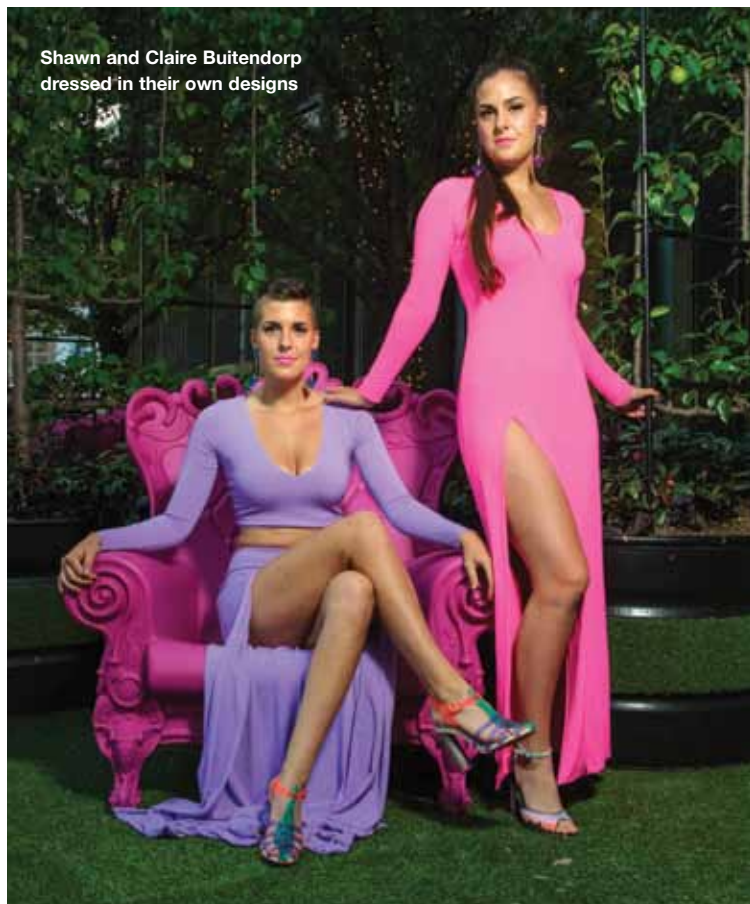


OPPOSITES ATTRACT

THE SISTERS OF SHOCK AND AWWW BLEND GIRLISH CHARM WITH EDGY DESIGNS



Shawn and Claire Buitendorp dressed in their own designs

It's not unusual for identical twins Shawn and Claire Buitendorp to finish each other's sentences, especially when it has to do with fashion, style, and all things wild and chic.

When the two 24-year-old sisters discuss their style icons, Shawn lists the sporty aesthetic of Gwen Stefani and Rita Ora as a huge inspiration, while Claire rattles off classic, feminine beauties and the designers who truly know how to dress a woman.

"Grace Kelly, that '50s aesthetic, Oscar de la Renta," Claire says, listing more designers such as John Galliano and Jean Paul Gaultier.

"Dior!" the two sisters say in unison.

But while Shawn and Claire have differing personal styles – Shawn being the edgier, sportier twin with undercut short hair, and Claire being the more effeminate twin with long, dark brown hair usually pulled up into a high ponytail – this blend of opposites creates the perfect balance for their custom clothing and stagewear brand Shock and Awww.

As with many budding fashion designers, the sisters had an interest in clothing at a young age, despite growing up in Grand Ledge, Mich., where eclectic or over-the-top fashion was not always favored. After high school, Shawn and Claire received a full-ride scholarship to Lansing Community College, where they studied fashion design and earned their associate's degrees.

"Once we went to college, that's when we actually learned how to sew ... It was a swift learning curve for us," Shawn explains. "Claire didn't even know how to use the backstitch lever on the machine when we were first sewing!"

But the hard work and long hours paid off pretty well when they made their first high-quality garment for a certain colorful pop star in 2011.

For their 21st birthday, Shawn and Claire decided to go see Katy Perry at the Palace of Auburn Hills for her California Dreams Tour. "And we thought, well, you only turn 21 once, so let's buy really good meet-and-greet tickets," Shawn says. But they didn't stop there.

The sisters decided to wear outfits that were true Shock and Awww originals – brightly colored, embellished and full of sparkling elements – designed by the girls themselves. "But then we were thinking, 'Well, that's great if she likes them, but we can't really give her anything because we're wearing them,'" Shawn says, explaining that they knew they had to design something just for her.

"So, we pretty much scoured the Internet, looking at all the costumes she's ever worn ... We just started developing this plan of 'OK, let's work with this design, and let's see how far this can take us.' And we never made anything of that quality or level before," Shawn says, noting that it took about five months to make.

"Frankly, Shawn thought I was nuts!" Claire chimes in, with Shawn adding that Claire is the dreamer of the two. But on the night of the concert, they gave the bubble-gum pink, candy heart tulle dress to Katy Perry, who wore it nearly 25 times at other meet-and-greets across the country.


The sisters were thrilled, to say the least. And by the time those images of Perry in their dress popped up on the Internet, the girls were transitioning to New York City for a design internship with Betsey Johnson. While working in the city, they learned that Perry was coming to Madison Square Garden, only a short distance away from where they were staying. With no further hesitance, they designed a second outfit for the singer, which she wore that night.

"And who was sitting in front of us? Betsey Johnson!" Shawn recalls. "We got to tell her that Katy Perry was wearing her interns' outfit at that time, which was pretty cool."

But after their success in New York, they decided they needed more education and moved back home to attend the University of Michigan, where they earned bachelor's degrees in entrepreneurial business and communication. "We have both the fashion knowledge from our associate's degrees and then the business acumen from our bachelor's degrees, which is great for young business owners," Shawn says.

Now the sisters are working with performers around the country such as Nervo, Little Mix, Lola Blanc and Aria Crescendo, and are constantly looking for new collaborations with artists and performers. Still situated in Michigan at the moment, the sisters are looking for the chance to move back to the Big Apple. And as for Shock and Awww? They've got some big plans for the company.

"A ready-to-wear collection and a presentation in New York City. Those are my goals," says Claire, with Shawn adding that she wants to see Shock and Awww on the red carpet and in more music videos.

"See, for me, I think Shawn is thinking too small," Claire adds, laughing. "I can see handbags. I can see jewelry. I can see the Shock and Awww mecca. She's thinking small. I'm thinking global."  — Audrey LaForest

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