

FEATURES

Clothing designer thrives on creating own world; Business more difficult, interesting than expected

By ALLISON BELL
Special to the STH

Lisa Heyward Marcusson once designed clothes for other people's stores. Now she sells her creations at Modern Times, her own Franklin Street boutique.

The shop offers women's apparel and accessories. A continually restocked sale rack brings Modern Times many interested college students looking for bargains. Many members of the UNC community browse there.

Marcusson opened the shop in the summer of 1983 with what she called "help from very private investors." She said running the shop was both more difficult and more interesting than she expected. "There are a lot more skills required than I knew," she said, such as learning how to market her designs.

The freedom to present her clothes her way was one of the reasons Marcusson went into business for herself. "I wanted to create my own

world in my store; my own music, my own interior, my own hours."

Born in Richmond, Va., Marcusson was reared in a family that prized independence and creativity. "It was automatic that I'd be encouraged in that way," Marcusson said. "When my brothers and I were younger, we were given art supplies as gifts instead of dolls."

One brother, Marshall Milton, creates the gold, bronze and sterling jewelry that Marcusson sells.

Although Marcusson grew up painting and drawing, she planned to be a dancer, not a designer.

During the '60s, when she was a teenager, she moved to New York to study dance. She supported herself by modeling and taking bit parts in off-Broadway shows.

At one point, she was the head model at the Mannequin Agency. "It was a lot of classes every day and living on a very small budget and going to auditions," Marcusson said.

To supplement her income, she

found a job at Kay Selig, a company that designed women's clothing.

"I started working in the garment industry because I got to use my art background to do sketches of the designs," Marcusson said.

After her daughter Lia was born in 1968, Marcusson said she wanted to work at home. "You can't be a model and raise a family at the same time."

Marcusson began dyeing her own patterns on plain white cotton clothing. A representative sold her work around the country. As her business grew, she started to sew clothes from her own patterns.

At first the business didn't make much money, Marcusson said, adding that she taught yoga to support her daughter. But by 1974, her work was profitable. "I learned how to produce more efficiently and more people knew my designs," she said.

Marcusson relocated to Chapel Hill because she didn't want her

daughter growing up in New York. "I wanted her to be in a more rural setting," Marcusson said. "I wanted her to have clean air."

The nature of her work made moving easy. "If you have a representative, you can live anywhere," Marcusson said.

She said she carefully planned the shop's decor, using neutral colors such as white, black and gray. "I don't want the colors of the store to intrude on the colors of the clothing."

When asked what kind of clothing she preferred to design, she said, "Clothing that has a lot of movement, clothing that will complement people and the way they move. Clothing that can be worn, that people can make like themselves. It's very contemporary, but it's not trendy."

Marcusson also sells a limited selection of accessories. She buys the jewelry, purses and hosiery in New York from designers whose work she knows well.

This month, accessories include a clear plastic purse that has an artificial fish built into it, and Fortune Socks, the creation of Chapel Hill's own Hey Max.

Marcusson said she wanted her merchandise to be adaptable.

"Most of my clothing can go from informal to very dressy depending on what accessories are worn with it," Marcusson suggested. "It can blend to a lot of different ages. It packs easily and it requires very little ironing. Most of it can go into the washing machine."

Marcusson said she tried not to design clothes that are too flashy. "I don't want everyone to see the clothing first," she said. "I want them to see the person first."

Modern Times is located at 402 West Franklin Street, across from McDonald's. It's open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday.

Six teen-agers go to Poland to compete in 'math olympics'

From Associated Press reports

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Six teen-agers are in training to represent the United States in international competition, but it's not their muscles they are strengthening as they go for the gold, it's their minds.

The six young men from across the country are in a four-week training session at the U.S. Naval Academy in preparation for the International Mathematics Olympiad to be held July 7-8 in Warsaw, Poland.

Seventeen other teen-agers also are attending the training session, some to sharpen their math skills, others with the hope of representing the

nation in the annual competition in the future.

"The training session is a very intense operation," said instructor Cecil Rousseau.

Rousseau, who has a doctorate in physics and is a professor of mathematics at Memphis State University, said the training consists of two lectures daily coupled with tests and contests.

The students are the cream of the nation's crop of mathematics students. They are selected from among 300,000 students through a series of three tests.

"Here you are not taking the

average student," Rousseau said. "You are taking the six best in the country. This is a big country and we produce . . . some very talented youngsters."

Some of the six, like 18-year-old David Grabiner of Claremont, Calif., found they had an aptitude for mathematics as early as the first grade. One the other hand, Darien

Lefkowitz, 17, of New York City, said he did not get involved in problem-solving until the eighth

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