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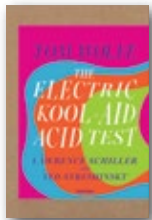
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“**T**he ball season
is massive here and
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it seriously.”

Belle of the BALL GOWN

*Vienna's Erika Suess Produces
Wearable Art for Women Worldwide*

by **ANGELA DANSBY**

Erika Suess started sewing at age eight and made all of her own clothes as a teenager, creating her first label exclusively for herself.

“Everything I wore I sewed, including every prom dress,” says the self-taught designer. “I think people thought I was a little weird, wondering, ‘Why is she sewing her own stuff, can she not afford to buy a dress?’”

Nowadays, the question is: Can people afford to buy *her* dresses? Suess’s hand-sewn, one-of-a-kind ball gowns are haute couture at its finest. They are made from exquisite fabrics—such as silk, crepe, chiffon, velvet, lace, and “tattoos” made with sequined nude mesh to mimic the skin—with craftsmanship that’s second to none. Many are inspired by the Middle East.

“Middle Eastern countries are light years above Europe when it comes to evening fashion,” Suess says. “That’s because they produce their own fabrics and throw parties like never before. The women wear a dress once. They are extravagant and extremely feminine.”

The ball gowns range in color and style but all are elegant, showing off women’s curves and different body shapes. Arguably, Erika Suess Couture offers wearable art that transforms any woman into a queen.

“Every woman wants to be Cinderella at the ball,” Suess attests. “My goal is to make her feel confident in a dress.”

Originally from New York but living in Europe the past two decades, Suess has been designing ball gowns for the past three years in the world’s capital of balls: Vienna, Austria. Her boutique there is frequented by local ball-goers and international visitors. Several U.S. and European celebrities have worn her designs, too, including Darryl Hannah, Jane Seymour, Missy May, and Barbara Wussow.

“I have clients from almost every continent; 80 percent is word of mouth and 20 percent are tourists or passersby,” Suess says. “People come all the way from Mexico City or Beirut, for example, to Vienna to find a dress. The ball season is massive here and the Viennese take it seriously.”

Vienna is the perfect place for a ball gown designer as it hosts about 500 balls a year as a big part of its cultural heritage. Balls are popular throughout Europe, particularly in the winter, but Vienna is the belle of the balls. And Suess is its belle of ball gowns. ■

