

# This designer puts nothing but the best into her dresses

*She's come a long way from tank tops and bell bottoms*

By GREG LATHROP

Dress designer Lisette Lux sat on a couch in her Victorian-style house in Santa Cruz, thinking back to the days of her first creation.

It was the middle 1960s in Belgium, and 14-year-old Lisette was marveling at her matching green with blue flocking tank top and bell bottoms. "I was so proud," Lisette recalled. "My father even let me wear it. There I was, looking like Cher."

So proud of her creation was Lisette, that she wrote to a "ritzy lady who owned an exquisite shop" and told her of the tank top/bell bottoms outfit.

Lisette didn't hear back from the lady — "It was garbage," Lisette now says of the outfit — but nevertheless it was her start in the world of design.

Nowadays, Lisette makes nothing but the best. All of her dresses — she gets a lot of calls for wedding gowns and fancy evening wear — are of original design and hand made. "The designs are romantic, feminine and sophisticated," Lisette says. "But they (the designs) are also classical and can be worn for years."

Once, when a girl tried on one of Lisette's designs, she started dancing and swirling around like she was in another world. On another occasion, a lady was trying on a dress for her sister's wedding when she saw herself in the mirror. Overcome, she grabbed Lisette by the arm and said, "You made me beautiful."

Most of her creations are in the Victorian style — "Victorian clothing inspires me," she says — but Lisette says she does everything, including lingerie. "The things I love to do the most are the things that

involve the most work," Lisette said, "like lace-collared and hand-beaded designs."

All fabrics are natural, usually Swiss Batiste and silks. And much of the lace is antique Victorian, which Lisette gets from her mother-in-law in Paris.

Lisette deals with the best shops, too — Alexandra's of Palo Alto, Shades of White of San Diego, Van-Duzen Green of Encino, J. Alexander of Los Gatos, Montage of Houston, and Fleurs de Paris of New Orleans — some of which only sell her line of dresses.

Lisette will also deal directly with the customer. "I prefer to work directly," she says, "that way when a girl comes in I have a chance to meet her and she gets a custom-made design."

That might be a good idea for cost-conscious consumers, because the prices of her clothes are in the mid to high three-figure range.

"All of my dresses are one of a kind," Lisette says proudly. "They're hand-made and well-finished, not mass-produced." Which, Lisette says, reflects her European training.

Lisette was born and raised in Western Europe, and worked in fashion in London and Brussels, where she first became interested in lace. She opened her first shop in Stockholm.

Her husband, Gilles, whom she met on vacation in Morocco, does all of the cutting in addition to helping style some of the dresses. "Plus, he gives me a man's opinion," Lisette adds, "which is always good to have when you're making clothes for women."

Gilles' background in the fashion world goes back even further than Lisette's. His mother worked for the well-know dress designer Lanvin in the 1940s, and he was a hairdresser at Alexandre in Paris. Alexandre did fashion shows for all the big names — Chanel, St. Laurent, Givenchy, and so on.

Lisette and Gilles moved from the south of France to Marin before settling in Santa Cruz 1½ years ago. "We get the same feeling here as in the south of France," Lisette says. And their Victorian-style house at 809 Mission St. was the coup de grace. "I fell in love with it the moment I saw it," she said. "It's so romantic."

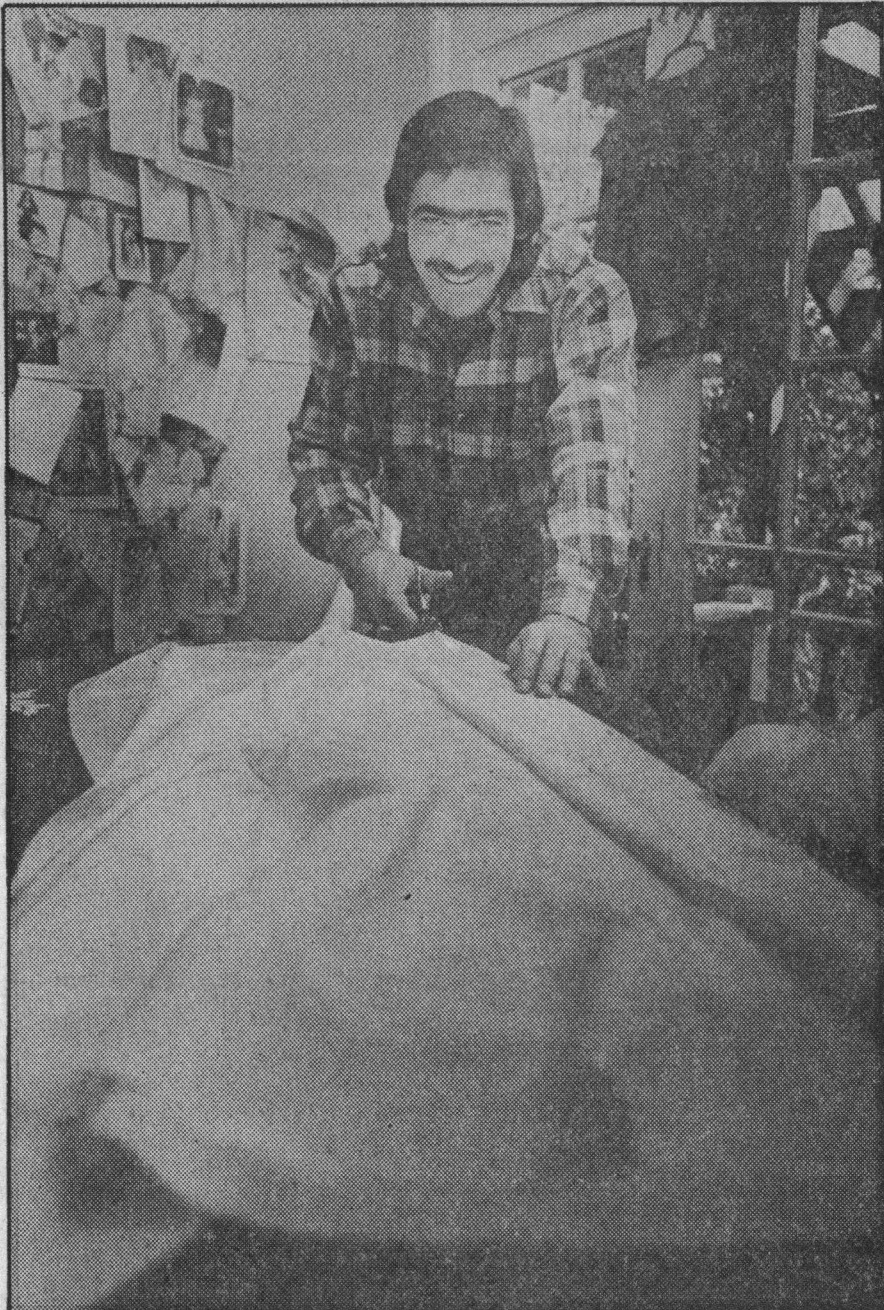
There are times when the house is full to the rafters, figuratively, with so much work for Lisette to do that she has worked day and night to meet deadlines. But she doesn't mind. "I could do this the rest of my life," Lisette said of designing dresses. "I love the dresses and I love the work. I don't wish I was doing anything else."



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel



*'All of my dresses are one of a kind,' says Lisette Lux (above and left) of her Victorian-style creations. 'They're hand-made and well-finished, not mass-produced.'*



*Gilles Lux does the cutting and helps style some of the dresses.*