

# ANGEL OLIVERA

Indy's legendary hospitality hooks a talented couture designer

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Never underestimate the power of global events to alter the course of one person's life. For Angel Olivera, the impetus for change was an economic recession. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Olivera left his home in 2008 and came to Indianapolis with few resources and even fewer contacts.

What he did have was ambition. He dreamed of rebuilding his existing fashion design business in the US as something bigger and better than it could become in the Isle of Enchantment. Olivera says the 2008 recession strained business conditions in Puerto Rico, and his father encouraged him to make the move.

"After building a successful career at home, I knew it would be hard, but not impossible to do in the US," he says.

Studying his options, Olivera bypassed New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, choosing Indianapolis for its low cost of living and its reputation for welcoming entrepreneurs and English-speaking Latinos. Once here, Olivera got a full-time job as a tailor for Nordstrom and began bootstrapping his custom-design business, which makes one-of-a-kind dresses for weddings, engagement parties, and special occasions.

Olivera was still relatively unknown in 2012 when he promoted his first US fashion show with a Facebook ad. To his surprise, over 200 people attended the show.

"I thought, 'Wow! If I can do this when I'm totally unknown, imagine what I can do when I open a shop,'" he says.

Olivera credits the show with helping him gain visibility among people who want to wear unique, well-crafted clothes, designed to fit their bodies.

After building a solid book of clients and opening his 54th Street studio, Olivera is ready for another show, planned for 8 p.m., October 24 at The Sanctuary at Penn, 701 N. Pennsylvania St. The show is dubbed Narciso's Garden, a nod to Olivera's grandmother, whose garden was adorned with the flower named after the Greek god, Narcissus.

Olivera will use the show to highlight his 2019 spring collection, which features ready-to-wear clothes that can be ordered to size.

"I think it's time to show my customers what else I can do besides custom dresses," he says.

What will viewers see on the runway? Nothing less than a piece of his soul. The 2019 collection displays Olivera's love for color and metallics, as well as his appetite for designing a wide range of styles – everything from classics to bohemian romantic.

Planning a fashion show these days is not for the faint of heart. The industry is having a lively debate about the relevance of runway shows. For starters, many designers complain that street-style photographers and fashion bloggers are detracting from their collections and competing for influence. Thanks to technology, designers can also choose more affordable, less time-consuming alternatives to promote their brands over the traditional fashion show. By necessity, they are expensive to produce, in part because they must be multimedia spectacles in order to captivate an audience.

Olivera is nervous about the investment, but that's where his concern ends. He views fashion bloggers and street photographers as an extension of the fashion press. They're partners – not competitors.

"We always include fashion bloggers in these kinds of projects," he says. "They help push the voice of designers out to the public." He expects the October show to help him reach a larger audience and advance his business goals, including a plan to start a school that teaches the art of sewing.

Olivera has spent most of his adult life mastering couture techniques, and much like Norman Norell, who was famous for bringing couture quality to ready-to-wear, he incorporates couture elements in every garment, whether it's custom or not. His work also shows the influence of other well-known designers – the elegance of Carolina Herrera, the femininity of Oscar de la Renta and the intricate detail of Valentino.

"What I loved about Oscar de la Renta was the way he could make a woman look sexy even when she was completely covered," he says. "Sexiness comes from the way a woman wears her clothes – not how much skin she shows."

Goal one is to make women of all shapes and sizes look good in their clothes with meticulous fitting that accentuates natural curves. A custom design may require two or more fittings, but Olivera says the extra time is worth it, especially when a client gets noticed.

"I always tell my clients, 'If you look good, I look better,'" he says.

Growing a business while juggling a full-time job and family life hasn't been easy. Olivera seldom takes a day off, but he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I get a lot of satisfaction from making new friends out of my customers and sharing my art with others," he says. "It's hard physically, but not mentally because I love what I do." ☺

