

Live from New York City

September 2003:
Fashion Week in
New York City. The
world's hottest
designers are
introducing their
spring 2004
collections. Couture
designer Michael
Kaye is enjoying the
buzz and we were
there to shoot it.

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Kaye grew up in Edmonton, Alberta and got his start making ball gowns for debutantes attending the local Johann Strauss Ball. He remembers sketching wedding gowns from an early age. "It probably sounds weird, but I loved weddings. I'd go just to see the gowns. Then in high school, I was an escort for a debutante at the Strauss Ball. The next year I did my first gown for one of the debutantes and by my sixth year, I did gowns for eight of the 24 debutantes."

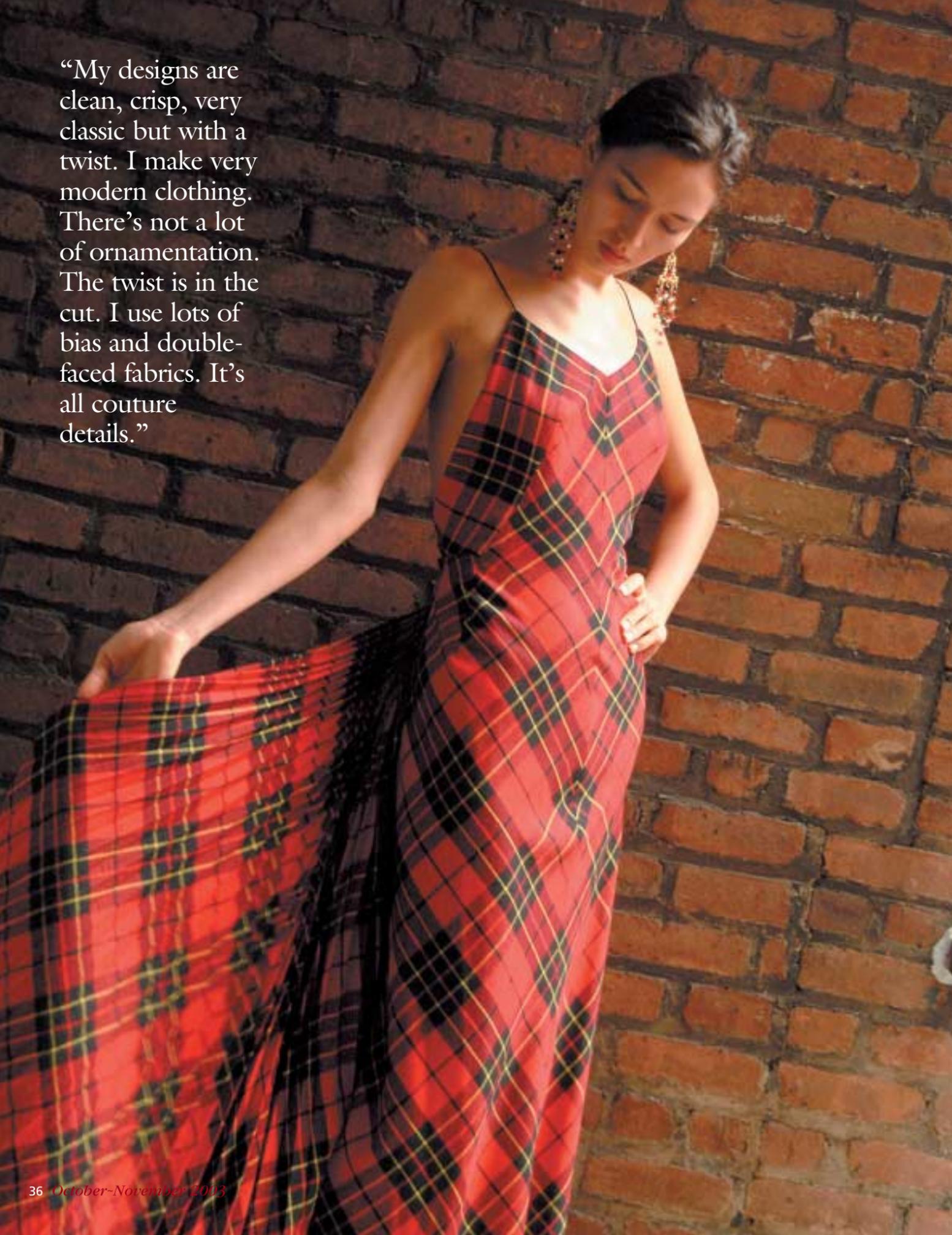
In 1989, Kaye took a leap of faith and applied to New York's prestigious Fashion Institute of Technology. He got in. It would be easy to say the rest is history, but this isn't a fairy tale. Kaye did what so many 'overnight successes' have done – he worked hard. He poured his passion and energy into his designs and paid the bills by working in "every price point in the garment industry."

He turned to couture about three years ago. Couture refers to individually made, individually fitted garments, one-of-a-kinds, made specifically for one person. "It's the most laborious technique in making clothing. There's a minimum of machine sewing and a lot of hand sewing. You do several fittings. It's hours and hours and hours of work, but the pay off is that my clients don't see each other coming and going at parties or social engagements."

"I do a lot of taffeta. I do a lot of tartan. I use the finest, most luxurious, most sumptuous fabrics."



“My designs are clean, crisp, very classic but with a twist. I make very modern clothing. There’s not a lot of ornamentation. The twist is in the cut. I use lots of bias and double-faced fabrics. It’s all couture details.”



Kaye’s progression into couture designer was a combination of necessity, fate and luck. His employer was moving to Florida and Kaye wanted to stay in New York, so he found himself without a job. Tiffany & Co. commissioned him to make seven gowns to accompany one of their touring jewellery displays around the country. Then a good friend called him up, in need of a special gown for a social engagement.

“I did a tartan gown for her. She wore it out and of course people asked about it. I’ve been getting calls ever since.”

It was the start of Michael Kaye Couture. The gown is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Costume Institute. It’s part of a collection of more than 75,000 costumes and accessories from five different continents and seven different centuries. It is also in esteemed company: Coco Chanel, Dior, Givenchy and Saint Laurent are just some of the haute couture names represented.

“The recognition [I received] for that gown introduced me to a whole new echelon of people. I’ve dressed some pretty big names,” Kaye says. While some insist on their privacy, he can say he’s dressed celebrities such as Alden Lagasse, Emeril Lagasse’s wife, Lucy Arnez and Katie Couric. His designs have also been featured in major magazines, including Martha Stewart Weddings, Town and Country, In Style and Vogue



“I stand outside that building and think, ‘oh my god, I’m in there. My gown is in the permanent collection of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I’m in there with Picasso, Van Gogh and all these world famous artists.’”

One of the biggest boosts to his career, however, has been dressing New York socialite Cece Cord. Cord was a perennial on New York’s best dressed fashion list until they finally inducted her into the fashion hall of fame. “Cece has been wearing my clothes for about two years now. She used to wear only James Galanos. Since he’s retired, I’ve been very lucky and fortunate to dress her. When people ask, she says she wears vintage James Galanos and contemporary Michael Kaye. It’s been great for me.”

With his star on the rise in the elite world of couture fashion, Kaye continues to draw

inspiration from living in New York. “I live in the greatest city in the world. There’s never a dull moment.” And every once in a while, especially when he’s walking his dog past the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he ponders on how far he’s come.

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