

THE JEAN FITS

CALS alumna assists with national made-to-measure jean company

BY TREY BARRETT

WHAT STARTED as a young girl creating clothing for her many dolls eventually turned into an active career in fashion design for Franklin, Tennessee native **Michelle Jean**. The 2019 MSU fashion design and merchandising alumna always knew she had this passion for fashion.

“Fashion design had always excited me and was something that I could see myself doing for a while,” Jean said.

Jean’s love for fashion led her to Mississippi State, majoring in fashion design and merchandising with a product development and design concentration.

As an undergrad, Jean sought opportunities to expand her knowledge and experience. In 2017, she studied abroad in France and Italy while taking a class about historic costumes. The following summer, she secured her first internship as a production intern with Isoude, a Boston-based retail luxury company that creates custom collections for women.

“I was a part of the product development side of the company, meaning I helped test fabrics, make patterns, and create product books,” Jean said.

Jean secured the internship with the assistance of **Dr. Catherine Black**, a professor in the fashion design and merchandising program at MSU. Black steered her toward opportunities that complimented her career ambitions.

“Dr. Black was our internship placement teacher, so she was really helpful with suggestions, locations, and connections when I needed an

internship during my junior year,” Jean said.

It was during one of Black’s courses, computer-aided design (CAD) that Jean found her future employer, unbeknownst to her at the time. Blue Delta Jeans representatives were guest speakers for the course.

The Tupelo, Mississippi-based company produces made-to-measure fitted jeans that are handsewn. Each jean is made with raw denim, the purest form of denim that remains untouched after the dyeing and sanitation process, creating a durable pair of jeans.

“While looking for a job after graduation, I remembered Blue Delta had come to my CAD class in the spring, so I decided to reach out,” Jean said. “Company representatives were in Nashville for an event, near where I live. They interviewed me and I got the job.”

Jean has worked with Blue Delta Jeans since July 2019. Initially a design intern, Jean later became a pattern maker that same month. In this role, Jean worked with new fabrics to create contemporary patterns for jeans tailored to individual customers.

“It is cool to see all of the differences I can make with every new fabric and every discovery that can emerge with each new style,” Jean said. “I even have a custom pattern I can pair with different fabrics to create new styles and stains.”

After a customer orders a pair of Blue Delta jeans, they are first measured by tailors to create a custom pattern. Sixteen measurements, including

waist and inseam, are gathered to make the one-of-a-kind denim pants. The information is then loaded into CAD where Jean designs the pattern for the sewing team to create the jeans.

“Since I make the patterns, I can go in and tweak it to create a new pattern to test things out,” Jean said. “I’ve tested my pattern on skinny, bootcut, and flare jeans. This makes it easy to explain these patterns and styles to clients since I’ve had experience making them.”

In January 2022, Jean became the director of design and alterations. She works closely with alterations based on customers’ needs. Blue Delta’s customer service team gathers information from each client. Jean then decides how to remedy each alteration for each client and give it to the staff to fix.

Since Jean started at Blue Delta, the company has grown its audience from local Tupelo and Oxford residents to celebrities and professional athletes.

“At first I made patterns for local residents, and then suddenly it’s for a professional football player, country singer, or an actor,” Jean said. “I love our ability to reach a wider clientele who are all coming together for this great fitting pair of jeans.”

Even with the company’s national fame, Jean said she still enjoys working with the team she’s grown to love.

“As the team grows, we continue learning from each other. It’s a team I am happy to be a part of,” Jean said. 🐾

Michelle Jean (photo submitted)

