



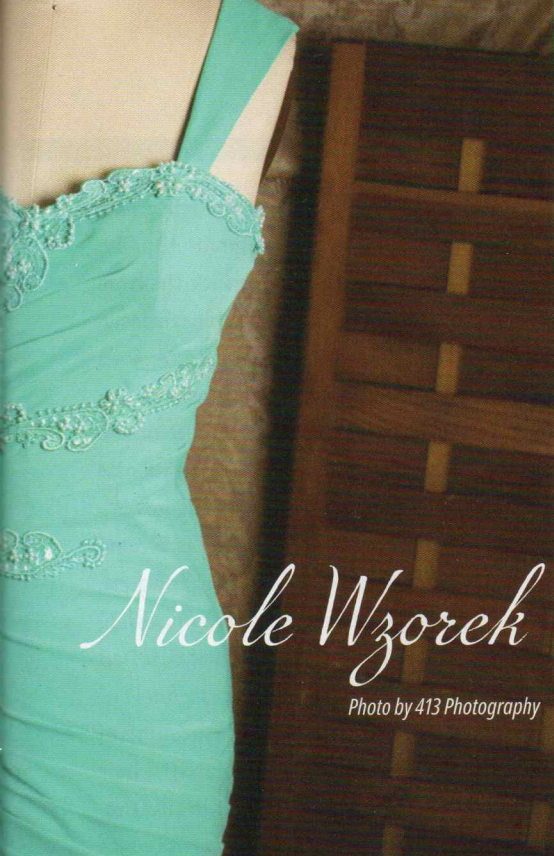
*Eleonora Ferragatta*

Photo by Rebecca Rose Fine Portraits



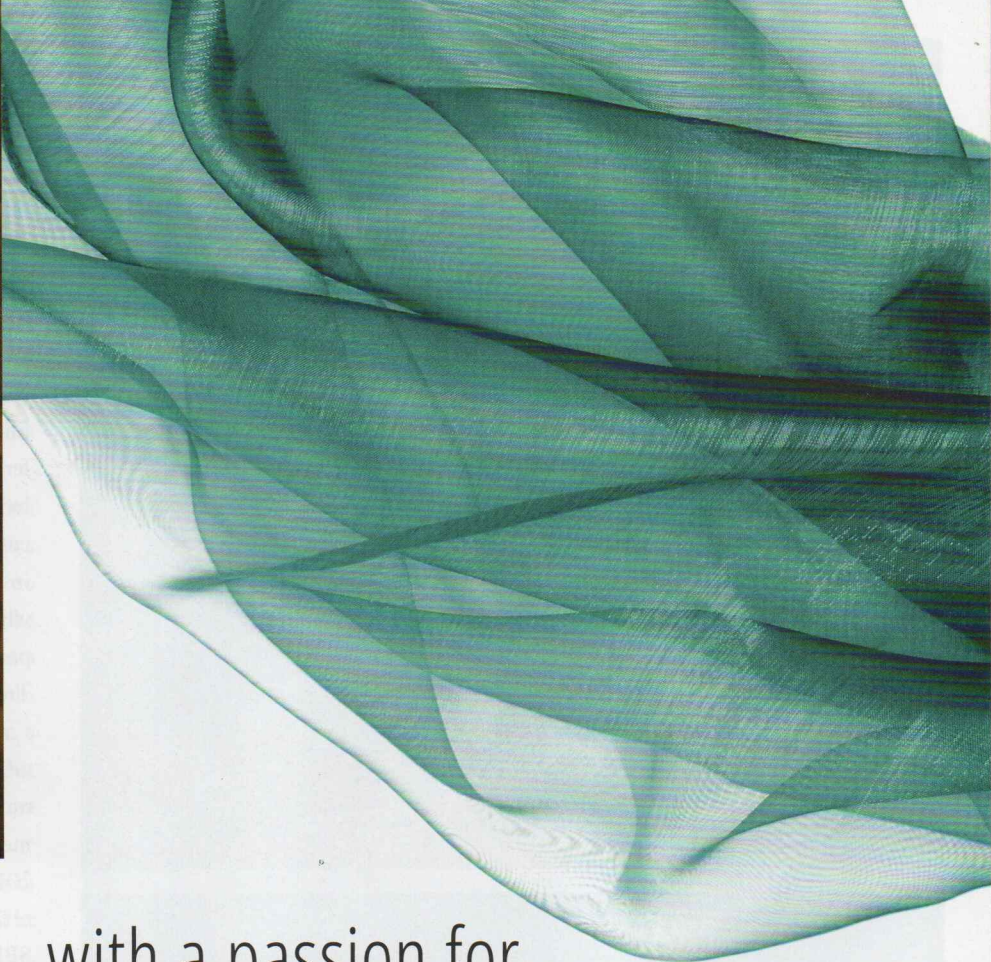
# *designing*





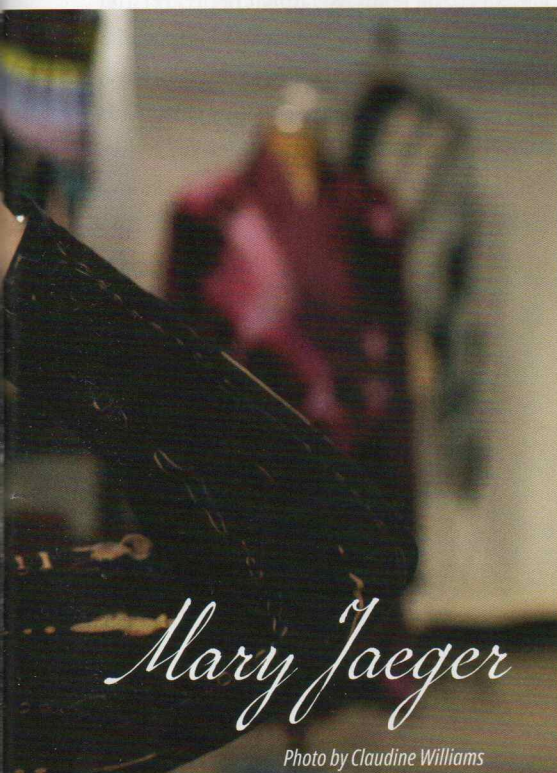
*Nicole Wzorek*

Photo by 413 Photography



women

with a passion for  
creating beautiful fashions



*Mary Jaeger*

Photo by Claudine Williams

*By Cris Cadiz*

Three women in the fashion industry, three experiences, one quest — to weave passion and fabric into meaningful, functional and beautiful design.

Eleonora Ferragatta of Pomfret, Mary Jaeger of Brooklyn, N.Y., and Nicole Wzorek of Westfield, Mass., have very different backgrounds in fashion but they share a mutual passion for design that has an impact.



Eleonora Ferragatta is a classically trained fine artist who takes her original oil paintings of lush floral designs and prints them on luxurious, sustainable and comfortable fabrics to create dresses, skirts, scarves, leggings and more. They are gorgeous limited edition works of art. She sells her eponymous brand online at [eleonora-ferragatta.com](http://eleonora-ferragatta.com) and in boutiques and showrooms in New York, Boston, California and Connecticut. Ferragatta's primary showroom is located in Stonington at the Blonde Hanger Boutique, which features her custom designed women's apparel and accessories (by appointment, call Diane Trone at 860-912-1566).

After several years of learning the best methods and technology to reproduce her paintings on fabric and finding a process that is environmentally friendly, she launched her brand in 2016. Ferragatta has found success in both the retail world and in the eyes of fashionistas. Her SPRING20 Collection was featured in both *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* this spring. Like many others, her small business stalled when the pandemic began.

"I was getting ready to launch my travel and lifestyle collection — which was in the works for almost a year — with Italian leather bags, wallets, scarves, and purses, but then COVID-19 hit, so everything was put on hold," she said. "All of our reps and boutique vendors were suspending custom orders due to supply



chain disruptions and were only selling off the rack. In the meantime, because of the huge demand and face mask shortages in the market, we started donating to help out, and eventually we started selling them.” Her business donated more than 1,000 masks to her local community, healthcare facilities and high risks populations all along the East Coast.

Ferragatta is currently in partnership with Dye Hard in Norwalk, working 16-hour days designing, and overseeing production of up to 20,000 personalized cloth masks per week. She has also helped keep seven cut and sew makers in Connecticut and New Jersey employed by subbing out part of the manufacturing. “It’s been a whirlwind, but we’re all trying our best to pivot quickly, to count our blessings, and to support each other during this very difficult time.”

Ferragatta’s thoughtful, passionate personality imbues her work and her message. “The bodyscape is my favorite living, breathing, walking, canvas,” she says on her website. “Art comes alive in new, thrilling, ways when worn by inspired (and inspiring) women. Each piece is handcrafted with love and reverence, in collaboration with our sustainable makers. I want each piece to be investment, something special that you can feel good about buying... wearable art crafted especially for you.”



**COUNTER-CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Eleonora’s new Travel & Lifestyle Collection features her custom-designed wearable art pieces from Italian leather totes, wallets, and cross body bags, to stylish sunglasses, silk scarves, luggage and holdalls. *Photo by Eleonora Ferragatta*; the “Eleonora,” an a-line, full-length, off-the-shoulder chiffon dress, with slip and sash, with the “Delphiniums” oil painting it’s based on. *Photo courtesy of Rebecca Rose Fine Portraits*; a close-up of Eleonora’s custom-designed metal hangtag featured on all Travel Collection pieces. *Photo by Eleonora Ferragatta*; part of a bespoke collection of leather purses with Eleonora’s distinctive hand-painted designs. *Photo by Eleonora Ferragatta*; the “Mercedes” knit maxi dress with slit, styled with matching Italian Leather Cross Body Bag With Nickel Plated Zipper & Chain Strap. *Photo by Geek Chic Photography*; the cover of Eleonora’s catalog features the “Dea”: a-line, full-length, special occasion chiffon dress with rushed neckline with “Primavera,” the oil painting that inspired it. *Photo by Rebecca Rose Fine Portraits*



Nicole Wzorek always loved being an artist... painting, sculpting, drawing, and more. When she went to college for fashion design and illustration, she thought her career would be drawing but then she fell in love with sewing. "I learned how to make gowns and found I enjoyed making the dresses more than drawing them. It's amazing to see an idea come to life in three dimensions with draping, pleating and all the details of handwork."

Seeing the look on a bride's face as a vision becomes reality is a delightful reward for Nicole. "I've always loved gowns and all the color of wedding celebrations. I like working with women. We never really think that we look that beautiful in the mirror. I want to help brides be beautiful on their special day."

Wzorek is a one-woman show, completing every step of each gown herself, from designing to cutting, fabric research to sewing, fittings to alterations. "When you work with me, you are supporting a small business," she says. Like Ferragatta, Wzorek made masks during the height of the pandemic. "I was able to donate my time and talent to local hospitals versus not doing anything. My sister asked me to make her a mask because she was pregnant. Then friends

and clients who knew nurses asked me to make them." Originally she donated her masks. Then she was featured on local news and NECN (New England News Channel) and got many requests for masks that she was able to sell. "It helped keep my business afloat, although brides were also keeping their appointments for a later date instead of canceling," she says. "I'm really happy to have loyal customers who are rescheduling now that things have opened up."

Wzorek's work is completely custom, whether a client comes to her with a picture and an idea, or they choose one of her sample gowns to make their own with choices of fabric, color, cut, and other details. She loves sharing the entire process with her clients, creating a personal and unique experience and a garment that looks and fits perfectly.

Wzorek also creates other wedding garments, special occasion dresses, accessories, custom lingerie and more. She specializes in non-traditional, colored wedding gowns, including dark blue or black. They are distinctive and extremely elegant. Her bespoke lingerie is both sexy and classy. She uses steel boning in all her corsets to ensure they last a long time.

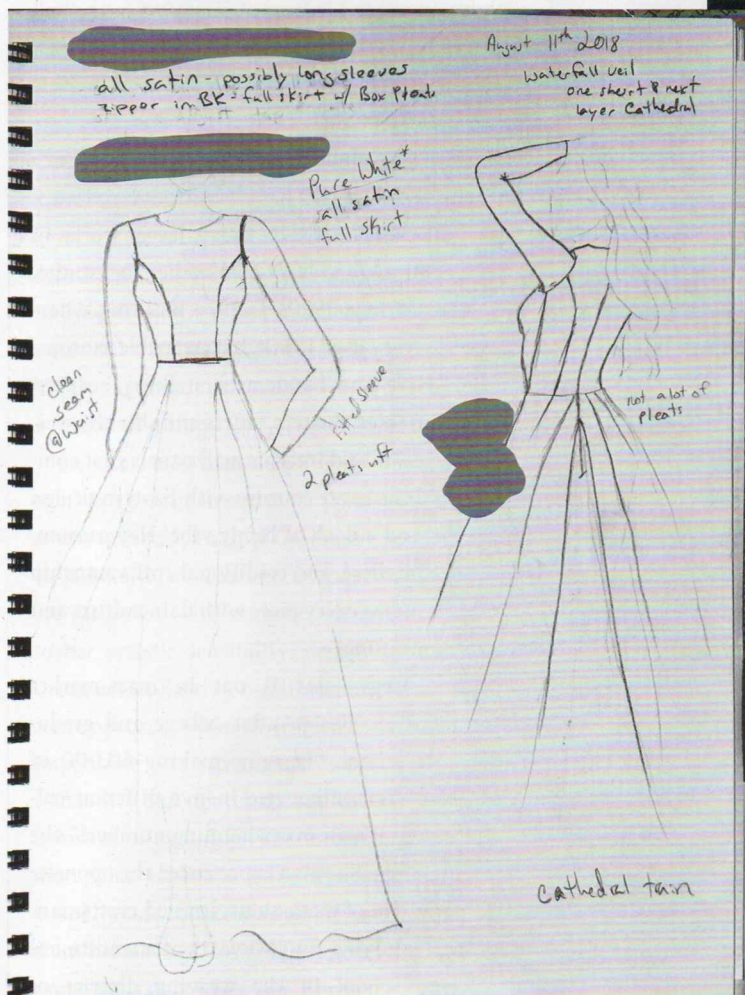
Every gown design begins with a consultation. Wzorek's studio is located in western Massachusetts. Clients can come to her or she is willing to travel to their location. "People often come to me because they can't find what they want in stores and I'll custom make it for them. Trying on sample dresses is another way to begin," she says. "Giving them a starting point is sometimes easier. Then they get to choose every detail in the process."

**LEFT:** Jessica models a unique black and white wedding dress, one of Wzorek's specialties. *Photo by Paris*



If you can't find what you want and it's not on my website, I can create it for you."

Wzorek's designs have been featured in fashion shows in Boston, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York, and before the pandemic began her goal was to get more work into boutiques. She currently has a trunk show at the Blonde Hanger Boutique at the Velvet Mills in Stonington, where people can try on samples. Her bridal collection and client showcase is also featured on [www.nicolewzorekdesigns.com](http://www.nicolewzorekdesigns.com).



**ABOVE:** An example of a sketch. Photo by Nicole Wzorek

**TOP RIGHT:** The bodice of a more traditional wedding gown. Photo by Nicole Wzorek

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Another unique wedding dress. Photo by Nicole Wzorek



**THIS PAGE:** Blue Threads poncho.

**OPPOSITE TOP LEFT:** Kyoto Mist cashmere Shawls.

**OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT:** Aqua Eyelash dusters.

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM:** Arch Quilted coats.

*Photos by Mary Jaeger*

Mary Jaeger made her first dress in first grade (“an A-line shift of white piqué with big red roses”). She also vividly recalls the gingerbread man ornament she crafted at age 4, a burgundy tweed hand-stitched with yellow yarn and lavender button eyes. “I cut it out of an old skirt of my mom’s. It’s a beautiful story because it’s about how we are looking at sustainability, upcycling and clothing and objects today. It’s a story of how you get on a quest at age four that puts you on a path for a lifetime.” At age 10 she saw a Japanese exhibition at the Madison Art Center. In the hall lined with Japanese woodblock prints, she saw one, stopped and said, “I want to go to this place where these beautiful women live.”

These impactful events during her youth in Wisconsin led her to study, live and work all over the world. Today, Jaeger works in Brooklyn, N.Y. Her atelier, or studio, is in a 1920s factory building where they used to stitch convertible car tops. Here she handcrafts striking scarves, dresses, dusters, shirts and shirtdresses, coats and interior wall panels that combine haute couture with Eastern design and a dash of hippy vibe. Her passion, intellect, and traditional craftsmanship imbue every piece with flair, culture and meaning.

Jaeger started out in mass-market fashion design after college and graduate school. “Imagine making 60,000 of the same silhouette in five different colors — it’s an overwhelming number!” she exclaims. She also experienced the opposite paradigm of meticulous, limited craftsmanship, studying for two years at a traditional dyeing school in the weaving district of Kyoto, learning Tegaki Yuzen (authentic Japanese drawing and dyeing techniques from the 1600s). After that, Jaeger was employed by Japanese companies that “taught me how to do mass market work at a different level with a sense of refinement.” After working in Asia and Europe for eight years, she returned home to start her own



collection. She eventually settled in New York City and launched an award-winning career creating highly artistic, thoughtful and wearable clothing.

Jaeger's "Accordion Silk Collection" is a continuation of her journey as an artist. Each of the dresses, jackets, dusters and neck wraps are fashioned with elements vital to her artistic sensibility: design that marries Eastern tradition and contemporary Western influence, impeccable craftsmanship, sustainability and upcycling, and the infusion of meaning. The Accordion Silks are made using repurposed, post-production remnants from her days of designing collections sold at her bespoke Spring Street store in NoLIta (NYC) and other places including ABC Carpet & Home. She experimented with pleating and dyeing the remnants to make a look that's both fluid and architectural. Then she wanted to take the design "from fashion to contemporary art context ... to have a deeper and more intrinsic meaning."



In addition to dynamic color, texture, shape, and movement of the fabric, each Accordion Silk item features a tangible message in "Words of Hope" discreetly embroidered on one of the pleats. According to Jaeger, "Each word has a particular meaning I want to share with the wearer. The words include love, compassion, peace, joy, happiness, courage and empathy. These messages are timely, yet timeless, and give a deeper meaning to the handwork, thought-process, care and time invested in the making of these individual clothing items in our era of mass markets, frenetic consumption and dismissive waste."

"My work extends beyond me," Jaeger says. "It's about my clients that want to wear something individual, that fits their personality and body, and has a timeless sense to it. That's what the Accordion pieces are." All of Jaeger's work is available online at [maryjaeger.com](http://maryjaeger.com) and can be shipped anywhere in the world. ■