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Designer gowns take different roads to ball

*Christie Vilasck talks with designer Sarah Dornink while she tries on her one-of-a-kind inauguration dress for the final time. Vilsack commissioned Dornink and her mother Faythe to make her dress, because she wanted it to be something special and made from Iowa. The shop “Dornink” is on East Grand.*

Two inaugural balls goers opt for custom dresses – one’s timeless, one’s....a T-shirt

A one-of-a-kind even calls for a one-of-a-kind dress.

That is exactly the thinking of two women attending two very different inaugural balls next week.

Neither Christie Vilsack, on her way to Washington, D.C. for an official presidential inaugural ball next Tuesday nor Kathi Slaughter, who is co-hosting the Yes We Can...Party at The Des Moines Club the same evening, will have to worry about running into doppelgänger on their special nights. Both women had dresses custom-made.

Former Iowa first lady Vilasck chose local designer Sarah Dornink to create her gown. Vilsack and her husband, Tom, whose Secretary of Agriculture confirmation hearing begins Wednesday, will attend the Midwest Inaugural Ball in Washington, D.C. next Tuesday. The Midwest ball is one of 10 official balls in Washington that night.

Made of blue-green silk faille, Vilsack’s ball gown is floor length with a v-neck and three banded waist detail. The  $\frac{3}{4}$  length sleeves feature covered buttons.

Vilsack stopped by Dornink 518 E. Grand Ave in the East Village last Friday to try on her dress a final time before taking it home.

“I love that the dress is just as beautiful on the inside as it is on the outside,” Vilsack said, indicating the craftsmanship of the dress.

Dornink, who opened her shop in May 2008 with her mother, Faythe, said the dress was a collaborative effort. Both she and Faythe worked on the construction and Sarah did most of the top stitching and the covered buttons.

Vilsack, who is working on the Iowa Initiative in an office in the East Village, said she walks by the Dorninks’ shop a few times a week. She decided to go in one day after seeing a beautiful bridal gown in the window. Inside, she connected with Faythe Dornink. Vilsack then remembered meeting Faythe Dornink in 1999 when she re-created Beulah Hubbell’s wedding dress. She then asked the two to create her inaugural ball gown.

Vilsack already had the color in mind, and Sarah Dornink drew up some sketches. They settled on the design and material, and the finished product was much to Vilsack's liking.

"My only request was something pretty and simple," she said. "I wanted it to be something timeless, that I could wear again."

Vilsack will pair the dress with a gold and pearl necklace from Elements, a jewelry store in the Shops at Roosevelt, a black formal coat – that Dornink added a button to, and shoes that she already had in her closet.

"It's not a good idea to wear new shoes when you're going to be dancing all night," she said.

The Dorninks also provided her an emergency dress repair kit, complete with scissors, thread and some extra buttons in case of any mishap on ball night.