

NORTHEAST MIAMI-DADE

A FASHION LAB FOR ALL

■ **DesignLab Miami in North Miami offers a variety of classes and workshops for different ages and skill levels.**

BY SUE ARROWSMITH
Special to The Miami Herald

The do-it-yourself movement, which includes everything from cooking gourmet meals to remodeling your home, has been fueled by popular television reality shows. It didn't take long for fashion design to catch on, too.

At DesignLab Miami in North Miami, both kids and adults learn to conceptualize and create unique outfits and accessories from scratch — à la *Project Runway* — under the guidance of Angie Cohen, a seasoned designer who has worked with Calvin Klein and J.G. Hook, among other leading brands.

"I think people may have started 'doing it themselves' as somewhat of an economic measure, or maybe just to take a break from all the high-tech gadgets they are surrounded by. But what really makes the trend grow and makes people stick with it is the satisfaction of creating something by hand and not getting it out of a box," Cohen said.

DesignLab Miami offers a variety of classes and workshops for different ages and skill levels, such as *Mommy and Me*, toddler and adult sewing, after-school programs, and even a summer camp. She also collaborates with schools on special projects.

On a recent Saturday morning, a group of kids worked on personalized Halloween bags to collect

If you go

What: Ruth K. Broad Bay Harbor K-8 Center carnival and fashion show featuring recycled materials.

When: Saturday, Nov. 17, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Where: 1155 93rd St., Bay Harbor Islands.

Admission: \$15 (includes rides) and \$1 to play games.

For more information: Call Julia Magnani, PTA president, at 305-610-1876. For more on workshops offered at DesignLab Miami, 2248 NE 123rd St., North Miami: Call 305-891-0440, or email angie@designlabmiami.com

candy. Isa Nuñez and 7-year-old son Conner Barreras made a black Darth Vader-themed bag. First they traced the design on the fabric with chalk, then cut the pattern and sewed on straps. The finishing touch was a stick-on label with Connor's name.

"It's a really creative and fun place where they can dream up fun," said Nuñez.

Upstairs in the room with industrial sewing machines, her 11-year-old, Kailani Barreras, meticulously pieced together a Lady Gaga-inspired prom gown. The lime-green dress had an intricate bustier made in part with pieces of Capri Sun juice pouches, recycled fabric and scraps.

"I really love it," she said. "It's so much fun."

Kailani's design will be featured as part of a Recycling Fashion Show on Nov. 17 at her school, Ruth



PHOTOS BY ALLISON DIAZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

FOUND MATERIALS: Mia Erlichman, 8, cuts out pieces of recycled snack bags that will be used to create a skirt at Design Lab Miami. Erlichman is wearing a skirt she made previously at Design Lab Miami.

K. Broad Bay Harbor K-8 Center. The fashion show is part of an annual carnival to raise money for the school, including a new playground, said PTA President Julia Magnani.

DesignLab Miami first teamed up with the school for last year's fashion show. "Our second time around, this one is going to be bigger with a silent auction," said Monise Miller, a Bay Harbor teacher overseeing the project.

Also in the fashion show: a potato-chip dress and skirt made from Doritos bags. Other items will include purses, shoes and hats made with recycled materials collected at the school.

Cohen said the classes and projects are not just fun, they are also beneficial.

"They are learning a new skill, and that is always satisfying and makes a person feel good about him- or herself. They can express their creativity in a new way," Cohen said.

Cohen opened DesignLab Miami in 2010. Originally from Medellín, Colombia, she attended the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and earned a degree in textile surface design. She started her own line of clothing and is also an artist and muralist, but said her true passion now is teaching.

"When I started, I was

told kids this young can't learn to sew. I created this place for kids to come in and believe they can do anything," Cohen said.

She envisions DesignLab Miami expanding into an international franchise that can provide the same opportunities for kids and adults everywhere.

The studio also works with charitable organizations, such as Sewing for Smiles, which creates and donates hand-made items for children and families in need.

Recently, Cohen said they donated more than 250 pillow cases, bags and toys to a local homeless shelter and a charitable organization in Africa.



DIY: Jillian Do, 12, cuts material to create phone cases. Do is wearing a shirt she made using old T-shirt material.