

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE BEST KANSAS CITY HAS TO OFFER

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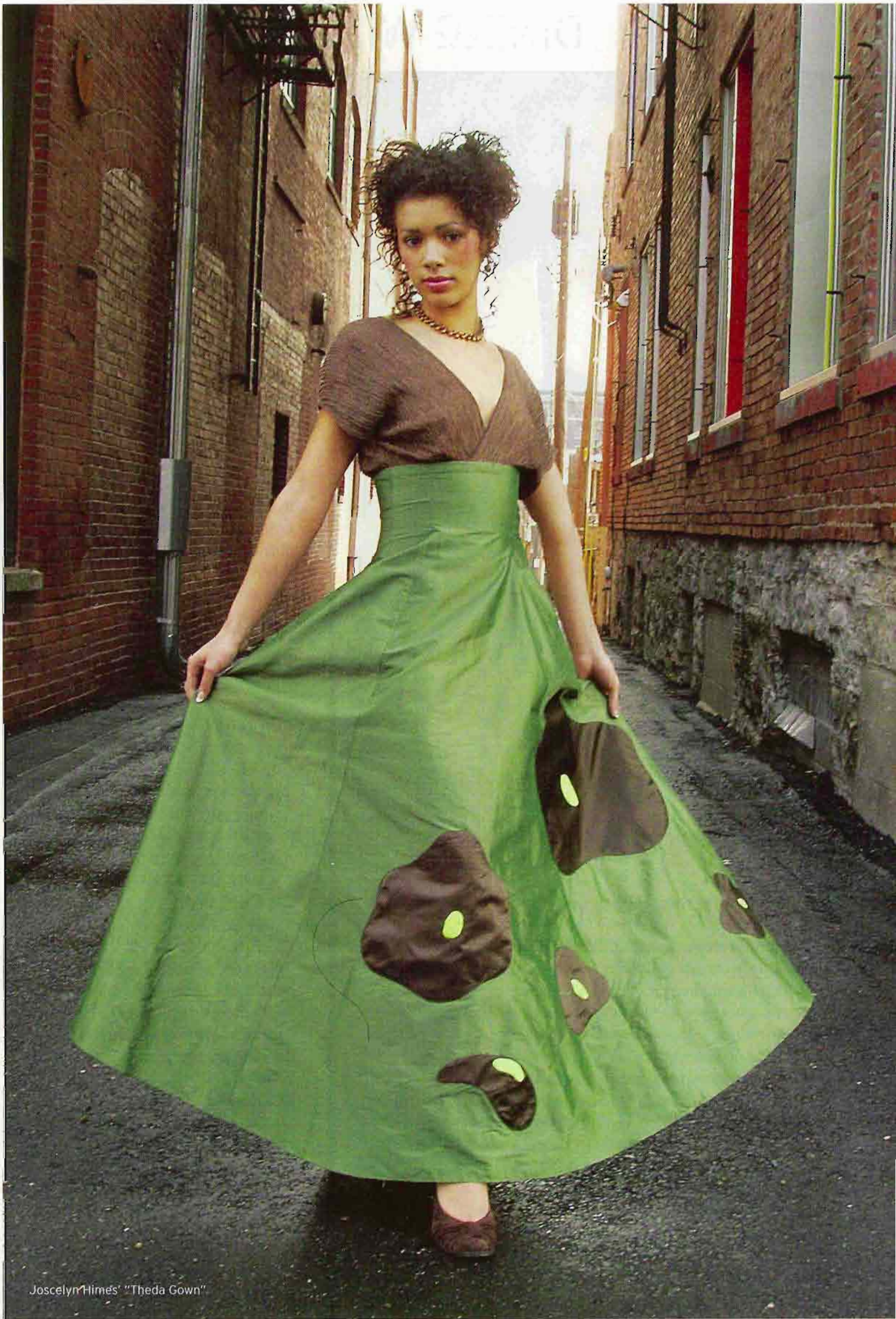
**FASHION IN THE
CROSSROADS
DISTRICT**

**ROB DALZELL
REINVENTS
K.C. CUISINE**

**BBQ&A WITH
THE EXPERTS**

**HOTSPOT:
THE COLLEGE
BASKETBALL
EXPERIENCE**

MIDWEST
AIRLINES



Joscelyn Himés' "Theda Gown"

KANSAS CITY'S CROSSROADS DISTRICT IS HOME TO
A TIGHTLY KNIT GROUP OF DESIGNERS.

BY SEANÁN FORBES

The Fabric of a Community

Young designers are flocking to Kansas City's Crossroads District to join what has become a thriving business. Thanks to generous grants from the city and ample support from established shops, many boutiques and art galleries are opening their doors to locals and visitors alike.

Peggy Noland, whose shop glows with the bright



colors of a 1960s Peter Max poster, says, "We are all so very reliant on each other. We need each other to survive." And she's not talking about foot-traffic. Noland has only been a professional designer for a year and a half and is already getting international recognition for

her colorful, irreverent looks. That would not be the case, however, if it weren't for the other designers with whom she shares the neighborhood. When she first came to the Crossroads District, she turned to fellow artists for inspiration and advice. There's certainly competition in the Crossroads area, but the support that designers give to each other is crucial. Peregrine Honig, who co-owns the lingerie shop birdies with her friend Corrie Van Ausdal, says that shop owners in the neighborhood are "in business together." It's this sense of community that has put the area squarely on the Midwest's fashion map.



Pendant by Robyn Nichols

birdies

116 W. 18th St.
816-842-2473
birdiespanties.com

Blooming Lotus

130 W. 18th St.
816-444-4735
bloominglotus.com

Nui Kai: Designer

Joscelyn Himes
130 W. 18th St.
816-471-2227
jhtextiles.com

Peggy Noland

124 W. 18th St.
816-221-7652
peggynoland.com

Robyn Nichols

1818 McGee St.
816-474-1731
robynnichols.com

Honig says that the whole of Kansas City has given her a lot of support—and not just small business assistance. According to Honig, the city is incredibly generous with arts grants, which is an extra boost to many Kansas City's fashion and jewelry designers who are traditional artists in addition to their trades.

Joscelyn Himes' work combines fine art and fashion-forward sensibilities, employing techniques like staining silks with rust. She esteems ancient skills, and her work is heavily influenced by Asian art. Her current designs incorporate both *obis* (the belt used to tie a kimono) and Japanese stitching. Himes' background in sculpture constantly reveals itself in the way she builds—really a more accurate word than sews—her garments, which are curved into graceful lines. Himes, who makes bespoke and limited-run pieces, says she thinks kinetically: For her, it's more important how a dress looks on a woman than on a hanger. The designer—who has worked with Vera Wang, Donna Karan and Bill Blass—came to Kansas City to study art, and she never left.

It's common to find designers in the Crossroads District who are not originally from the area but moved here to attend the Kansas City Art Institute. They stay because, for them, this is the best place to work as both business-people and designers.

But in a city where customers were accustomed to shopping in malls, Noland says, it was necessary to teach people how to shop in a boutique. It is a different experience, simultaneously more intimate and elegant. The designers and their employees get to know shoppers and their preferences. From a buyer's perspective, shopping at a boutique in the Crossroads District is like having an art concierge in every store. Thankfully, Kansas Citians quickly took to the area's small shops.

Honig remembers it wasn't easy in birdies' early days. The shop featured one table, and all of the stock was on

display. "If you didn't see it," she says, "we didn't have it."

But Honig and Van Ausdal worked out a system: They bought plain underwear, which they designed and embellished, doing all of the work themselves. As soon as their budget increased, they increased their stock by purchasing work from other underwear designers in the area. Now, three of the women they first bought inventory from have LLCs in their own rights. Kansas City's closet-sized boutiques like to spread their bounty.

It's not only clothing, either. Kansas City houses the likes of organic bath and body product producer Blooming Lotus and a number of jewelry designers. Robyn Nichols, who studied at the Kansas City Art Institute, is a self-taught metalworker. She makes one-of-a-kind and limited-edition pieces in sterling silver alongside her two apprentices. Like the Crossroads' other designers, she is continuously investing in her business and in the future of the region.

While the designers are happy where they are, their work moves beyond the city's borders. Himes is moving into creating a national design line, Nui Daily Couture. And birdies' Panty of the Month Club (where subscribers get monthly deliveries) has clients all over the world.

Despite being successful far beyond the Crossroads' borders, these designers have no plans to leave their beloved Kansas City. As Himes observes, the city "offers a good lifestyle for the amount

of money you make." In Kansas

City, both the cost of living and the cost of running a business are much lower than other art capitals. This provides artists the chance to quickly see profits and live a life far more comfortable than their struggling peers in expensive coastal cities. And with

the designers spending less time worrying about making ends meet, they can spend more time making the kind of creative clothes for which Kansas City has become known. ■

