



## FIRST NATIONS' VERY OWN

# First Lady

BY: SHANNON LINDEN



PHOTO JILL SETAH

**S**he calls her fashion design First Lady and it's fabulously fitting. Not only is Jill Setah a proud First Nations woman, she's the first in her family to graduate from college, and really? What's the first thing that comes to any woman's mind when she's getting ready for a big event?

### What will I wear?

From traditional aboriginal dress for powwows to sassy contemporary couture, Setah's got it covered. "I got into fashion back in 2006, when I made my son a traditional regalia outfit. It looked good but I knew I wasn't doing it quite right."

That's when Setah decided to go back to school. Recently graduated from the two-year fashion design and merchandising program at the Northern Centre for Arts and Technology, Setah has already been invited to show her designs at National Aboriginal Fashion Week in Regina, has a fashion show planned in Westbank, she's on the design team, and is helping her students find cooperation with local vendors.

"I've been in contact with other designers from Vancouver who are all coming in to do a fashion show together too," she says.

PHOTO: ISA HAYWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY; WARDROBE: JILL SETAH; HAIR AND MAKEUP: ELSIE WATSON; MODEL: JAZ CLARKE; LIGHTING: TONY A. CLARKE



WARDROBE: JILL SETAH

She loves honoring her culture, yet she's equally adept at bringing First Nations flair to more modern designs. Dress in point: a stunning sheath-styled number with a west coast native motif featuring ravens and owls floating down the front, a slimming, eye-popping panel of red running down the sides. It's spectacular—and very wearable for any woman.

"My goal is to create classy designs," Setah explains. "When I first started, Michelle Obama came to mind. She's just so elegant and classy and I love her style."

Mrs. Obama may be her dream client but for now Setah is content to create traditional styles for local ladies as well as custom designs that cross over into mainstream fashion. She keeps up with trends and is cognizant of her clients' personalities.

"I have a couple of local clients that I make medicine dresses for, black skirts for powwows. Back in the day, First Nations women only wore skirts and we're seeing a return to that tradition," she explains.

"Right now I'm making one for a lady whose Indian name is, Brings the Storm, so I'm going to create a skirt that resemble that."

Check out her Pinterest site ([pinterest.com/youngnaivewoman/pins](http://pinterest.com/youngnaivewoman/pins)) to see Setah's tag line, From Culture to Fashion, come alive. A blazing black men's dress shirt accented with a bright turquoise aboriginal design at the collar and cuff and a sexy, off the shoulder black dress highlighted with a turquoise and red aboriginal motif at the waist and along the collar bone, are among her styles.

Unlike designers who use only applique, Setah sketches, creates patterns and uses First Nations fabric (much of which is special ordered from Dancing Bear Indian Trader in California) to hand sew her clothing.

As with First Nations jewellery featuring characters and cultural symbols, often seen on the wrists and finger and earlobes of people from all kinds of cultures, Setah's designs have the potential for broad appeal.

Born into the Chilcutin Nation near Williams Lake, Setah lives on Westbank First Nations land and would love to open a boutique there. Along with completing college and building her business, she is mother to three children, ranging from 4 to 18—with a fourth baby on the way.

"I'm going to be so busy!" She laughs. "Maybe I'll design maternity wear next!"

The future is promising for Setah—a new baby, a loving and supportive family and partner, a budding business—this First Lady is full of dreams bursting to be brought to life.

Like to know more? Email Setah at [youngnaivewoman@gmail.com](mailto:youngnaivewoman@gmail.com) or [www.youngnaivewoman.com](http://www.youngnaivewoman.com)

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