

Bridal designer, St. Charles native to open shop in Geneva



Caroline DeVillo adjusts one of her wedding gowns, "Amanda," in her new retail shop on Third Street in Geneva. The shop opens at the end of March. (Marwa Eltagouri, Chicago Tribune)

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Rustic furnishings, mirrored walls and the murmurs of French love songs make the second floor of 312 S. Third S. in Geneva a haven for any bride-to-be.

But the most enchanting part of Caroline DeVillo's bridal studio is a single wall of hanging wedding dresses, a pool of cream and ivory silks.

"They're kind of like my babies," DeVillo said, tracing her fingers across the gowns. "Each has a different woman's name and her own personality."

After years of working in Chicago, DeVillo, a St. Charles native, has returned to the Tri-Cities to open a studio in Geneva, showcasing her bridal designs. She envisions the shop, set to open at the end of March, to be an intimate place for brides to select, fit and modify DeVillo's classic American Couture gowns.

DeVillo, who moved back to St. Charles recently with her husband and three young children, said Third Street's charm was crucial to her decision to open the shop.

"I've always loved Third Street," she said. "And I wanted an old building, since I love mixing old, traditional styles with new and exciting elements. It would have only been Third Street or nothing at all."

After graduating from St. Charles East High School, DeVillo attended the University of Illinois, where she earned a degree in marketing textiles and apparel. She then went on to study at the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising in Los Angeles, where she became involved with film costume design.

She began to seek a more hands-on design opportunity, though, and so she returned to Illinois in her mid-20s and began working at Geneva's Veiled in Elegance.

"I sort of walked into Veiled in Elegance and said, 'I really want to design wedding gowns,'" DeVillo said. "I showed them some of my work, and they picked out three sketches."

Caroline DeVillo Couture quickly caught the attention of other boutique buyers at the New York Bridal Show, and in 2003, DeVillo opened a retail

location in Chicago's Bucktown, at Damen and North Milwaukee avenues. The store was open for nine years, she said.

In 2011, Nordstrom picked up DeVillo's line, and DeVillo closed her retail shop to focus on wholesale designing. Her gowns are still available at the store's Michigan Avenue location, where DeVillo will continue to meet with brides and hold trunk shows throughout the year.

DeVillo said she designs one collection of up to 12 dresses a year, with about four of those dresses becoming available for sale. Each collection will often have a common thread, she said. One year, all the dresses were named after first ladies; another year, the dresses all featured covered buttons.

Often, she designs a collection by first finding an eye-catching fabric, such as silk organza or silk tulle.

DeVillo said she's excited about the Geneva shop, and hopes it will become a hub for local brides. She envisions the space will allow for a handful of friends and family to attend fittings with brides and enjoy a glass of champagne.

"What I missed about the Chicago store was the trial and error of it, and seeing what brides really liked," she said. "I've always known I'd open something in Geneva. I want people around here to think, 'This is where I'm going to find my perfect dress.'"

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