

# Mary Adams the Dress

• Press Kit •

## **Contact Information**

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## • *Mary Adams: Designer Bio* •

Like most girls in the 1950's, Mary learned to sew from her mother, grandmother, and the public school system. By the age of 12, she was making clothes for herself and her friends. In the late 50's and 60's, she was perusing through fabric stores with her mother, picking out fabrics and looking through the many pattern books that showed the latest trends in fashion.

In the early 70's, fashion was still expressing the theatrics of the 60's and was full of limitless possibilities. Boundaries were being broken, velvet patchwork and tie-dye were all the rage. While others were taking their cues from sources that varied from the Renaissance to Afghanistan, Mary found her influences in Japanese print making, fabric design, and the American colonial era.

While studying art at the University of Oregon, from which she received a BFA in print making in 1974, Mary started making her own fabric by piecing, quilting, and appliquéing. Scraps became a vital part of Mary's sewing vocabulary, and these techniques became the trademarks of her work. Flea markets and garage sales became sought-after destinations, as many older women who had spent years sewing were passing away and leaving behind the best yardage, notions and scraps. Mary used these scraps to create items like a folding wallet, pot holders, vests and quilts that she would sell at local boutiques and Saturday markets that had started popping up.

In the late seventies Mary moved to Portland, setting up a studio in old town where her interest in sewing merged with her path as an artist. She realized that making party dresses would give her the most creative freedom, and she began developing her trademark party and wedding dresses. Working from a basic vogue pattern with a fitted bodice and a full or straight skirt, she adapted different sleeves and collars to the simple silhouette. Mary also started a vinyl make-up accessory business that she wholesaled to small boutiques. This was followed by her first large order from Nordstrom and Henri Bendel in New York City. Mary was also busy arranging for her first fashion show at Portland Center for the Visual Arts (PCVA). The show brought her to the attention of the local print media and a variety of fashion-minded people and merchants in the area, which enabled her to pursue her dress designing on another level. She enlisted a pattern maker and started putting together a line of dresses that she could wholesale along with the custom pieces she was designing.

In 1983 Mary moved to New York City, where she learned how to make the 'French Seam.' She opened The Dress, a dress shop and studio with designer Amy Downs in the heart of Manhattan's Lower East Side. Here she created a space to showcase her designs and explore her ideas. She also continued with her line of plastic make-up cases, which flourished during the eighties. They could be found at small boutiques across the

## • *Designer Bio Continued* •

country as well as Nordstrom, Henri Bendel, Barneys, and Bonwit Teller. Continuing with her party dress theme, Mary began concentrating on layering colors using transparent fabrics like cotton organdy and silk organza – another technique that has become part of her trademark.

The East Village had become a hotbed of creative innovation. Mary was part of the scene, attracting attention from the media, both local and international. Her work became part of F.I.T.'s permanent collection featuring East Village artists and designers. At this time a new breed of Nightclubs began to display fashion and art, providing a venue for artists and designers like Mary to show off their unique style. In addition to her own fashion shows, Mary participated in shows at Danceteria, Palladium, and Limelight in New York, and The World in London.

In 2000, the real estate market changed; rents and evictions increased as gentrification moved in. Mary Adams the Dress moved down Ludlow street, where Mary found herself in a beautiful new environment she and her friends restored in a old building that had suffered decades of neglect. Much like her former shop/studio, this space housed a boutique in front and Mary's workplace in back.

Mary's work has always been about showing off the female figure at its best. The fitted bodice has always been a part of her dialogue. Her past figured prominently in her ability to combine fabrics, layer colors, and create textures. The opulence of the 17th and 18th centuries and the elegance of the 1940's and 50's are all part of her collection of party and wedding dresses – some liken them to confections!

Mary has also spent her time working with the Lower East Side Girls Club, where she teaches the girls to sew. In 2004 she and the Girls Club started the first 'couture camp,' a program designed to teach the girls basic sewing skills while making bags, skirts, and tops. The campers took field trips to museums and participated in workshops with guest designers. One of Mary's dreams is to get sewing back into public schools.

In 2008 Mary found herself once again subjected to the changing real estate market and moved to a private atelier on 32nd and Madison Avenue, where she continues to design and make her unique, one-of-a-kind party and wedding dresses.

The move also coincided with her creating and writing *The Party Dress Book: How to Sew the Best Dress in the Room*, published by Watson-Guption, a division of Random House, in 2010.

## • Timeline •

- Home town: Eugene, Oregon
- 1974 - B.F.A. University of Oregon, Eugene Oregon  
Trip to Japan to study Japanese print making
  - 1975 - Designed and made quilts and small fabric items to be sold in small boutiques and Saturday markets
  - 1977 - Moved to Portland, Oregon.  
Set up studio and began designing dresses under M.A. label
  - 1980 - Started wholesale vinyl makeup accessory line under label Mary Adams, Nordstrom  
First fashion show at Portland Center for Visual Arts  
Henri Bendel, Private label NYC (make-up accessories)
  - 1983 - Moved to New York City
  - 1980's-90's - Involved in the burgeoning creative scene in the lower east side
  - 1984 - Opened "The Dress" with hatter Amy downs on Ludlow st in Manhattan's lower east side
  - 1986-1990 - Barney's private label (make-up accessories)
  - 1984-1995 - Fashion shows at Danceteria, The World, The House of Candles, Limelight Night Club, Marianne's, Palladium Night Club
    - Featured in alternative press (New York Talk, The East Village Eye, New York Press, Paper Magazine), as well as established print media (New York Times, Women's Wear Daily, The Village Voice, Time Out New York) For more information, refer to press list.
  - 1986 - Included in the Fashion Institute of Technology's East Village Collection
    - Fashion show at the Holly Solomon gallery in Soho
    - Private label Bonwit Teller (accessories)
  - 1995 - Absolut Citron fashion show at Palladium Night Club
  - 2000 - Mary Adams the Dress moved down ludlow street
  - 2003 - Set up sewing workshops with LES Girls Club in schools
  - 2005 - Started summer Couture Camp at LES Girls Club
  - 2006 - LES Couture Camp goes to Chiapas, Mexico to research traditional dress and weaving
  - 2007 - Party dress featured on the cover of Amy Sedaris' book, *I Like You: Hospitality Under the Influence*
  - 2008 - Mary Adams the dress relocates to a private atelier in Manhattan's Murray Hill district
    - Started working on the Party Dress Book
  - 2010 - The Party Dress Book is released by Watson-Guptill, a division of Random House

• *Press List* •

*For press clippings, please visit the Mary Adams the Dress website at [maryadamsthedress.com](http://maryadamsthedress.com)*

**The Party Dress Book by Mary Adams**

Published by Watson-Guption, a  
division of Random House  
November 2010

**Real Simple Weddings**

*Married and Bright*  
2010 Edition

**I Like You: Hospitality Under the  
Influence** by Amy Sedaris

*Cover & Editorial*  
2007

**BRIDES Magazine**

*Urban Hipster*  
February/March 2007

**New York Magazine**

*Best Shops*  
2001-2010

**Index Magazine**

*Amy Sedaris, Cover and Editorial*  
December 2004

**New York Sun**

*Here Comes The Bride*  
Tuesday, February 24, 2004

**BRIDES Magazine**

*Marrying @ 20 30 40*  
Summer 2004

**Oregonian**

*It's a Cinch*, by Vivian McInerney  
May 25th, 2003

**The Village Voice**

*Elements of Style*, by Lynn Yaeger  
April 30, 2003

**BRIDES Magazine**

Special Issue  
September/October 2002

**Good Morning America**

*Destination Weddings Fashion Show*  
March 29, 2002 (TV)

**New York Times**

*Sunday Style*  
April 14, 2002

**PAPER Magazine**

*Style: Girls in Pretty Dresses*  
October 2000

**City N.Y.**

*Storefront*  
November/December, 1999

**The New York Post**

*Seven Brides in Seven Seasons*  
Sunday, February 22, 1998

**Harper's Bazaar**

*Crossing Delancy*  
March 1998

**The New York Times**

*Weddings: Vows*  
Sunday, April 26, 1998

**Maxi** (German Lifestyle Magazine)

August 1998

**Time Out New York**

*Three Tulle Women*, by Brandon Holly  
February 18-20, 1997

**Market Fashion**

*Designer Profile*  
August 1997

**The New York Times**

*Weddings: Vows*, Sunday  
September 14, 1997

**The New York Press**

*The Best of Manhattan*  
September 1996

**The New York Times**

*Weddings: Vows*  
Sunday, January 15, 1995

**Seventeen Magazine**

*Have a Ball*  
March 1995

• *Press List Continued* •

**City Arts**  
*PBS Series*  
May 1, 1995 (TV)

**New York Press**  
*Scouting Report*  
June 1995

**The Village Voice**  
*Material World, by Lynn Yaeger*  
November 1995

**The New York Times**  
*Weddings: Vows*  
Sunday August 22, 1993

**The Jewish Bride**  
*Down The Aisle in Style*  
Spring 1991

**The New York Times**  
*Sunday Outing*  
May 12, 1991

**The New York Times**  
*Downtown and Dishy*  
May 1991

**Elle Magazine - Spain**  
*Lettera Da New York*  
June 1991

**The Village Voice**  
*Living Color High Styling On Ludlow Street*  
August 21, 1990

**Profession Textile**  
*Un vaste Champ d'expeirementation*  
January 1989

**Details Magazine**  
*Geoffrey Beene*  
March 1989

**Paper Magazine**  
*Shop: Happy Birthday Baby*  
June 1989

**The Oregonian**  
*Designing Women*  
Thursday, July 14, 1988

**Elle Magazine**  
*Beauty Cast 2: Beauty Stashes*  
May 1988

**Teenage**  
*Waists*  
February/March 1987

**Paper Magazine**  
*Of the New*  
June 1987

**Daily News Magazine**  
*Hot Line: Dot Your Eyes*  
August 1987

**Elle Magazine**  
December 1987

**The Village Voice**  
*Storefront Courtier*  
April 1986

**Fashion Institute of Technology**  
*The East Village Collection*  
1986

**Women's Wear Daily**  
*East Village Dynamic Duos*  
Tuesday, June 17, 1986

**Harpers Bazaar**  
*Gold-Card Express*  
December 1986

**Glamour Magazine**  
*Three Ways to Keep Organized on the Go*  
February, 1984

**The Oregonian**  
*Fashion/September*  
September 11, 1980

• *Press Quotes* •

“I like Mary’s dresses because they complement my style: They’re nontraditional, unique, and one of a kind. Mary’s dresses have a humor about them; they’re whimsical, flirty, and guaranteed scene-stealers. I depend on Mary when I need just the right party dress, and she has never failed me.”

-Amy Sedaris, forward to *The Party Dress Book*

“Strong, individual visions that manage to warm even my prickly heart: Mary Adams’ loopy Cinderella dresses--if you’re gonna go retro, what’s wrong with 18th century?”

-Lynn Yager, *The Village Voice*

“Never one to hotfoot it after the latest trendsetters, Mary Adams happily refuses to step into the 20th century, preferring instead to hand-sew lavishly detailed party dresses fashioned from fine silk organza’s. From barely there slips to fairy-tale princess gowns that require their own mini storage units, Adams delivers only the best.”

-*Paper Magazine*

“A party outfit by Mary Adams – crinolined, French-seamed, generously cut, often Empire-wisted, piled with weightless layers of sheer and opaque silk—is not going to whine if you roll in the grass or have too much to drink.”

-*New York Press*, Best of Manhattan

“Mary Adams makes and sells silk organza dresses that are either jeune fille or sophisticated. For the woman to whom ingenuousness is a dirty word but soigné is not.”

-Elaine Louie, *New York Times*

“In the anarchistic East Village world of neobohehian revolt, screaming graffiti and high-nerve nonsense, the great American traditions of the free enterprise and rugged individualism are thriving nicely. Literally hundreds of shops of all description have transformed this once-barren hinterland, and among the shopkeepers are a handful of young fashion designers who have teamed to distribute their work through tiny storefronts. They are total independents, doing everything from constructing interiors to manufacturing garments.”

-Walter Thomas, *Women’s Wear Daily*

## • *The Party Dress Book* •

In **THE PARTY DRESS BOOK**, Adams invites readers into her studio to learn about her creative influences. She shows her favorite sewing techniques and how she incorporates them into her creations, and takes readers step-by-step through the process of sewing an irresistible party dress, from taking measurements to finishing.

Divided into four major sections, THE PARTY DRESS BOOK reveals:

- **Good Times:** Origins and Influences (page 15): how Adams has designed a career and where she finds her inspiration
- **Party Colors:** Inspiration and Ideas for Combining and Layering Color (page 45): how to combine colors in surprising ways, and how to make color work for you
- **Party Tricks:** Essential Techniques (page 69): advice on piecing, quilting, appliqué, ruffles, and more
- **It's Your Party:** Sewing Your Dress (page 107): how to choose the dress' details, measure, prepare fabrics, fit, make alterations, and finish

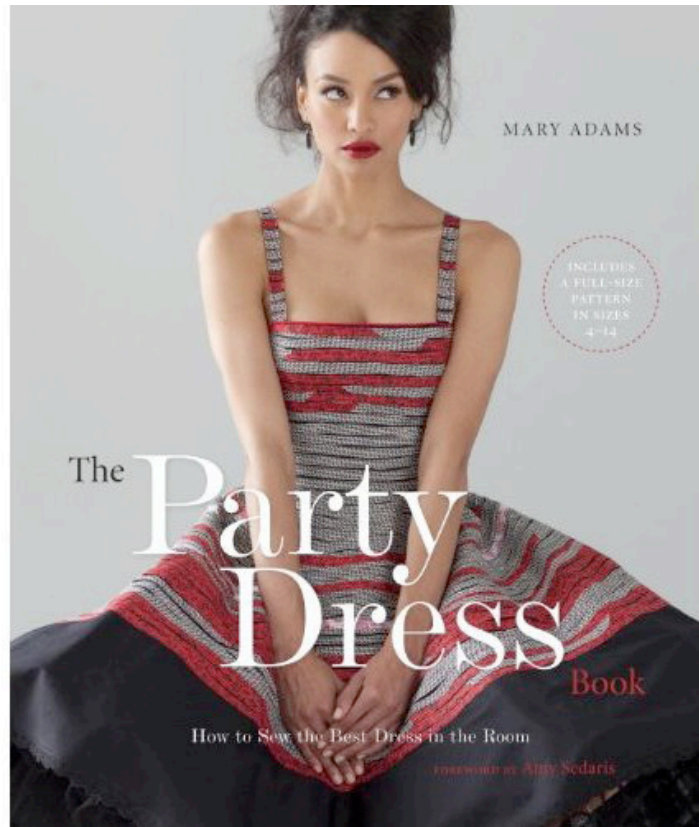
As a self-taught designer, one of the most interesting aspects of creating the Party Dress Book was doing the research. This book is not just about being a designer, or a how-to on sewing. More importantly, I've come to realize that it's about a greater knowledge--social, political, and visual--that has shaped the whole sewing industry and, indirectly, my own creative path. I have been a lucky witness to and a participant in the rise, fall, and recent resurgence of the home sewing industry--an area once belittled as 'women's work.' I have gained a much deeper appreciation for all the players who I have come to know either personally or through history who have inspired me in my own creative development. I've always seen my life and work as a meandering path, one thing leading to another, and I'm hoping The Party Dress Book will convey this and inspire the readers in making their own rules and pursuing their own visions.

-Mary Adams



• Sample Images •

For hi-res images, please contact Mary Adams at [maryadamsthedress@gmail.com](mailto:maryadamsthedress@gmail.com)



• *Sample Images* •

