

AISLE ICON

No name is more synonymous with bridal gowns than Vera Wang. The designer, who began her career in fashion at *Vogue* before leaving the magazine world to found her own design house, took the wedding industry by storm with her chic, modern take on bridal dressing. Here, the iconic designer shares her story.

Since starting your design company in 1990, you have established a virtual bridal empire – gowns, lingerie, fragrance, even mattresses – as well as your signature collection, your contemporary Lavender Label collection and your diffusion line at Kohl's, Simply Vera Vera Wang. What are some of the characteristics that unite these different areas and mark them with your signature?

I like to think there's always a grace to what I do, and that there's a certain dignity. I'm a designer who loves the architecture of anything I do. It's very much about the purity of form. That's something that I'd like to be known for – the care given to the design.

What inspired you to start designing bridal?

My idea for my business came to me as I was looking for my own wedding dress. I realized there was a need in the marketplace. No one was doing any dresses that addressed the modern woman. The only thing out there was cap-sleeved versions of full-skirted dresses. I wanted something more sleek and minimal.

Was it always a goal of yours to outfit a bride in every area of her life, from aisle to home?

With bridal, I stumbled upon a unique opportunity to create a brand based on intimacy, romance and beauty that resonated with modern women. And although it did begin with a dress, it ultimately came to symbolize the promise of a dream.

What are some of the unique characteristics of your bridal collection?

I see myself as a true modernist. Even when I do a traditional gown, I give it a modern twist. I work with structure, with techniques, but I go outside the box and give it my own spin.

As a native New Yorker, you grew up surrounded by fashion. What are some of your earliest fashion memories?

My earliest fashion inspiration was my mother, a woman with impeccable style. She was an incredible clotheshorse. She would take me to all the couture shows in Europe, so I grew up around clothes. I grew up loving fashion. She used clothes to express herself. And she always encouraged me to pursue art forms to express myself.

You were also a competitive figure skater. Does your experience as a skater influence your designs, and if so, how?

All those years of competitive skating have carried over. Skating is a very demanding sport, and it taught me perseverance and dedication that have lived with me the rest of my life. I can't design anything without thinking of how a woman's body will look and move when she's wearing it.




When you were 23, you became the youngest *Vogue* fashion editor ever. What lessons did your editorial experience teach you about designing and running a successful fashion house?

I had an incredible education in fashion at *Vogue*. You're exposed to everything such as the newest, most edgy designer out of Antwerp to a Geoffrey Beene or Yves Saint Laurent. I was in the industry for so long as an editor that by the time I went to design on my own, I brought a certain amount of education that was unusual. After that, I decided that what I really wanted was to design, so I joined Ralph Lauren for two years as design director.

What was one of the most difficult challenges you faced when starting your own design house?

At Ralph Lauren, I saw how hard it was to get the product made, shipped on time and sold. I knew the chances for success were very slim because it's about more than talent. It's also about timing. It's about reaching your customer. It's about having allure for the press. My business did not take off right away. I built it up client by client.

Bridal, ready to wear, fragrance, china, stationery...You truly dabble in everything.

So much of my brand is about my relationship with women. We've built a certain name recognition and trust with the consumer because we've given the same design integrity to everything we've done.  – Rebecca Stevens verawang.com