

POSSE

KAROLINA ZMARLAK AND JESSE KEYES ARE REDESIGNING EVERYTHING FROM THE WAY WOMEN WEAR CLOTHES TO WHERE THEY GO OUT AT NIGHT.

Photographed by LINDA TEGG



Jesse Keyes and Karolina Zmarlak

Karolina Zmarlak is an emerging designer in the ever-evolving world of fashion. She creates clothes for the individual, not the masses — clothes that are expressive and communicate a message. Jesse Keyes is her business partner and a designer in his own right. Hotel Griffou, GoldBar, La Esquina and the new live-music event space, E_P (Guns N' Roses held their after-party here after they performed at the John Varvatos L'Espresso Vogue party during New York Fashion Week) are his spaces, and all on the cutting edge of cool. But it is the brands Karolina Zmarlak and THE COLLECTIVE that Zmarlak and Keyes share. Pushing the limits of ingenuity, Zmarlak's eponymous label can be worn multiple ways, just as she and Jesse work together in multiple capacities. The Yin to her yang, Jesse completes her sentences, can seemingly read her mind. They even walk in sync. So it is no surprise that as a team they are a force to be reckoned with. And the press agrees. Journalists and bloggers alike have adored their every turnout and this season's was no exception. So with their faithful staff at their side, the two are steadily setting the bar on style one design at a time. **STACEY HOWARD**

What do you do? Karolina: I'm the creative director of the design label, which includes creating and editing collections, selecting fabrics, designing patterns and samples, directing clothing production, planning seasonal shows, as well as the day to day management and direction of marketing, sales, showroom and customer relations. Jesse: I do the business development — structuring financing, operations, marketing and co-developing.

Who is in your posse? Samuel Leeds (Production and Visuals Manager, Karolina Zmarlak), Olivia Bookshester (Product Development, Karolina Zmarlak) and Brett Kincaid (Manager, E_P).

You are both designers. What occupational similarities do you share? Jesse: Though Karolina's cycle of creativity is faster paced than mine, we both use the context of the

onomy, form design inspiration from historical narratives and spend a great deal of time forming our designs before we begin production.

How do you influence the architectural elements in Karolina's clothing? Karolina's clothing is highly architectural, containing careful awareness of the complexity of material, pattern and silhouette as it forms and shapes around a woman's body. Karolina's team helps me with textiles and spatial design details. I work more effectively receiving and laying out spaces.

Karolina, where do you find inspiration? It's the power and sexual independence found

in the writings of Germaine Greer. In the intense dance movements of the gypsy woman, otherwise known as flamenco. I am moved by the decadence and season-less glamour and conflict of Elizabeth Taylor and Frank Sinatra, bathing suits with fur, tuxedos with beach towels. Also, the colorful, sensual-yet-controlled oil paintings of Georgia O'Keefe have seeped into future collections.

How do Jesse's venues impact Karolina Zmarlak? Karolina: I have thoughtful spaces in which to show and communicate my clothing. Whether showing at E_P or having a business dinner at Griffou, we can help more powerfully connect the clothing to our partners through a physical encounter in these places.

If we opened up each of your closets, what would we find? Jesse: Boots, blue jeans, belts, button ups and blazers — my five "B's" — all black and fitted. Rick Owens and Issey Miyake are my favorite designers. Karolina: It's filled with my power pants combination skinny pant and legging that literally sculpt your legs and behind. I wear these with everything, layered with tanks, draped tunics, tailored jackets or dresses. I'm not much of a girly or frilly kind of dresser. I love strong clothing with an interesting point of view and clean, sharp detail.

Who is your favorite designer and how has that influenced you? Karolina: Cristóbal Balenciaga, the master of sculpting and building upon the woman's body during the 1940s through 1960s. Clothing to her starts with shape, with technical and artistic execution. She looks to Cristóbal as a genius pattern maker and a clothing craftsman.

What are you listening to right now? Jesse: Radiohead, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Led Zeppelin and Nine Inch Nails; all pure, creatively original, technically-talented audio wizards.

When you aren't working, how do you unwind? Jesse: I go the gym, read the New York Review of Books and watch Dexter. Karolina: Unwind!

Where do you like to go out? Karolina: Jesse really only goes out to his own spaces unless invited to the other spaces of creators of culture out there. We all really work to make it work.

Karolina, what was the last text you received from Jesse? "Where are you, we have an interview!"

Famous last words? He who lasts has the last laugh.



Left to right: Olivia Bookshester, Jesse Keyes, Brett Kincaid, Karolina Zmarlak and Samuel Leeds