

Pillow talk

Designer **Sylvie Guieysse** indulges her love of color and textures in her delightful pillow collections.

Parisian-born Sylvie Guieysse began her career 12 years ago in Paris as a theater costume designer while attending fashion classes at night. Moving on from that genre, she launched a men's and women's couture line from her home. But always intrigued by the power of color, the influence of geometric lines and curves and the abundant access to textures and textiles from all over the world, Sylvie decided to concentrate on home accessories, resulting in Sylvie Guieysse Pillows LLC, established in 2007, in New York City. "I feel as if pillow shapes have been given to me in the same way that a painter is given a frame; they are the starting point for my vision," she says.

Writer and editor Kitty Cox interviews the designer:

Q: What were your earliest fashion and/or design influences?

A: I've always been fascinated by "enfants terribles" designers, such as Jean Paul Gaultier, Issey Miyake and Alexander McQueen. At the end of the 90s, when I was entering the fashion field, I found their mixing of tradition with contemporary styles, both in fashions and theater costumes, irreverent, lavish and unconventional. Their creations always told a story by mixing fabrics and cultural influences and I've been strongly affected by their work. Having lived in Paris, Moscow and New York City, I truly believe we are all a mix of the influences that rule our lives. And right now, New York City is the best place to understand this.

Q: Where did you attend fashion school and what type of classes did you concentrate on?

A: The first school I attended in Paris was AICP, renowned for its tailor-based pattern-making techniques. I attended classes daily for eight hours, seven days a week and then took tailoring at night from eight until eleven. It was grueling! Once I graduated, I worked as a costume designer for a friend who was directing a Shakespearean play. I also received a terrific creative education when I worked on puppet shows (based on Japanese adult-sized puppets) and circus costumes. During this time, I still took fashion classes part time and found that textile design was, above all, my favorite.

Q: You launched a couture line when in Paris. When was that and what type of fashions were they?

A: At the end of 1997, I set up my own fashion company, Sylvie Guieysse. I wanted to design clothes that were colorful, fun and told a story, not only for women, but also for men—apparel that reflected Paris at the time. When I put on fashion shows, my actor friends were the models—they were contemporary and natural, complementing my styles. I didn't try to sell to stores, but only to my own network. I decided, after eight collections, that what I really loved was to organize fashion shows, so I worked freelance for a special events company designing décor for five years, while still keeping my hand in creating costumes and apparel.



From top to bottom: "Wolf" in cotton and suede, from the Jungle collection; "Tea Ceremony" in printed cotton, from the Far East collection; "Savannah" in pure cotton, a new addition to the Birds collection; "Sunny Day" in cotton and suede, from the Birds collection.



La Joyeuse Couterière, designer Sylvie Guieysse, is happiest when she's creating her delightful pillows.

Q: Were your home accessory lines launched when you came to live and work in New York City?

A: My husband and marketing “coach,” Antoine Gervais, whom I met while in Moscow, got a job in New York City in October, 2005. For a while, I found work as a stylist for various photographers, as a manager in a French restaurant and finally tried my hand at designing home décor with a focus on pillows, my first love. I launched Sylvie Guieysse Pillows in October, 2007, and recently incorporated in January, 2008.

Q: You discovered the original craft of Central Asian tapestries while on many visits to Samarkand, Bukhara and other lands. What qualities attracted you the most and how have you translated them into your own creations?

A: When living in Moscow in 1995 and 1996, I traveled a lot and became friends with the director of the cultural center in Uzbekistan. She has worked hard to keep the Suzani tapestry craft viable, along with other indigenous crafts from this area. All are now finding popularity with collectors, decorators and designers. There is a wonderful balance in these intricate designs, which I am always trying to capture. I try to pick different fabrics that give a strong impression when used together, just like the tapestries. It's a wonderful source for meditation.

Q: You have said that pillows are a natural evolution of your past artistic work. Could you elaborate on this, please?

A: Designing apparel was satisfactory, but mixing fabrics, colors and textures is more important to me. My grandmother was a good seamstress and loved creating clothes

Shopping Details

Sylvie Guieysse Pillows can be found on www.sylvie-pillows.com and at the following stores.

Nest

172A Ninth Ave.
New York, NY 10011
www.nestinteriorsny.com

Home & Haven

177 Smith St.
Brooklyn, NY 11201-6408
www.homehavennyc.com

Flirt

303 Third Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11215-1814
www.flirt-brooklyn.com

Diva Desires

687A Washington Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11238-4005
www.divadesires.com

Hammertown

Montgomery Row
6422-3 Montgomery St.
Rhinebeck, NY 12572-1356
www.hammertown.com

Galatea Linen

1218 Washington St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5470
www.galateastores.net

Main Street Gallery

486 Main St.
Prince Frederick, MD
20678-4180
410/535-3334

for people. But for me, I find that in designing pillows, the shape is a given—a blank space I can fill with anything. And since there's a wealth of fabrics out there, giving names to my various collections keeps me focused.

Q: I like the idea that you hold “salons” at your studio on a regular basis to showcase your home lines. How often do you have them, who attends and has this helped your business grow?

A: This has resulted from the French influence of inviting friends and neighbors over to casually see my latest creations. I like to network this way in order to better understand my market and listen to what others—maybe future customers—have to say. I hold my salons once or twice a month in my apartment/studio. In holiday seasons, I have them twice a week. But to find retailers I bang on doors and show at the NY International Gift Show in the Handmade section twice a year. For on-going inspiration, I visit textile suppliers in New York City, search the Internet and travel to visit fashion centers and museums everywhere.

Q: Can you share what new ideas or collections you are planning to launch in the near future?

A: Retailers have been asking for table and bed linens, but these take a long time to sew, since I make everything myself, and these products must be washable. The types of fabrics needed, if they are up-scale and still priced realistically, are hard to find. The same goes for scented pillows, since the filling ingredients must be special and pleasing.

Q: What do you enjoy doing in your “spare” time?

A: What is that? I try not to work on the weekends in order to create a good balance. My husband and I love to walk for three to four hours at a time, exploring not only the City, but also other boroughs, especially Brooklyn. We'll travel anywhere for a good restaurant! And just because I can, I like taking an afternoon off, spending time with friends in a café. I have also been a fencer for years—starting when I was ten years old—since I never wanted to dance, nor play soccer or judo. I have entered competitions, but at this point in my life, I just enjoy this demanding sport as a very physical exercise.