her vision. Then, as a stylist, I bring in my vision. I ask the bride for the tone or mood she is looking for—whether it's romantic, beachy, sleek or casual, and I create that aesthetic through the dresses. Then, the bride and bridesmaids come into the Olive Design Showroom, choose from one of Olive's six signature silhouettes and view an array of fabrics. A bridesmaid brunch is also offered at the showroom, and this is a great time for the girls to meet over mimosas and sweets to try on their new dresses.

**What are the prices?**

For now, they are \$188, and I think that's doable for a bridesmaid's dress that is all-purpose. I see bridesmaid dresses that are \$328 dollars, and, personally, I couldn't ask someone to share in my special day and pay that much for a dress—even if they are going to wear it again.

**So these are the kinds of dresses that a girl can twirl in?**

You just gave me chills. These are twirling dresses. You hit it! I always know that I've done well when a girl comes out of the dressing room and says, "Look at this," and she gets that twirl going on, and she says, "I feel girly." I love doing this, and I think it is what I was created to do. I'm not a brain surgeon, and I don't cure people, but I do make them feel better by styling them. That is art to me. **SP**