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From Russia With Love

Olia Zavozina takes on Nashville's fashion sense with a touch of Eastern style

BY STEPHANIE STEWART

AMONG THE SWAG GIVEN OUT AT the 2007 CMT Awards were tops, flirty dresses and more from Nashville-based designer Olia Zavozina. Aside from being cute enough to warrant pictures in the pop culture gossip mags ("Look what's in Miley and Nicole's gift bags!"), the publicity served to underline the talents of someone poised to become a serious original designer. And one who's not just using Nashville as a stepping stone to New York.

Russian-born Zavozina is the real deal, possessing not only the talent and wherewithal to get her clothes onto the stars (she's currently working on pieces to send to Oprah and her associate, Gayle King), but hoping to dress Nashville as well. Zavozina's been making clothes since the age of 7, first in her native Russia, then here in the U.S. She arrived in the U.S. as a college exchange student, studying in Bowling Green, Ky., to get a business degree. She liked it so much she stayed, heading to Nashville with a scholarship in business to Free Will Baptist Bible College. She graduated in 2006, and now she's pursuing a master's degree at Tennessee State University.





Still, she's excited about the collection she's putting together for the current season. "I think this is the first time I've really designed cocktail dresses," she says over coffee. "I love them." Her inspirations come from Russia itself, and very much from the natural world, working as she does with a palette of saturated, autumnal colors. A few pieces, like a stunning low-backed halter dress hint at shades of winter with a distinct gray theme, as well as cool metallics in silver and bronze.

Fall for Zavozina is going to be busy. Having decided to skip the boutiques in favor of personalized service via her online site, buyers will be able to choose between purchasing ready-made garments from her current collection or arrange to have a custom one-off garment made for them. For those who select the latter, Zavozina will come to the buyer's home for the fitting process—an option that distinguishes her from most designers. "My goal is really to

During her educational pursuits, she made the acquaintance of Robert Campbell of Nashville Fashion Group. Campbell was organizing fashion shows for local designers at the time, and encouraged Zavozina to pursue her passion for clothing design. Now she has a new online store and a new marketing agent, and she's building a collection available to the public.

"My style is influenced by my Russian background," she admits. "I like clean-cut, but I also like really rich fabric. I love coats, I love hoodies. I like texture and gold, silver and crystal—but all in moderation."

If you've seen any of Zavozina's previous work, to say she loves coats is perhaps an understatement, but the pieces she creates are indeed a balance of simplicity of cut, elegant patterning and rich detail. Her 2007 collection, shown at the now-defunct Layl'a Rul, was definitely all about the coat in its various forms.



create a personal relationship with my customers so I can help them pick the right dress," she says.

She has a hectic personal life as well at the moment, having just gotten married to Nashville native Robbie Bell. Still, she's got major goals for the future, including growing her company while maintaining solid relationships with clients. Eventually, the goal is to have a real storefront, as well as a virtual one. "Remember though, I don't do alterations, I do dresses to fit you," she cautions. (Part of the reason to start with a virtual store is to avoid the inevitable requests that she hem a pair of pants or alter a suit bought elsewhere.) Zavozina wants to focus on creating her own designs.

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Making 65-70 items for awards-show swag bags may also be a thing of the past, as she looks forward to doing more individual work for stylists and stars who come directly to her. She's looking for the right opportunity to dress a star (or stars) for fall trips down the red carpet even now. This coming spring, she'll take off on her first series of trunk shows outside Nashville, with Florida as her target audience.

Aside from the occasional business trip, Olia Zavozina's not leaving town anytime soon, regardless of how successful her endeavors are. "Nashville's a growing city and a good place to live," she says. "I'm not overwhelmed by it. Here, you can really get to know people. It's a perfect base of operations for my business."

So while she'll be going back to Europe and to Russia to keep her Euro-centric aesthetic focused, expect her to reside here in Nashville a good long while.

Find Olia Zavozina's work at www.oliazavozina.com.