

Carolyn's Kitchen

Carolyn West's vintage-inspired aprons and dish gloves walk the line between the lands of whimsical dress-up and naughty pin-ups. This range of appeal makes Carolyn's designs perfect gifts for all generations and occasions. I interviewed Carolyn West from her home in Los Angeles, where she designs and manufactures these beauties.



Carolyn officially launches her line this month, but she has already discovered some interesting things about her own products while testing the market at gift fairs. Carolyn exclaims, "The men love it. When they come up to the booth, they tune in. The male psyche loves it. They want their women to buy it more than the women do. These also can be used for fetish - you can wear nothing underneath. It's a takeoff of the 'French Maid' outfit and that whole fantasy. The black aprons sell the best." Indeed, these aprons are a real kitchen treat for men.



These sets are also sweet treats for yourself and fun gifts for mothers, sisters, daughters, and brides...especially as women have become more attracted to domesticity since September 11th, including knitting and cooking and Desperate Housewives. Yet, "[t]here is a humorous element to it because so many women are now in the working world," Carolyn observes. To be sure, Carolyn herself mixes the domesticity of past decades with the working world of the 21st century woman by creating a business focusing on feminine domestic designs.

Carolyn began her career by running a mail order department for an aromatherapy business. There, she learned the skills that she uses in her work today. She thought, "I'm learning so much here that I'd really like to start my own line, create my own job." Despite no formal training in design, art, or business, Carolyn has "always been creative, always wanted to have my own business, and somehow decided to go for it. Even when I was a kid, age five or six, I loved to sew and I love fabrics and fashion." So Carolyn launched her business by designing sari pillows and selling them through stores.



Later, inspired by a gorgeous apron and glove set from Paris, Carolyn "started finding '40s' patterns and I love the glamorous styles. It just popped into my head that I wanted to do this, to bring back the glamour, sexiness, and cuteness. The gloves and fabrics are new and nicer - it's a new and improved version of the '40s."

Carolyn is quite excited about her new career. "I'm following my passion. I wish I had followed my dream when I was younger. I wish I had started this a year ago." Recently, her products completely sold out at a gift fair and were also showcased in two issues of Romantic Homes magazine, a "very



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crafty shabby chic magazine." She plans to expand the line to kitchen linens, towels, tablecloths, and oven mitts.

During this adventure, Carolyn's greatest challenge has been "keeping positive and moving forward in the face of obstacles." Carolyn is lucky to have a very supportive boyfriend and family. "I have had support big time...I've not just been on my own." To burgeoning entrepreneurs, Carolyn suggests thinking thoroughly about the financial aspect and how much savings and/or investment will be needed. Her boyfriend has been extremely helpful for her on this front and Carolyn says, "My boyfriend feels that my success is his repayment." Carolyn has noticed a lot of couples and family members working together, which could also save a lot of money. For fashion or design entrepreneurs, Carolyn suggests an "extremely useful resource called [Fashion Business Incorporated \(www.fashionbizinc.org\)](http://www.fashionbizinc.org). For women trying to start their own lines, it's really incredible."

**Carolyn is offering a special for
UniversityChic readers!**

**\$10 Off Any Set (Apron & Gloves)
PLUS Free Shipping!**

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in a lovely gift box!**

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