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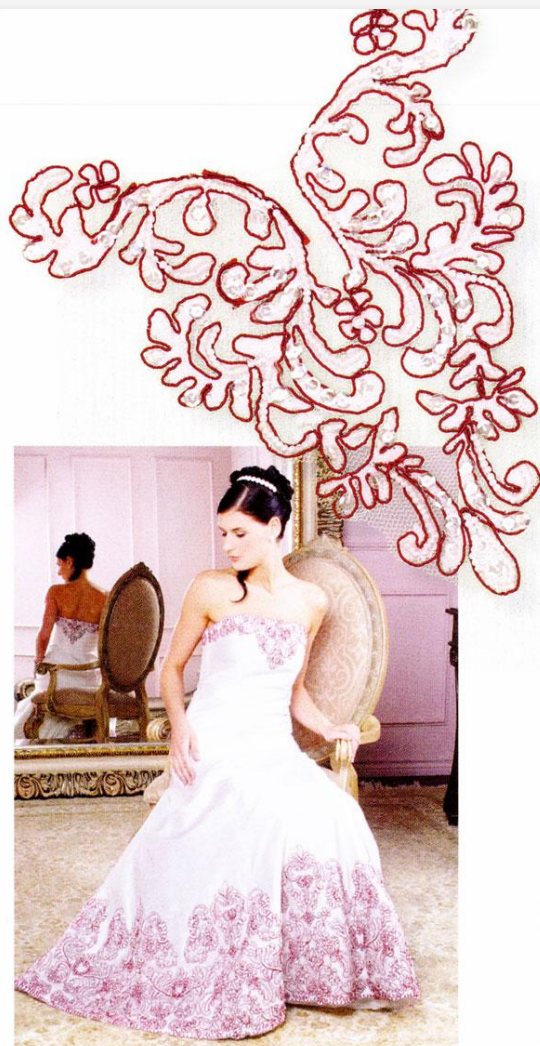
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tailor of the bride

From her new atelier on Oak Lawn, Dallas designer Shemara Jeyarajah creates one-of-a-kind wedding gowns.

BY KRISTIE RAMIREZ

SHEMARA JEYARAJAH HAS BEEN passionate about creating since she was a child in Sri Lanka. "When I was little," she says, "I loved to draw and paint. I've always been creative." One look at her decidedly feminine gowns and you can see that Jeyarajah has a whimsical imagination. Hand ruffled and ruched silk with intricate beading cascades down bodices, and pleats form details that evoke Gustav Klimt's painting *The Kiss*. This is not the work of a novice.

A graduate of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Jeyarajah has been designing gowns for the past 13 years. This year she found herself as a finalist in the Texas' Next Top Designer competition while she was working alongside Nicolas Villalba, the former in-house bridal couturier at Stanley Korshak. But it wasn't until this past June that she decided to take the leap and open her own atelier. Jeyarajah sources her fabric from

Paris, Italy, and India, but she prefers the naturalness of silk.

The intricate design process is a collaborative effort between Jeyarajah and the betrothed. "I like that each client brings her own unique vision," Jeyarajah says. A bride-to-be comes in for an initial meeting to discuss her idea of a dream gown and its fabrication, and Jeyarajah begins with a sketch. After tweaks and the client's approval, a pattern is made, followed by a muslin fitting. After more adjustments, Jeyarajah moves on to the final fabric. This painstaking work takes up to three months to complete, and gowns can cost anywhere from \$2,000 to \$8,000.

Jeyarajah thinks a ready-to-wear bridal collection could be next, but right now custom design is where her heart lies. "I don't feel like this is work," she says. "I love what I do."

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