

The Roanoke Times

[Roanoke.com](http://www.roanoke.com)

Sunday, December 30, 2007

Dress designer's skills earn study trip to Paris

The Tech student created a modern dress resembling the Victorian bustle.

By [Lindsay Key](#)

381-1671

When Mariah Clarke decided to sew the late 19th century and modern day together, her efforts did not go unnoticed.

The International Textile and Apparel Association recently awarded the Virginia Tech student the Paris American Academy 2007 scholarship for her gown design, "Victorian Rose."

Clarke, a senior from Greenwood majoring in apparel, housing and resource management, created the dress for a historical costume class at Tech.

"Our assignment was to take a historical garment and make it modern," Clarke said. "We had to pick a time period and decide which elements we wanted to keep and which we wanted to change."

Growing up, Clarke said she was fascinated by the late 19th century and admired prints by Louis Antoine Godey, an American editor and publisher who created a women's fashion magazine. The era was noted for dresses with bustles, or cushioning under the back of a woman's skirt.

As Clarke was beginning her project, she realized that she had yet to see a modern dress that resembled the bustle dresses she loved.

"I have seen modern dresses which resemble the Renaissance styles, full skirts that almost mock the early Victorian period and many with empire waists which resemble the early 19th century, but I have never seen modern dresses which resemble the bustle dresses," she wrote in a paper describing her work. "They just don't fit our modern silhouette."

But Clarke was determined to create a dress resembling the Victorian bustle that could be worn today. First, she decided which elements really made the bustle dress "so spectacular and breathtaking." These she wanted to keep.

"I wanted my new dress to maintain the close-fitting front which is pulled up to the back as though it was going to go over the bustle," Clarke described in her paper. "I also wanted to keep the main attention of the dress where the bustle would have been."

Clarke also decided to keep the time period's fitted bodice, traditional collar and intricate piping detail.

But she removed the actual bustle and the sleeves, and she left the collar as part of a halter.

After the finished product made it through the first round of competition in June, it caught the eye of ITAA judges at a conference that Clarke attended in November. There, she was awarded the Paris American Academy scholarship, a design award ITAA offers to an undergraduate student for his or her creativity and innovation.

"Mariah's design is absolutely a one-of-a-kind gown, and she did a stunning job obtaining design inspiration from historic costumes of the Victorian era. Her construction skills and techniques leave no room for error and academic professionals and industry members at the conference highly commended her visual design and the quality of the construction process," Jihyun Kim, assistant professor of apparel, housing, and resource manager and Clarke's adviser, said in a news release.

As a recipient of the scholarship, Clarke will study at the academy for four weeks this summer. She'll particularly study haute couture sewing, or high-fashion, custom-fitted sewing, which she plans to incorporate into her custom dressmaking business, Mariah Amine Couture.

She started it last summer to have it ready when she graduates from Tech in May. She plans to work from her home in Greenwood when she returns from Paris, she said. Although she hasn't determined a price range yet, one thing is for sure: Each dress will be one of a kind.

"I want to establish a business that will be successful and create works of art on an individual scale for clients," she said.

On the Net: www.mariahamine.com

THE ROANOKE TIMES
roanoke.com

Copyright © 2008