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[AVALON COLUMNS](#)

[AVALON TRAVEL](#)

[AVALON INTERNS & MENTORS](#)

[AVALON: THE ARTS](#)

[AVALON MEDIA KIT](#)

[AVALON 2011 WATER ISSUE](#)

[AVALON SUMMER 2010](#)

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FASHION:

Interview with a Goddess of Wind and Water

Interview by Rebekah Blu

Photos by Randi Baird



The setting: Evening. A design studio, a stone's throw from Vineyard Haven harbor, on the island of Martha's Vineyard. Two ladies—former Swedish national windsurfing champion and now fashion-designer Stina Sayre and artist Rebekah Blu—lounged on a sofa, surrounded by rich textures. The scent of sea, carried on a gentle breeze, finds its way in through the open door.

Blu: How do you think growing up in Sweden with a grandfather who owned several clothing stores, influenced your career choice?

Stina: Well, I grew up being apart of that environment and I would work in his stores. Ever since I was a kid, I found clothing design interesting. As for my drive to make money, making clothing, of course, I think of my grandfather. He was a businessman, he was not a designer at all. But then I have many artists in my family. So, I have a bit of both.

Blu: What sorts of artists are in your family?

Stina: There are painters, musicians, and sculptors. I come from art. A lot of art.

Blu: It appears that water has served as an

inspiration for many of your designs. What was your initial connection to the ocean, did you grow up near the coast in Sweden?

Stina: I was lucky to have a summer home on the West Coast. My Mom would actually pack us up and go for the whole summer. That's where I started windsurfing.

Blu: Tell me a bit about your accomplishments and experiences as a windsurfer.

Stina: I was a Swedish champion for five years. I traveled and did a lot of international competitions. That's how I met my husband, Nevin Sayre, at one of the regattas.

Blu: Is Nevin currently in the business?

Stina: Yes. He still works in the industry [as a member of the U.S. Windsurfing Task Force, formed in the spring of 2010.] He just finished doing a National windsurfing regatta for kids.

Blu: Speaking of kids, I hear your children are passionate about the sport as well.

Stina: Yes, my son, Rasmus. And my daughter Solvig, she is on the U.S. Sailing Team in

windsurfing.

Blu: Rumor has it, you have an unusual way of commuting to work?

Stina: Sometimes I paddleboard to work. You stand on a surfboard and you have a paddle, similar to when you sit in a kayak. I wear my work attire, but I have good balance. And if I were to get wet, once I arrive at my store, I always have a selection of something dry to put on.

Blu: Having spent so many years as a professional athlete, what do you think you learned as a windsurfer about the body and movement that you apply to your current vocation?

Stina: I'm glad that you're bringing that up because I'm aware of it. I've done many different sports. I also used to be a dancer, but I think figure-skating has taught me the most, as far as what I can apply to design. In particular, doing figure eights on the ice. It gives you such an incredible sense of space and timing. It also gives you an incredible sense of weight, form, and shape—very sculptural in a way.

Blu: What do you think are your greatest



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strengths as an artist?

Stina: Design wise, I think my strength is jackets and coats. This here is a duster. It's a great shape that works with a lot of bodies.

Blu: Do you tend to work in this general palette of neutrals, white, black, and blues?

Stina: I pretty much stick to these colors. Occasionally I throw in something different but these are the colors I come back to. Also because I am such a small business, I can't create my own fabrics. So I have to pick up whatever I can find. I work with very high-end fabrics that are leftovers from big designers.

Blu: Why are you drawn to these colors?

Stina: I look for sophisticated colors that work with a lot of skin tones.

Blu: What is one thing you try to keep in mind while creating new designs?

Stina: I consider the whole human being. We want to get stuff done and yet we are sensual, playful beings. We are not just one thing, and I think clothing should support that.

Blu: It seems you've captured the essence of both Martha's Vineyard and Manhattan: One

could wear your clothing in either place. Do you design for both?

Stina: Yes, very much so.

Blu: Your handbags made out of seatbelts seem perfect for the streets of New York! What inspired you to work with this material?

Stina: I had a role of elastic webbing and decided to play with it. I started to sew it into spirals and it became a tube, so I stitched it together. But I realized the elastic just didn't look clean enough. And I thought, "oh seatbelt webbing would be good." I don't know how it came into my mind. Then I researched seatbelt webbing, I spent a lot of

time developing that line.

Blu: It's evident. How long has it been your signature bag?

Stina: Maybe seven, eight years. By the way, I love your hair. The texture reminds me of yarn. I used to knit a lot.

Blu: I've noticed you seem to be drawn to materials that are tactile. How do you think your experience with knitting influences your choice of fabrics?

Stina: The more knowledge you have about something, the better you understand it, and knitting has given me that understanding

of fabric. When you knit you are actually making the fabric. Maybe that's why I choose my fabrics so carefully. When customers come into my shop, that's always the first thing I hear: "Your fabrics are fantastic."

Blu: At your Runways Merge fashion show, held in a hangar at the Martha's Vineyard Airport, where you introduced your current Fall/Winter line, there was an abundance of clothes! You are a small operation. How did you manage to do it?

Stina: I didn't do it all by myself, I had help with the sewing. But it is a whole lot of work! I couldn't do it every season, that's for sure.

Blu: Though you've been working as a designer for years, you only recently started doing fashion shows. And I understand that a Vineyard restaurant owner, Susan Guérin, works with you in organizing and promoting the shows, which you do as benefits. This show raised funds for the Michael J. Fox Foundation and for The Yard, a performance art and dance space in a magical wooded setting on the island. What inspired you and Susan to choose them?

Stina: Susan and I both support The Yard. It inspires us, to see world-class artists in such an intimate setting. It's such a kick to go up there. I saw this guy who sings with the New York City Opera in this little performance



space in the woods! Most people don't ever get to do that, but we can go do that every weekend of the summer on Martha's Vineyard.

And this year, we thought it would be great to include another organization that wasn't in The Arts, to try to bring in a wider group of people and mix it up a bit. Michael J. Fox summers here and he's a person who inspires us all, so his foundation, and raising money for Parkinson's disease, seemed like a good fit.

Blu: Your choice to hold the show in an airplane hangar was brilliant. The way the lighting came through the open wall at the end of the day was exquisite. Were you pleased with how it looked?

Stina: Yes, very pleased. I chose the hangar because I wanted an industrial-looking space. My clothing isn't cute, so my design sensibility doesn't work with picket fences



know what you're seeing. You see fabric but you don't really understand it until it's on the body. So a fashion show is the designer's art show or installation.

Blu: When choosing models to present your designs, what do you look for?

Stina: I'm looking for woman who can project an inner beauty. Modeling is much more than meets the eye. It's actually an art form in itself.

Blu: What one aspect of clothing design do you appreciate most?

Stina: It's kind of interesting with clothing. I have a pair of shoes that are sitting in the window because I think they're so gorgeous. They're as much art as a painting or sculpture. It's just that we use them. And I think that's what's cool with design, that we use the art. It's not that I don't appreciate a beautiful painting, because I do. But fashion has another dimension. It has function. You touch it, and it's precious in one way, but yet it's not so precious.

Blu: Another unusual thing about fashion design is how different your art looks each time its viewed! That must be exciting?

Stina: Very exciting. It's an aspect of clothing I think is interesting—that it takes a body to make it happen.

Blu: At the end of the day, Stina, what satisfies you most about your work?

Stina: I really enjoy the personal relationship that I get with my clients. When someone realizes they look attractive in something they didn't think they could wear, it's rewarding, seeing that little self-discovery.

Blu: For whom are you designing? Describe your customer for us.

Stina: My customer is sophisticated and adventurous. She's professional and she's powerful in her work and as a human being. I see my clothing as a tool. When you walk into the room, you have already spoken. It's a language. And you can use that to your advantage. I want women to be powerful. I want them to feel confident in what they're wearing, so they can accomplish what's important to them. That's what I want my clothing to do for women. ❖



RIGHT: The designer often models her own clothes, and the streets of New York provided the perfect backdrop for photographer Randi Baird to shoot Stina in her winter collection.

View more Stina Sayre designs: stinasayre.com

and roses. I loved seeing the silhouettes of the airplanes with the silhouettes of the models. That was really cool. Also I think Wendy Taucher (artistic director of The Yard) did a wonderful job with the choreography.

Blu: You've said you could envision doing a fashion show on a ferryboat, utilizing the ramp as a runway. Where else do you dream of doing a show?

Stina: Now that I've done the industrial space, I'd choose a mountain top—snow and storm! I love drama, which would explain why I love opera so much.

Blu: Speaking of drama, I understand "air" is a theme for this collection, and that was particularly evident with the spectacular red dress worn by the opera singer in the fashion show!

Stina: I made the red dress for opera singers, as a way for me to honor my love of opera. I

think it's the most powerful art form. When I hear opera it makes me cry and it makes the hair stand on top of my head, a beautiful, emotional experience. I don't sing, so this is my way of singing.

Blu: I'm drawn to photographing musicians for the same reason. I often view what I do with a camera as my way of playing an instrument. How did you feel, seeing the opera singers on stage, performing in your designs?

Stina: Grateful. I feel privileged to have been able to work with them. Hopefully the event brought as much attention to their craft as it did mine, and I hope it raised awareness for the dancers at The Yard as well.

Blu: What do you appreciate most about your work being presented on the runway?

Stina: A fashion show is a designer's gallery. When you look at the rack, you don't really

