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PHOTOS BY WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN



Design assistant Sophie Jolin-Roch wears a flirty bubble dress transformed from what was a fuchsia ball gown with never-ending folds. The hint of white crinoline peaking through the bottom adds fun.



Brooke Hunter's halter dress was transformed from a classic strapless gown. Rachel Sin removed the black waistband and added a halter strap with ribbon detail. The ruched sweetheart neckline, bow and numerous curvy folds create wow appeal.



Megan Aubin, 16, rocks the red party dress, which used to be a heavy mermaid-style gown. The pretty neckline was kept intact, but the crinoline was removed and incorporated into the shorter dress.



Cindy Hill, 16, wears a pink pouf dress. The bridesmaid dress screamed out-of-date with the '80s print waistband and ruffled trim. These were removed and the neckline improved with a sweetheart dip.

On with the prom



Rachel Sin's made-over prom dresses are a hit with Fairy Godmothers' girls

BY CHELSEY BURNSIDE

The clock has barely hit 9 a.m., but Ottawa's Fairy Godmothers and their crew of volunteers are awake and excited as teenage girls on prom day.

Armed with clipboards and large Starbucks cups, they rifle through hundreds of donated dresses and rush to size them all before the girls arrive for their first official prom dress fitting on what the Godmothers call Boutique Day.

"It's why we wear runners," says the organization's co-founder Melissa Shabinsky with a laugh as she carries a pile of gowns across the room, careful not to let their colourful hemlines drag on the floor.

The space itself has had a makeover for the first fitting, transformed from a dingy City Centre warehouse into any girl's dream closet.

The makeshift boutique is complete with a room full of high-

heeled shoes and every style of gown imaginable, from a classic floor-length princess dress engulfed in embellishments and tulle, to strapless cocktail dresses that could be straight out of a *Gossip Girl* episode.

Shabinsky and her fellow Fairy Godmother, Catherine Whitla, have collected more than 1,000 dresses to lend to Ottawa girls who can't afford one of their own on their special night.

By 9:30 a.m., five girls are modelling the dresses in front of the floor-length mirrors as friends, family and their designated personal shoppers "ooh" and "ahh" over their selections, eagerly suggesting accessories and helping to alter them to perfection.

But the game of dress-up is put on hold as designer Rachel Sin enters the room with the four dresses she custom-made from out-of-date ballgowns.

The girls are awestruck as Sin unwraps each piece. A ruched Barbie-pink and black halter dress

even incites gasps from her audience, and her designs are snapped up seconds after the plastic has been torn off.

"I think I'm in love with the red one," says Philemon Wright High School student Megan Aubin, 16. "It's one of a kind."

Aubin and her friend Cindy Hill, 16, are quick to claim two of the four Rachel Sin originals for Philemon Wright's prom at the Château Laurier on June 25.

'We wanted to update these dresses to look fresh, fun and ready to party.'

"I knew I wanted something short, and I like that it's really girly," says Hill. "Everyone's really scared of wearing the same thing as another girl. We even started a Facebook group so people can post their dresses. I can knowingly walk out of here without the same dress as anyone else."

Both girls don't want to take the

dresses off, basking in their 15 minutes of fame as they get their photos taken and are fawned over by the volunteers.

Sin shows the girls pictures of what the dresses looked like before she got her expert hands on them. It took only about three weeks to take the dresses from dowdy to dance floor-ready, and the remodelled frocks are shades of their matronly former selves.

"We wanted to update these dresses to look fresh, fun and ready to party," says Sin, adding that short dresses are the way to go for prom this year.

"With the over-the-top ball gowns, we deconstructed and removed outdated embellishments. With the simpler dresses we added detailing to give the eye another focal point," she says.

And what has been the most rewarding part of Sin's work with the Fairy Godmothers thus far?

"It always feels good to see a final result," she says. "Today, definitely today."