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Dorninks debut first clothing line in business launch

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Unique lines, beautiful fabrics and attention to detail all came together Saturday for Faythe and Sarah Dornink as they unveiled their first ready-to-wear clothing line on Saturday, following months of work by the mother-daughter business, Dornink Des Moines-New York.

The two women held their **debut** event at the Hohberger Building in Des Moines' East Village, surrounded by buyers, clients and friends sipping champagne and listening to music. For Faythe, this marks the continued evolution of her custom sewing business. And for Sarah, a 2003 graduate of Manhattan's Fashion Institute of Technology, it was a stepping-off point for her career in the fashion industry. "I just knew that my end of the business needed more help to continue to grow, because I was at the limit in what I could do," said Faythe, company president. "I needed help in other areas, and her design is a perfect fit."

Faythe began her custom sewing business approximately 23 years ago, as she left her career as a teacher to stay home with her three children. Having already designed and made her own dress clothes, she started with one friend as a client and began adding to that list. Now, three-quarters of her business comes from weddings – formal wear for brides, mothers of the bride, flower girls and bridesmaids. In 1999, she created a replica of Buelah Hubbell's 1899 Victorian bridal gown for a re-enactment of the wedding at Terrace Hill.

With three children around the house, they were all asked to help out in some way or another. Faythe's son even made a business out of it, presenting her with a bill for picking up sewing pins. But Sarah, Faythe said, was always the one who showed the most interest in her mother's craft.

"She never sewed for me, but she was always interested in fabric and design," she said.

"I was a little girl surrounded by her sewing all the time," Sarah said. "I took sewing lessons, but I kicked and screamed about it."

Indeed, Sarah had a different career path in mind when she attended the University of Iowa. She enrolled in pre-medical courses, took the Medical College Admission

Test and applied to medical school.

“But one day it hit me that I wasn’t happy doing it and it wasn’t going to make me happy in the long run,” Sarah said. “That day that I decided I didn’t want to go to med school, I went out and bought a sketch pad and pencil and did some sketches (of clothing).”

Faythe recalls that as “a really fun day.” Sarah brought her sketches home to show her mother, who provided advice and encouraged her to seek professional training and make it happen.

“I was just so excited for her that she put the brakes on something that wasn’t really in her heart,” said Faythe. “I loved her designs immediately.”

Sarah moved east, working under an accessory designer before she enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology, where she specialized in evening wear.

“I’ve always loved long, beautiful dresses, and I know that comes from what my mother does,” she said.

Since her May 2003 graduation, Sarah has worked on a freelance basis for several fashion designers in New York City and currently is an assistant designer for Nicholas Breslow, a women’s clothing designer.

Though going into business together always seemed to be in some corner of their minds, it wasn’t until one of Faythe’s trunk shows in Iowa City this spring that they decided to make the move and begin work on a clothing line.

Sarah had sent home a sketch of a bridal gown, which Faythe then created for display at the trunk show. As one woman after another stopped to admire and comment on the gown, Faythe knew they had to take a shot at going into business together.

“She has a gift of designing and all of the wonderful, professional, technical skills that go along with that to create a marketable design,” Faythe said. “I’ve worked with customers for 23 years, and my sense of fabrics and what goes with what design will play into [her talents] and hers will play into mine.”

Sarah came to Des Moines and stayed for more than a month, as she and her mother worked to design cocktail dresses and skirts, bridesmaid dresses, mother-of-the-bride dresses, flower girl dresses and a few bridal gowns, all set to be unveiled at an October **debut** event. After Sarah returned to New York, she continued to send patterns to her mother, and both women shopped throughout New York City to find fabrics that fit their designs.

Faythe said that, through nearly six months of work, they have not butted heads, but rather have a strong working relationship.

“We seem to understand each other’s strengths and limitations,” said Faythe. “I’m perfectly happy to let her go in her own area and she in mine.”

They said their struggles were typical of any clothing line launch, except when they waited for 18 days for five bolts of fabric to be delivered.

Sarah said their first designs are defined by “beautiful fabrics and unusual lines that flatter all women – something that you aren’t going to see a lot of the time.”

They worked for weeks, along with Faythe’s two assistants, to create the samples for Saturday’s event, putting in several late nights in their work room.

They hoped to attract interest from some buyers expected to attend the **debut**, and have planned to hold private showings in the future, as they work toward a goal of seeing their dresses and gowns in stores around Iowa and the Midwest. They eventually hope to take the clothing line to market in New York City.

Faythe will stay in Des Moines and get back to work with her custom design and sewing business and her clients who have been put on hold for several weeks.

"Sewing all day isn't fun if you don't have the people who you can make it for," she said.

Sarah will stay in New York, managing design and production for the company. And Saturday’s **debut** allowed her to check off a major goal that she set for herself after finishing fashion school.

“On my 25th birthday, I said that I wanted to have something with my name on it by my 27th birthday,” Sarah said. She turned 26 on Oct. 7.