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**Lafayette Mom Launches Customizable Dress Line for Little Girls**

By Clare Varellas



Dresses designed by girls, ages 3-6, as part of the new Isabel Azam girls' fashion line. Photos provided

For several years now, 4-year-old Persia Naasz has eagerly followed the annual production of her very own, personalized "birthday party dress" by her mother, designer and previous fashion teacher Jaleh Naasz.

"She was really into the process," said Jaleh Naasz. "She would go fabric shopping with me, I would let her pick her own fabric, and then she'd wake up in the morning and go check on me and be like, 'Are you done with my dress yet?'"

So when Naasz's friends on social media expressed their interest in having similar custom-made clothing for their own daughters, Naasz, who holds a master's degree in fashion from the Academy of Art in San Francisco, considered stitching together a business plan for a girls' fashion line.

After a year of planning and a month of work at the sewing machine, Naasz is completing the final touches on the line's first collection: a group of 20 girls' dresses completely designed by the daughters of her friends, all aged between 3 and 6. The custom-made collection is to be shown at the line's first fashion show at Hacienda de las Flores in Moraga on July 22.

"The girls have been picking flowers to put on there, and my daughter has a complete opinion about which flowers go exactly where, and if you move them around, she'll notice," said Naasz.

Personal customization, according to Naasz, is one of the highlights of her new line, which she calls Isabel Azam after the middle names of Persia and her younger daughter, Raven, 1. So, she says, is sustainability and awareness of how clothing is made.

"You have no idea who made your clothes," said Naasz. "You have no idea what their living situation is like, and they'll continue to take those jobs because we continue to buy [clothing] from the stores."

Learning how clothes are made begins when girls between the ages of 3 and 12 receive a dress kit in the mail in which they are given a brief page of information about clothing production, along with an envelope in which to send back their fabric of choice, measurements, and dress style choices. Upon receiving the fabric, Naasz plans to update a daily blog with the progress of all dresses currently in production, so girls can monitor the stages of sewing. Eventually, the dresses are to be shipped back in big red boxes with personalized tags.

Naasz hopes that the process will instill in girls an understanding of how much effort and time goes into making clothing, especially in an era in which children around their age labor in factories across the world to produce the clothing easily available in stores. In addition, she hopes to decrease body image issues by making girls clothes that work best for their figures.

"I really need to get the message across that you're not just buying a dress; you're buying an experience," said Naasz. "And when you're done with it, your child should have learned a little bit about fashion and where clothes come from, the mom would have had a little bit of a bonding experience with the child, and they both [will have] had to practice patience."

Laura Kelly, one of Naasz's friends and the daughter of fashion show participant Mae Kelly, 3, said she learned lessons of her own when Mae demonstrated a desire to make her own design decisions about her dress. But ultimately, she said, it was an empowering experience for her daughter, who was able to choose exactly how she wanted to present herself.

"I went into it kind of with some ideas of how I thought the dress would end up being like, and the dress has ended up not being at all like that," said Kelly. "It was an experience for me having to think this is about her, not about me. I was really pleased because when we saw the dress yesterday, it was beautiful."

*The first fashion show of Isabel Azam will be held at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 22 at Hacienda de las Flores. It is open to the public, but RSVPs via the Facebook event page (https://www.facebook.com/pages/Isabel-Azam/140688416433) or email (jaleh.naasz@gmail.com) are requested, as the event will be limited to 200 guests.*



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