

WHERE WOMEN CREATE

book of
inspiration

**IN THE
STUDIO** *and*
BEHIND THE SCENES
with **Extraordinary
Women**



JO PACKHAM  JENNY DOH



Ashley Carter

Ashley Carter uses her fascination with fantasy and fairy tales to design inspired creations that help people celebrate life. To get her designs produced and out into the world, she oversees a production staff through her company called Goldbug Studio, where each and every piece is lovingly handmade in Raleigh, North Carolina.

HAUNTING QUALITY

What Ashley Carter is inspired by doesn't fit into a nutshell. "I'm inspired by fairy tales, folklore, deeply southern traditions, superstitions, vintage carnival, theater, and circus ephemera, and my mother's style of entertaining," she says. "And if I weren't in charge of everything related to Goldbug Studio, I'd probably be renovating houses or creating theater and movie sets."

Aside from all of these fantastic sources of inspiration, Ashley also turns to New Orleans as a clear and present muse within her work. "My work has been heavily inspired by my childhood memories and impressions of New Orleans," she says. "My paternal grandmother, Meme, lived uptown on Napoleon Avenue for over 50 years. I was born in New Orleans and my family visited often ... I've always thought of that city as a storybook place — almost like visiting a foreign country. I remember feeling slightly stunned when a buyer at my first wholesale show said my pieces reminded her of Mardi Gras floats. Until that moment, I hadn't consciously made the connection."



When Ashley embarks on creating one of her signature pieces, she leaves no stone unturned in terms of materials used. Branches, leaves, vintage millinery, and found objects are fair game — and always abundantly present in her studio.



The final source of major inspiration for Ashley is what she describes as “hauntings.” “Most members of my family believe that my grandmother’s home in New Orleans and my family’s first home in Greensboro, North Carolina, were both haunted,” she says. For Ashley, the idea that a house or object could be haunted is absolutely fascinating to her. “The creepier the better,” she says. “I like using vintage elements in my designs and giving them new life ... I’ve been told many times that there is a haunted quality to some of my work.”

VINTAGE MILLINERY FOUND

In 2003 when Ken and Carolyn Blazier (Ashley’s largest millinery supplier) were ready to retire, Ashley took one look at their inventory in Georgia and purchased the entire inventory. She knew it would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. To house it all, Ashley found a warehouse space outside her home to make it all come together. “Originally, it was just a raw warehouse space ... but it had an amazing arched wood-frame ceiling and good natural light,” she says. “The studio is shotgun style — a long narrow space about 650 square feet with painted concrete floors ... the space is cheery, light, and bright with French blue porcelain enamel light fixtures, a vintage crystal chandelier, 1940s wallpaper, and vintage furniture.”

While the production team for Goldbug Studio works on a long communal counter created with stained doors facing two huge picture windows and a fenced courtyard, Ashley’s personal studio space is separated from the main production line by a partition wall. “I prefer to do most of my work on the counter in the main studio but when I need to really concentrate or spread all of my junk everywhere, my private studio is a great refuge,” she says.



HANDMADE FOLLIES

The art that Ashley regularly designs for Goldbug Studio is a collection of sparkling handmade follies, fairy tale-inspired figures, decadent headpieces, and vintage-style party embellishments. The process of constructing her designs into products can be described as “vintage mixed-media” where paper sculptures are blended with vintage millinery elements and carefully selected vintage embellishments.

“My designs wed the simple and the extravagant,” says Ashley. “I’m not a purist. I’m not interested in trying to re-create pieces from a specific era — I like to mix it all up. For example, I’ll use 1930s pageant queen paper dolls and Victorian starlets mixed with 1950s wallpaper, glass glitter candies, vintage crepe paper, 1920s millinery, and new wired French ribbon candy.”



Her colors

ROBIN’S EGG BLUE • SEA GREEN • IVORY

Ashley’s favorite color palette is made up of robin’s egg blue, sea green, and ivory. “It’s a lovely, calm, and serene palette,” she says. “I need to live with light colors, big windows, and open space. I like a pop of red or black here and there for drama and interest but in general, I live in a sun-dappled blue-green world.”

Though many things in Ashley’s collection have a muted vintage aesthetic, she likes to mix such findings with modern-day elements like glass glitter, glossy papers, and colorful fabrics and embellishments.

She stays inspired

With the endless demands of running a business, Ashley sometimes finds herself battling creative ruts. "I get overwhelmed with the business end of things and before I know it, a few weeks can pass without much time spent in the studio," she says. As soon as Ashley becomes aware of this, she will make sure, after her staff members leave for the day, to put on one of her all-time favorite movies, turn off the phone, and start moving her hands in her studio. When this happens, a new piece will usually start to form — often around 2:00 a.m.



CELEBRATING LIFE

Each piece offered through Goldbug Studio is handmade in Raleigh, North Carolina. Among the large collection of designs, birds and other wired creations have become Goldbug Studio's signature. It's important to Ashley that her designs look like they have moving parts, as they are inspired by her love of fantasy and fairy tales that are — in our imaginations — never stagnant but very much full of motion and life. "The Goldbug Studio Collection is a culmination of all the stories, characters, and elaborate parties that live in my head," she says.

In many ways, what Ashley creates are works that help people celebrate. She remembers that a collector once described one of her crown designs as "the birthday cake I never had." And for an artist whose mission is to create celebratory magic inspired by fantasies and fairy tales, Ashley took the collector's comments as the "ultimate compliment." "It's a celebration of childhood, imagination, and life," she says.

Ashley Carter is proprietor of Goldbug Studio, where she designs and assembles elegant adornments for the home and special occasions. To learn more, visit www.goldbugstudio.com.



Her tip for organization & exercise to fuel creativity

TIP: Ashley Carter knows a thing or two about design and assembly. For keeping things organized during production, Ashley recommends that all elements be pulled together and meticulously counted. "Prep all parts in a systematic way ... by cutting everything at once, spraying everything at once, and glittering all at once. Once all the prep is done, and you're sure you have everything you need to complete the project, you can assemble," she says.

Exercise: Over-valuing vintage finds can inhibit creativity. The next time you feel such inhibition, consider taking a prized vintage treasure and creating something with it. By using an item that you've been afraid to use because you might not find another one just like it, you'll be surprised that even more extraordinary things will enter your life, now that you've made room for them.



She remembers

Ashley remembers growing up with a very generous father who interestingly hated receiving gifts that were fancy or expensive. "Fancy cars, designer labels, the latest gadgets ... these things have never motivated him in his career or his life," she says. "He was always happiest with a handmade gift from one of his four girls. I learned very early on that a simple gift made of Popsicle sticks from one of his four daughters would bring him more joy than a Polo shirt." This type of handmade upbringing was cultivated by both her father and mother — resulting in a family that values the art of making and giving heartfelt gifts by hand.