

A woman with dark hair, wearing a black top and a necklace, is focused on adjusting a light-colored, possibly white, garment on a mannequin. She is looking down at her hands, which are positioned near the neckline of the garment. The background is blurred, suggesting a workshop or studio setting.

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Sunday, March 24, 2013 | Section W E2

In Marin

Fashion focused

Dartmouth trio create edgy
clothing line in Oakland
Page 24

Kensington pizzeria offers Neapolitan-style pies, Page 4

Where to go this week, Page 12

Home sales in your town, Page 22

NOTE TO READERS

Chronicle begins new In the East Bay weekly section

Welcome to the third week of In the East Bay, The Chronicle's new weekly section focused on your neighborhood.

In the East Bay offers readers who don't subscribe to the paper a taste of The Chronicle.

In this section, you will find a story on the rising trend of artisan doughnuts, a profile of an Alameda accordionist and singer and recipes for breakfast bowls.

Today's cover story is about Oda, a new, edgy fashion line started by three Dartmouth grads and run out of a work/live space in Oakland. Six years ago, the three wom-

en traveled to Burning Man where they dreamed up an idea for a clothing company. After heading to fashion school and building their business, they are on their fourth line of clothes, have a popular shop on 18th Street in San Francisco and sell their clothes online. They create fanciful costumes for the San Francisco Ballet and are always incorporating feathers, spikes and metal sequins.

We hope you enjoy the issue and would love to hear from you.

— Maggie Creamer, editor

Send your ideas and suggestions to IntheEastBay@sfchronicle.com

Cover story

24 Angie Kim, co-owner of Oda, looks through a collection of clothes.

Cover photo: Angie Kim, left, Maggie Kim, center, and Mandalyn Begay are owners of Oda.

Photos by Dan Evans/
Special to The Chronicle



HOW TO REACH US

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Photos by Dan Evans / Special to The Chronicle

Angie Kim, left, Maggie Kim, center, and Mandalyn Begay are Dartmouth alums and co-owners of Oda, a fashion line based out of West Oakland.

OAKLAND'S ODA

Burning Man dream becomes fashion reality

By Nellie Bowles

When a half dozen Dartmouth co-op roommates reconnected a few years after graduation, they drove to Burning Man and put on their best platform shoes, gypsy tops and feathered hats.

By the end of the week, covered in Nevada dust, West Oakland-resident Mandalyn Begay and her friends Maggie and Angie Kim decided to quit

their jobs and enroll in San Francisco's Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising upon their return.

"We wanted to make art, art that was accessible, that was useful in some way," said the 37-year-old Begay. "And so we started making clothes."

Six years later, their fanciful and wild fashion company, Oda, is coming out with its fourth line. They have a popular storefront called The Mis-

sion Statement, a cooperative shop on 18th Street in San Francisco that they share with two other designers. They recently created the costumes for the San Francisco Ballet Gala performers — all white feather and spandex outfits. They've also shown their detailed, eco-friendly, costume-party-inspired clothes at San Francisco's Fashion Night Out, the Green Festival and house parties around the bay.



Mandalyn Begay, co-owner of Oda, traces patterns onto paper in the Oakland studio of the fashion line.

As rising rents in San Francisco continue to push artists toward the East Bay, the women of Oda join a cohort of designers and painters. Many in their retrofitted West Oakland live/work space are from Dartmouth, including the building's new owner.

"There's a Dartmouth artist community here in Oakland.

Even if you didn't hang out with someone that much at Dartmouth, when you get out here, you sort of have that in common already," said Maggie Kim.

They were attracted by more than low rents and the Dartmouth connection — "there are so many artists here, and there's a sense of freedom,

creativity," said Begay.

For the first clothing line, they chose strong females from fiction and tried to imagine what they would wear today. There were pieces inspired by the Chinese action film, "House of Flying Daggers," plus young adult fantasy books by Garth Nix and Lemony Snicket. This line included an intricately woven yellow lace and feather dress, a patchwork bolero sweater, and a sheer gypsy top.

"We named it Oda, which is Spanish for ode, because we were designing for these stories," Begay said.

"We use pop culture references but also crazy, cerebral stuff," said 35-year-old Angie Kim. "Sometimes I worry we're over-thinking it, over-thinking clothes, but what could be a more interesting art."

In their three lines so far — Bedouin Princess, Threesome of Stone, and Evanescence of Eventide — they've created wedding dresses, casual printed spandex and kids' clothes.

Their fourth collection, the Darkness of Light, will feature edgier wear than before — they're incorporating feathers, spikes and metal sequins, sourced from a trip to Bali.

"We bring back pieces from trips," Begay said. "And we try to honor our heritage with each line, bringing elements that are Korean or Native American — I was really proud to use traditional beading for some dresses."

They have three interns from local art schools working on the line, as well as a cohort of friends who come on the weekends to help sew.

"There'll be pieces that look like chain mail with feathers," Begay said. "We're starting to deconstruct our fabrics, shredding, removing colors, pulling to expose the threads," Maggie Kim said. "So that plus the studs, it'll be a little bit punk '80s."

For the ballet's black tie opening gala, Oda outfitted acrobats in elaborate white feathered frocks.

Posing all along the red carpet and in cages, the costumed gymnasts drew attention to the



Maggie Kim hand stitches a skirt for Oda's "The Darkness of Light" fashion line.

budding Oakland designers.

"We had to figure out, logistically, how to make someone look amazing while still making sure they can go upside down in a hoop," said Begay. "Like, can you still do a handstand in a 14-inch headdress?"

They work with raw materials — organic cottons, linen, silks, wool, bamboo and soy — that they dye in the studio. Originally, they used tea bags but began sourcing dyes from Dharma in San Rafael.

"None of us were experts when we started this; we just learned as we went, learned by necessity," said Maggie Kim.

Sharing Mission Statement Cooperative with jewelry designer Vanessa Gade and vintage fashion designer Estrella Tadeo, the Oda team takes turns manning the counter.

"Most of our retail happens at Mission Statement or at our Etsy shop," Begay said. "Surprisingly, our men's clothes probably are our best sellers. And we get a lot of special orders."

Oda

www.odafashion.com.
To buy in person: The Mission Statement, 3248 18th St., San Francisco, CA 94110
To buy online: Etsy, www.etsy.com/shop/odasf
Circle and Square, www.circleandsquaresf.com/store/shopby/oda.html

Mia Mustari, a 35-year-old musician, started wearing Oda after she played at one of their house parties — she asked them to make her wedding dress.

"It was all hand-dyed silk. The back was made of flowing ribbons with dreaded silk. Inside the ribbons were little things, little shells and artifacts they put in for me," she said, on her way back from baby yoga. "They put so much thought into each piece. It's different from normal everyday clothes; it's like wearing your favorite artist on your body."

Mustari has become a collector. She has a long purple gown



Maggie Kim presses a metal stud into a skirt for Oda's "The Darkness of Light" fashion line.

and recently bought a piece from their newest collection: a silver bubble dress with lace on the front and metal sequins down the back.

In Begay's brightly painted home studio, the team had been working overtime to prepare for a show in Los Angeles. Her daughter Moonoko, a 12-year-old who is homeschooled, worked quietly in a loft built

above the kitchen.

"Our co-op at Dartmouth, we called it the Happy Home, was this whimsical funky place, you could be anyone and wear anything," Begay said. "Oda lets us bring back that same energy."

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