



LOTTE NEW YORK PALACE

You can dress like vintage Barbie with new fashion line

One of the largest sellers of vintage-inspired clothes is working with Mattel on the first women's line to meticulously duplicate some of Barbie's iconic early looks.

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NEW YORK — In time for her 60th birthday, Barbie has a new collaborator bringing her wide-ranging style to life for humans.

One of the largest sellers of vintage-inspired clothes, Unique Vintage, is working with Barbie parent Mattel on the first women's line to meticulously duplicate some of the doll's most iconic early looks. In the process, the company also has taken care of the one thing critics love to hate about Barbie, her very plastic hourglass physique, by offering the outfits in sizes XS to 4X.

The collaboration, Barbie x Unique Vintage, celebrates 1950s and '60s Babs. The company that sells online and in about 500 boutiques around the world plans to go even bigger for Barbie's big 6-0 next year, offering key fashion moments from across the rest of her decades.

Until then, for fall, we caught up with all things Barbie x Unique Vintage in the swanky Jewel Suite designed by jeweler-to-the-stars Martin Katz in the Lotte New York Palace hotel on Madison Avenue. Katz paired a few of the looks with some of his own bling, from \$36,000 button earrings in a rainbow of sapphires, garnets and tourmaline to a \$48,000 cocktail ring of Bombay spinel cabochons and round diamonds.

All of the glam pleases Katie Echeverry. She's the founder, CEO and creative director of Unique Vintage, an 18-year-old company with 60 employees based in Burbank, California. With her long blonde locks and Barbie-esque dimensions, Echeverry said she was a Babs fan as a girl but was also a "tomboy" who loved to play softball.

During a recent round of media interviews explaining how the collab came about, Echeverry donned a Kelly-green shawl dress worn by Barbie in 1962 and done by Unique Vintage in a forgiving stretch fabric. Noteworthy was Echeverry's most definitely un-Barbie upper-arm tattoo, on proud display in the off-shoulder outfit, as she recalled her luck.

"When I emailed Mattel, I didn't think they'd actually reply back, but they did, and I was thrilled," Echeverry told The Associated Press. "They ran with it. I couldn't believe they hadn't done it before."

Echeverry worked closely with Mattel but "they didn't dictate what I chose." Mattel opened its archives to her as she went about duplicating outfits, with adjustments to account for the real human form. She said she chose looks that "spoke to me."

Barbie, the doll, first hit store shelves in 1959. That year, she stepped out in a swirl of gold and white brocade for evening. The dress was among those Echeverry picked and sells for \$118 on uniquevintage.com. The matching collar coat with three-quarter sleeves trimmed in faux fur goes for \$148.

Unique Vintage has brought Barbie fashion full circle, in a sense. It was a designer for actual women, Charlotte Johnson, who was hired to be the doll's first fashion creator. A Mattel team took over soon after Barbie's debut.

Echeverry's first Barbie go-around dropped in the spring. Social media fans of vintage and of Barbie took notice and sales have been brisk, she said. For fall, her prices range from \$88 for an A-shaped Barbie flare skirt in green with a white hem to \$198 for the doll's red matinee sleeveless sheath dress and short jacket trimmed with calico-colored faux fur.

It was important to Echeverry to choose looks that have remained iconic through the years but were wearable by women in the broad range of sizes she is committed to providing.

"I was like a kid in a candy store," she said. After the first season went on sale, Echeverry watched the response online, where nostalgia kicked in among fans who recalled favorite outfits, some gushing how they'd always wondered what it would be like to wear the looks themselves.

That goes a long way in explaining why Echeverry was more than a little dedicated to getting the clothes right.

"I went online and ordered every single vintage outfit myself. Mattel offered to lend them to me, but I was a little nervous about having some of their archives," she said. "In our fittings, we literally had the original Barbie dress next to the model. We moved Barbie. When I sourced fabrics overseas, I had Barbie clothes in my pocket and I was making sure we got as close as possible."

She was also dedicated to the price points she knows her buyers are after.

"I know our customer and she doesn't want to spend a lot of money, and I understand that," Echeverry said.

Unique Vintage sells shoes, hats, gloves, sunglasses and jewelry to complement the Barbie outfits. The company offers a red pillbox hat, for instance, to go with Barbie's 1962 red flare coat done in a soft felt with the same swing and puffy three-quarter sleeves and bow the doll wore, down to the white lining done in a white poly satin.

Barbie wore a cloche tweed hat with a rose with her "Career Girl" tweed pencil skirt set in 1963. Unique Vintage offers a black fascinator with a rose instead, for \$22.

As for her afternoon of glam in the Martin Katz suite, with its shiny black grand piano and sparkling crystal ceiling decor on the 53rd floor of the Towers at Lotte, Echeverry was impressed.

"This is so glamorous. It's so much fun. The view's incredible," she said.

While noting Barbie's evolution as a "strong kick-ass woman" over the years, Echeverry said she was ready for a bit of her own reality after her recent promotional go-round.

"It's unusual to find me in a dress," she said. "As soon as this interview's over I'll be putting on my jeans and my T-shirt and be back to the regular Katie."

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