

# Shop Talk



## ENGINEERED FOR GREAT DESIGN

A local designer makes her way in the fashion world.

When KayOss designer Amy Johnson sat down to chat in her CWE studio-cum-home, she was busy prepping for Midwest Fashion Week in Indianapolis. After successful showings at Saint Louis Fashion Week, she has plans to set out on what she likens to a nationwide tour. For Johnson, who went from environmental engineer to full-time fashion designer, it's been quite a trip already. —N.B.E.

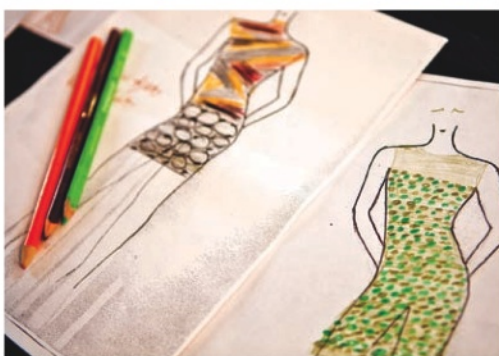
**YOU CAME FROM AN ENGINEERING BACKGROUND. WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO GET INTO FASHION DESIGN?** When I was working as an environmental engineer, it never felt right... But when I took fashion design in Florence, I thought, "I can do this." I came back to St. Louis, and my preacher's wife taught me how to sew. My first pair of pants took eight hours to make, and they fit perfectly. When I went out that night, everyone I ran into asked about them.

**HOW DID THE COMPANY GET ITS NAME?** I actually came up with it way before I knew what I was going to do. Life is about chaos, but with that comes some order. In doing what you love, there is a sense of calm. KayOss became a character—she wants to express herself, be noticed, and show who she really is through what she wears.

**WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FIND IN THIS BUSINESS?** Mainly problems with production. I try to keep everything local, but I have to go to New York and L.A. to buy my fabric. All of the sewing is done here in town—that's so important because it allows me to keep an eye on everything. Another issue is getting into boutiques outside of St. Louis. Just sending an email doesn't work. I have the most success when I go in person while wearing my designs; the boutiques always order on the spot.

**DO YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR BUSINESS BASED IN ST. LOUIS?** Definitely. I'm really close to my family and love having my studio in the Central West End. This city has so much to offer, and there are an unlimited number of resources. We have the first fashion-design school in the country [at Washington University], and there are so many seamstresses here.

**WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE OF KAYOSS?** I would love to be in more boutiques across the country and in a major department store. I'll be participating in other cities' fashion weeks to grow the line's distribution. I'd like to develop my online business and add a men's collection. Most importantly, I really want to incorporate environmentally friendly designs by 2011. I plan on creating my own fabrics, so they're unique to KayOss.



KAYOSS IS AVAILABLE AT VALERIE MILLS FINE APPAREL,  
139 CARONDELET PLAZA, 314-727-4545, VALERIEMILLS.COM.  
YOU CAN SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE DESIGNER  
AT AJ@KAYOSSDESIGNS.COM OR 314-398-9098.