

Romi Loch Davis

When have you decided you wanted to become a clothing designer?

I always used to cut up my mother's table cloths and discard my beautiful smock dresses to make my own clothes as a young girl, and I guess that ultimately led to my starting my own little thing in Paris. I had two shops over the years, one in the Marais, and then one in Saint Germain des pres.

Where does your inspiration generate from?

I have always loved the same things colours, textures, moods, fabrics ... I am still moved by the same atmospheres as when I was a young girl growing up in South Africa where we did not have a culture of labels and aspirations to possess big names: one had to almost create one's own canons of aesthetic or creative expression, look into oneself and draw on oneself rather than emulate. In many ways I feel this freed one's mind from a certain form of conditioning and one could read books to learn about European clothing, culture and costume history and have a framework of reference points.

Unique is the perfect adjective for your couture.

I work in a very visceral and emotional way. Some people find that disconcerting, I believe. But then exploring beauty is disconcerting and can therefore be a regenerative force in a powerful manner. Many pieces are one-offs and custom made, and I am obsessive about the quality of fabrics and the making up of garments. Studio hours would be impossible to count, so I suppose we work in a way that is anti the fashion system of today. Actually, I barely even know what trends there are... I have exquisite fabrics, including brocades from Rafael Català, the great Spanish brocade maker, who tragically had to shut down after centuries of making cloth for the royal family and the clergy. Few people are interested in these things today, but when people are they are truly passionate about them.

What other materials and fabrics do you choose for your pieces?

Brocades, mousselines, velvets, denim "nobilitato" or "anoblie", that we ennoble, to express it as the Italians and French do. I have a collection of passamaneria handbags that are made in one of the last passamaneria studios, and beaded jewellery made by zulu women in South Africa who continue their extraordinary traditional craft. I feel and hear the way these various fabrics and objects resonate amongst each other.

After South Africa, and after Paris, you chose Venice for your home. Why?

Out of mad love for this city and Italy in general. Venice blows me away every day of my life, her beauty reconciles me with the world and her artisanal traditions are a source of never ending wonder ... her cultural crucible is vertiginous.