

Pamela Baker: A Woman of Distinction

Organza, linen, chiffon. Do these fabrics conjure thoughts of fashion from Paris or New York? You need not look any further than the North Shore for beautiful, wearable art.

Pamela Baker has accomplished more in her 40 years than many of us dream of. Baker, who grew up in the Squamish Nation, is grateful to her Coast Salish father, who taught her good business ethics and the politics of Band life. Her mother, who is Kwagiutud and part Tlingit, has also been a major influence in Baker's life, instilling in her a strong sense of identity and encouraging her to realize her dreams. Baker's eyes light up as she recalls receiving her first button blanket from another role model, her great aunt.

Baker is adept at integrating both sides of her ancestry in her designs, from the embroidered Coast Salish "eye" on her contemporary potlatch pillows to the Kwagiutud chilkat blanket,

the inspiration for her elegant evening capes.

After completing a course in fashion merchandizing in the late 1970s, Baker moved to the United States, where she got her start in the fashion industry, coordinating fashion shows. Awakening in Baker was a fascination with design, which led her to a two-year textile-arts course. She then returned home in 1985 to begin her own business, Touch of Culture. "I set a goal that I would continue to work within Native communities and better myself as a teacher," she says. Baker has never lost sight of that mission.

"My goal was to build self-esteem within our youth, as well as start my own business," Baker says. For 12 years, Baker worked with the youth of the Capilano Indian Band as a counsellor. She was instrumental in developing the youth program Self-Esteem One. Learning traditions such as the sacred circle and medicine

wheel, youth reconnected with their roots, gaining confidence. Baker involved them in the fashion industry, leading tours to places such as Arizona, where the youth learned about other Native cultures.

With a desire to further develop her craft, Baker enrolled in Capilano College's textile program, graduating in 1994. Her quest for learning did not end there, however. Supported by Band's education director, Baker applied successfully to degree programs at fashion-design schools in New York and Los Angeles.

With her two boys, she set out for California's celebrated Otis College of Art and Design. The school was "very tough," Baker admits. "Each night I would work on my projects until 2 am, or 3 am, and sometimes even later." Her hard work and perseverance paid off.

Baker's talent earned her two design awards: top honours for sportswear in her first year, followed

LEFT: Tribute to Coast Salish Women

Photo by Erin Kennah

RIGHT: Contemporary NW Coast Indian Artwork Dévoré 2 pc/hand dyed powder blue silk velvet
Photo by Michelle Paquette

