

Kambriel

By Jonathan Williams

From the Old World-inspired elegance of Kambriel's designs, it looks as though slipping into one of her gowns, capes, cassocks, or coats might just transport the wearer to a magical and mystical place bound only by one's own imagination. While most of her designs draw heavily from Victorian-era fashions and look like they would be worn by the inhabitants of an enchanted Gothic castle, they also have a unique, modern twist that gives them an appeal beyond the traditional Goth or Renaissance garb. Kambriel's designs are clearly rooted in the past but have a timeless feel that makes them every bit the modern Goth's desire.

"I first started creating my own designs from scratch when I became involved in the punk and new wave scenes and started going to clubs and shows in 1985," she recalls. "I was only 12 or 13 at the time (luckily our clubs were all ages), so that was a major influence on me while I was growing up. We didn't start calling it 'gothic' in my circles until 1988, but by then I already had the pointy black buckle boots and big crimped hairstyles down to perfection! The biggest effect it had on me, in relation to my views on style, was that I felt freedom from an early age to walk my own path, and not worry about what the general public thought. I would put together unexpected combinations [because] even at that young age I saw certain 'uniforms' in the subcultures and I was conscious of maintaining my own sense of individuality."

Lavande Gown featuring bias cut sleeves and a gathered centerpiece of melted-effect fabric with an iridescent backing, framed on either side with rich, blackened velvet.

model: Kambriel
photographer: Nadya Lev



Gothic Vamp: This beautifully draping Theda blouse has twice-gathered and flared sleeves and is available in semi-sheer georgette. The neckline is designed so that it can worn either on or off the shoulders depending on your mood. Shown being worn with the model's own corset and the fantastically dramatic and voluminous Theda Skirt which is made from softly flowing georgette. This semi-sheer skirt has very full sides and a train in the back to flow elegantly behind you.

model: Batty
photographer: Ron Davis

KAMBRIEL

In many ways, things have come full circle for Kambriel. Being influenced by the musical movements that eventually morphed into the goth scene, she now makes clothes that modern goth musicians such as Lisa Feuer, Judith's Christopher David and members of Mors Syphilitica and Unto Ashes have had her design for specific tours or photo shoots.

"I think designing for musicians is something that happens naturally given my deeply engrained passion for music," says Kambriel. "I am a musician myself, playing violin and singing, so I have an understanding of the freedom of movement that is important to have onstage. I play their songs while I am creating the pieces and work with the intention of embodying my design with the spirit of their sound so it will add another layer of depth and dimension to their performance."

And over the years, Kambriel has also created many unique pieces for Monica Richards of Faith and the Muse, one of her most well-known and most consistent clients.

"I have worked with all sorts of designers through the years, but Kambriel is my tried-and-true favorite," says Richards. "I

always think of her first. What I love about Kambriel is how creative she is. She really loves her work, creating costumes, designing how the fabric works with the form and shape, how it moves. And she's one of the nicest women I know."

The theatrical quality of Kambriel's designs has not only attracted bands from the Goth scene, but has also transcended to other performing arts as well. She has done some period work on a few Shakespearean performances such as *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as a production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. Kambriel's pieces will also be appearing in a yet-to-be-released independent film called *The Corridor*, inspired by H.P. Lovecraft.

Likely her proudest theatrical moment, however, came when she had the opportunity to work on *The Temperamental Wobble*, an Edward Gorey-inspired dance piece that premiered in Boston and has gone on to tour across the globe.

"With the theatrical Gorey show I designed for, I found out about it while attending an auction at the Edward Gorey house,"

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The Crystal Palace: This two-piece Victorian inspired ensemble creates an extremely flattering silhouette, and is made from luminous, iridescent crushed silver taffeta with other custom fabric choices upon special request.

model: Jillian Ann
photographer: Nadya Lev



she recalls. "There were a few dancers there from the troupe performing as Gorey's characters come to life (like a widow who kept trying to hang herself... unsuccessfully), and after hearing that they were going to be creating a grand piece to be premiered the following year, I offered to do the costume design. Once they saw the kind of work I do, they immediately realized my vision would be a perfect fit for the production."

Kambriel's work has also caught the attention of at least one person not typically considered even remotely Goth. Comedian Margaret Cho has commissioned her work for numerous special occasions. But Kambriel says Cho's personality is not such an unlikely match with her designs.

"Margaret commissioned me to create a variety of pre-Raphaelite and gothic gowns to wear for her onstage appearances and media events as well as for her wedding, where I created a pearl encrusted cathedral veil with a headpiece embellished with a swarm of writhing black snakes," Kambriel enthuses.

Regardless if it's a specialized piece for a high-profile client or a piece that resulted from her own inspiration, Kambriel says she likes different aspects of each item she creates.

"All of those have their positives, but I would say the one that least appeals to me is the mass-produced option," she says. "I have had many opportunities to go that route, and chose to keep things close at hand and close to heart. I like to have a personal hand in everything, so that my signature and spirit are retained in each and every piece released. There is a different energy within an item made with that kind of spirit versus something that is mass-produced in a faraway place..."

When not busy making new clothes for men and women, Kambriel also likes to put her personal touch into unique items for the home, such as accent pillows and quilts fit for a funeral.

"My main focus is still on the men's and women's clothing and accessories, and will remain as such," she says. "But our homes make up such a major part of our surroundings that I enjoy creating beautiful one of a kind pieces that people can use to surround themselves in a bit of luxury even when they're not necessarily all dressed up."

When it comes to getting decked out in your best Goth wear, comfort is often sacrificed for more aesthetic appeal. But one of the things that keep people coming back to Kambriel and her pieces is the comfort and quality she is able to provide.

"That is a wonderful compliment since I feel a person is at their most beautiful when they are comfortable on a variety of levels- physical and spiritual being among them," says Kambriel. "Blending opulence with comfort is an instinctual gift that comes from working with a sense of what it is I personally desire..."

Another common thread that is likely to continue being woven into Kambriel's designs is that longing for eras of long ago, when maidens wore ornate gowns and dresses of velvet and lace and their gallant male counterparts dressed in floor-length coats and frilly shirts. And it seems that Kambriel finds inspiration not only from classic works of art and literature, but also from her very surroundings. Based in Salem, Mass., there is definitely plenty of history from which to draw.

"I've been living in Salem since 1996," she says. "The building I work out of was built in 1805 and was written about in *The House of Seven Gables* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. There is a great deal of haunted history here. I am centered in the midst of an atmosphere of magic and it has given me a backdrop in which I can feel very comfortable to create."

And like a painter or a poet, Kambriel finds ways to transport those wearing her fashions to a special place by observing the world around her on a daily basis. While many designers cite other fashion gurus as an influence, Kambriel says she finds ways to make the natural (and supernatural) world around her come to life in other ways.

"I'm neither focused on historical reproductions, nor obsessed with the latest trends" she says. "All of what we see, hear, experience, and feel in our lives, past and present, blends together to form who we are as individuals. I follow my own internal barometer, and my inspirations will continue to emanate from a collage of past influences, current thoughts, and future dreams." ♦