

## "Lines and Numbers"

by Anya Georgijevic

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Photos by Peter Jensen - <http://www.peterbo.com>



Ever wonder who ensures that your clothes fit right? Who makes sure that you've got enough room for your shoulders to move around freely, that your arms fit neatly through the armholes and that you can sit comfortably in your pants? It's the pattern maker, the bridge between an idea and reality.

For many top Vancouver designers, Laela Blanchet is that bridge. Think of her as an engineer to an architect: examining the structure of the garment, calculating ratios and nailing down the best fit for all shapes and sizes. Blanchet owns and operates Dampkring Designs, a pattern making studio in Vancouver. Together with her three full-time employees, she creates patterns for 150 to 200 clients at any given time. It may seem like a colossal number, but she has created a well-oiled business thanks to Gerber, a groundbreaking auto-CAD software that allows for digitizing, grading and plotting of patterns.

A graduate of George Brown College with a diploma in Fashion Design, Blanchet's interest was always on the technical side of things. She is, in her own words, a "lines and number person and problem solver," taking designer-sewn garments, or often just sketches and drawings, and turning them into reality. As a part of a high school home economics class, she held an internship with a local designer and pattern maker and fell in love with the profession instantly. Shortly after graduating from college, Blanchet moved across the country to Vancouver in the early 2000's. Following a brief stint as a costume-maker, she began working with a local fashion design and production company, eventually becoming their head pattern maker. After years of working for others, the seasoned veteran started Dampkring Designs and is widely regarded by many fashion designers as one of the best in the business. Blanchet is also an instructor at the Art Institute of Vancouver where she trains young designers how to draft and grade patterns using the Gerber technology and is often invited as a guest speaker by other fashion programs in the lower mainland.

"I'm a perfect compliment to somebody that does design," says Blanchet. It's often quite difficult for young designers to get from 'here is my idea' to 'here are my samples.' Dampkring Designs bridges that gap by helping designers with pre-production: getting garments factory-ready by creating patterns, altering patterns, sample sewing, grading (or sizing) and marking the final patterns. It's the collaboration between the designer and the pattern maker that achieves success and good chemistry between the two is a must. "I don't click with everybody. I feel what I do is a bit of an art. Some people I just click with and we get out brilliant designs and with some, we hit a roadblock." With that collaboration and chemistry in place, the first pattern and sample can be perfect and ready for production. Sounding a bit like a proud mother, Blanchet remarks, "I've had some people that are just such success stories. Their lines and collections have built to the point they are big people in the industry now."

Blanchet's meticulous eye for detail and incredible set of technical skills can assist both young and experienced designers in achieving that perfect fit. Dampkring Design offers that bridge from sketch to product, from idea to reality.

For more information please visit the website at [www.dampkringdesigns.com](http://www.dampkringdesigns.com).