

on set with
**THE DUPLASS
BROTHERS**

Scene

Louisiana's Entertainment Magazine

JULY 2010

THE GATES
open wide

SWIM IN STYLE
summer fashion

BROOKE WAGGONER
orchestral pop princess

plus:
JAZZ FEST
in review

**KRISTEN
STEWART**
from Twilight till Dawn

Helene Florence
NEW ORLEANS

HELENE *Florence*

by Lana Hunt

Last winter, Helene Florence, a New Orleans designer of one of a kind t-shirts and accessories, found herself in the presence of not only the president, but the entire Home Design team of Anthropologie. The team, who travels the world looking for new talent, came to New Orleans in search of local designers to begin creating pieces for the New Orleans location, opening this August at the Shops at Canal Place.

It was "a dream come true," according to Florence, a completely self-taught designer. "Anthropologie is the only big name store I shop in," she says, "and I kind of always dreamed about having my pieces in there, but how does one even make the introduction?"

Florence never actually envisioned working as a full time designer. "I always loved and appreciated textiles and fashion, but I have never studied anything formally," she said. After receiving dual BAs from St. Mary's College in Notre Dame and an MA from Duke in the early 1990s, Florence worked as a museum curator before a visit to Japan developed an appreciation that inspired a career change. Helene purchased some vintage kimonos at a flea market, falling in love with the fabric's delicate beauty.

"I started thinking about the fact that the Japanese rarely wear kimonos anymore, but they are so beautiful and intricate and have such rich history behind them." Helene loved the look of the kimonos, and began thinking of ways she could recycle the fabric into new, modern and wearable creations. "It's not just pretty fabric," she noted. "It's interesting. It has meaning."

Although extremely inspired, Helene did not immediately begin designing when she returned home. "I actually let the idea incubate for about ten years," she said. She informally played around with the fabrics and started making belts and necklaces to give as gifts. "It was the easiest way to get feedback," she said. With no formal training, Florence was unsure how to execute her design ideas. After time spent experimenting, some friends convinced her to have a trunk show about three years ago. "I made some embellished t-shirts, belts, a few chokers and cuff bracelets. They all sold really well... so I began having more trunk shows around town."

Her work caught the eye of Seema Sudan, a local knit-wear designer who has a great relationship with Anthropologie. "Seema put a list of local designers together who she thought they should see. She thought they may be interested in my things," Florence remembers. The president liked them so much she took a few of Helene's handmade t-shirts with her to see about mass production. Because of the nature of the original kimono fabric, reproduction was tricky. "They had to send the fabric to India to be re-created," Helene said. But they eventually got it right and two of Florence's designs were sold in over sixty-five retail locations around the country.

Over the past few months Florence has been spending her time designing for the opening of the New Orleans store. Some of her clothing items will be mass-produced, but the majority will be one-of-a-kind obi style belts and necklaces. Florence said the experience working with Anthropologie has been a dream. "They are a truly great company. I know what I do won't appeal to everyone, so it's been fun and interesting," she says. "It's nice that they are responding to it."



Helene Florence

photo by Sara Essex



Original handmade top by Helene Florence

ONE-OF-A-KIND BELTS BY HELENE:

