

Success a pattern for Sointula businesswoman



Photo — Courtesy Kathleen Cheetham

Kathleen Cheetham on the Craftsby set where she has taught a series on pattern and fitting techniques.

By Kathy O'Reilly

For many women finding clothing that fits can be a challenge, even more so for those who have petite size figures with extra curves.

For years, petite women have made do with tugging, gaping, baggy, out of proportion clothes.

Enter Kathleen Cheetham and her company Petite Plus Patterns.

Cheetham has a business background and worked in the accounting field until at age 40, she made the decision to go back to college and study fashion.

"I studied full-time for two years at Kwantlen University College (Richmond, BC) and earned an Associate's Degree in Clothing & Fashion Technology," she said.

"While studying and after graduating, I worked in factories, ready-to-wear and the film industry."

While working in film industry, Cheetham had the opportunity to build costumes for some made-for-TV movies and weekly series that were filmed in the Vancouver area.

"As a seamstress, I rarely

worked directly with the cast, but would say hello now and then," she said.

A few series were The Adams Family, Cold Squad and Breaker High "where I sometimes chatted with a young and very nice Ryan Gosling", she said.

"Most of these shows used ready-to-wear garments that had to be modified or altered to fit and I really learned a lot about the craft of sewing and fitting onto different body types."

One company she worked for specialized in plus-sized ladies wear.

While she liked what they were doing for women who were "grand", she noticed that smaller, petite-framed ladies were not being served.

"I really wanted to create my own line of ready-to-wear for these ladies - the petite-plus, but after doing a business plan, realized that financially, I couldn't pull it off. I shelved the idea, but soon got the idea to create garment patterns for those who sew."

Existing commercial sewing patterns were not serving the petite-plus niche either and ladies who sew were faced with making extraneous adjustments to their patterns before they would fit.

"The scale and proportion on these patterns were all for taller, more slender women and the adjustments needed to adapt to a petite-plus were really difficult," Cheetham said.

She began to create patterns from scratch with the right fit and design scale for "little round women".

The company's "look" is classic and includes basics with clean lines that people can dress up or down with fabric and accessories.

With only minor adjustments, if any, her patterns fit a plus-sized, 5 foot 2 inch woman just right, right out of the envelope.

"I launched Petite Plus Patterns in 1999 after developing the first six patterns while working at my sewing and alterations business."

She sells the patterns to brick and mortar fabric stores and directly to sewers by mail through her website. Petite Plus Patterns has customers around the world.

"In our custom clothing business, we've seen lots of fit challenges.

"That's why we offer custom fitting advice within our patterns or on our website," she said.

The end result is that sewers have the power to make clothes that are just right.

Cheetham and her husband Dan moved to Sointula from the Greater Vancouver area in 2007.

Her husband is retired, however Cheetham continues with her business in Sointula.

Her office is located in a two-room addition to the couple's home, and her sewing studio is ensconced in a cabin on the property.

"It is a wonderful community to live in and so long as I have telephone, Internet and a post office, I can continue happily with my pattern-making business."

When she changed careers at 40, there was a popular mantra; "Do what you love and the money will follow".

"I love what I do. The ideas come naturally and although I've worked hard, somehow it's always felt nurturing and fun. I don't feel like I'm working. To see my customers enjoy what I enjoyed creating is wonderfully satisfying."

For more information visit www.petitepluspatterns.com



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