



Art to Wear

MIAMI-BASED DESIGNER **LISU VEGA** SELLS GLOBALLY YET CREATES LOCALLY. BY **GALENA MOSOVICH**

Lisu Vega opens the door to the Little Haiti studio she shares with her artist husband, Juan Henriquez. She's draped in a striking cobalt blue cape that covers her slight frame without overwhelming her completely. That's because she made it by hand. Vega makes a lot of things by hand, creating what she likes to call "art to wear."

The 34-year-old Miami-born artist and fashion designer employs vibrant colors that pervaded her childhood in a small town near Maracaibo, Venezuela, and her adult life when she returned to Miami. "The bright blue skies here are so similar to there; both are so inspiring," says Vega, who recently won a competition to design the flight attendant uniforms for a reincarnated Eastern Airlines, a household name in Miami for 65 years until it went out of business in 1991.

INSIGHT

WHERE DO YOU FIND INSPIRATION?

"Inspiration comes anytime from anywhere, but Miami is really my muse."

WHY "MADE IN MIAMI"?

"I refuse to produce in China or other places because of the exploitation of the young workers and human trafficking."

TELL ME SOMETHING QUIRKY ABOUT YOU:

"I keep a sewing machine with me at all times. I have one in my studio, one in my car, and one in my bedroom at home."

WERE YOU ALWAYS INTO FASHION?

"My grandmother, who's 81 now, taught me to sew when I was 4, but I went to law school. I ended up leaving all that behind."

ANY ADVICE FOR EMERGING FASHION DESIGNERS IN MIAMI AS THEY START THEIR BUSINESSES?

"You can work hard here in Miami, and you can achieve your dreams."

Lisu Vega at her studio in Little Haiti.

Though it bears the same name, Vega clarifies, the new Eastern Airlines Group is not affiliated with the defunct carrier. And neither are her designs. "When I was 6, my mom's friend was a super chic flight attendant for a Venezuelan airline," she says. "I'm channeling her vibe and elegance for this project."

The fusion of glamour and function is what makes this self-taught designer's collections so desirable for many of Miami's most fabulous women, including Athina Klioumi de Marturet, the wife of the acclaimed Venezuelan composer and maestro of The Miami Symphony Orchestra, Eduardo Marturet. This summer, she commissioned Vega to create a silkscreen gown bearing a repetitive stylized image of Eduardo at work for the opening night of his ninth season with MISO.

The iterative patterning technique is one of Vega's signature moves. She says her indigenous roots taught her that you can't worry too much about matching, which has allowed her to go wild with tribal imprints, collages, Japanese silhouettes, mod geometric forms, and African color combinations.

One hundred percent of her line is made in Miami with primarily organic or upcycled (using useless/recycled goods and making them better) textiles, which poses a challenge as she competes against designers sourcing and producing elsewhere for much less. "You have to keep your priorities straight," says Vega, a self-described "artist, mother, and an American."

One of her biggest priorities is her family, and she and her husband of 15 years are the proud parents of Julian, their 6-year-old son. She recalls how she breast-fed him for nearly two years while she worked at her desk, building her business; her designs are now carried in stores from Miami to Panama and Venezuela. "Without him, all of this would be impossible—he's my inspiration." *Alessandra Gold Concept Store, 3326 N. Miami Ave., Miami, 786-518-3357; lisuvega.com* **OD**