

# A talent for TUDOR & RENAISSANCE DRESS

By Christine A. Verstraete



Early  
Tudor

A computer operator by day, you'd never know that Swiss doll artist **Priska Groetsch** almost feels more comfortable with soft recorder music in the background, Gable headdresses, lace ruffs, and all the finery that is associated with life as someone of means in Tudor/Elizabethan times.

"I think I must have lived during the Renaissance period before, in particular in Tudor and Elizabethan England," says Priska, who now calls Minnesota home. "Ever since I can remember I have felt drawn to these times in history."

While Priska never made larger dolls, she was "always creative and it was a matter of hitting on the right thing." She

found her niche after meeting doll artist Dana Burton and seeing what could be done on a smaller scale. As a result, she not only found a dear friend, but a new heartfelt vocation that she says has also helped her through some difficult times.

"I threw myself into learning how to pour and fire porcelain, as well as china paint," she says. "That was four years ago and I have never looked back. I work a full-time job, but every free minute I have is spent on creating dolls."

Lovers of the rich fabrics, lush fashions and the splendor of Tudor/Elizabethan England are glad for her dedication. In fact, Priska's devotion is such that she can easily spend several weeks working on a single doll and worrying over every

This rich brocade gown and Gable headdress is fashioned after that of Henry VIII's third wife, Jane Seymour, supposedly his favorite wife and mother of his heir, King Edward VI.

little detail until she is sure it is just right. Take her wonderful Queen Elizabeth I. In her "stash" was just the right strand of real vintage pearls. She used 200 or so for the necklace, but was initially unsure of what to use between the pearls to give that certain effect. "I will lay in bed awake thinking of stuff like that," she admits. She finally decided on using tiny clear seed beads as spacers.

Of course, with an extensive library at hand and quite a collection of period costume films, she doesn't have to go far



German  
"Puff and  
Slash"  
gown



Typical  
Renaissance



Elizabethan,  
16th Century



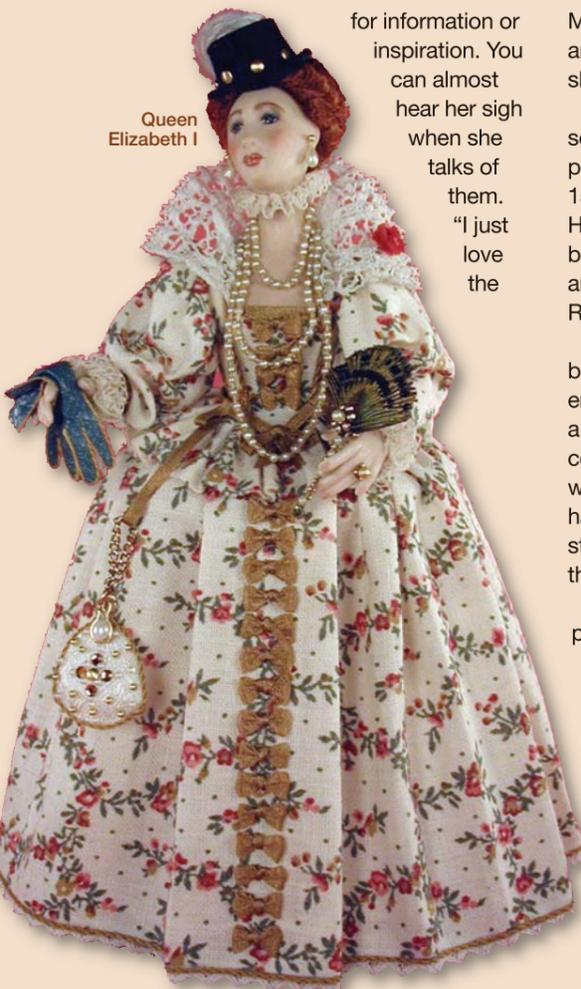
Early  
Renaissance



Venetian  
Courtesan



Anne  
Boleyn  
style



Queen  
Elizabeth I

for information or inspiration. You can almost hear her sigh when she talks of them. "I just love the

Masterpiece Theater series on Elizabeth I and I like 'Shakespeare in Love,'" she says.

Period portraits are another favorite source, especially the work of court painter Hans Holbein the Younger, 1497-1543. The painter spent two years at Henry VIII's court. He painted portraits, but also designed the king's state robes and made drawings of items used by the Royal household.

The results are evident in Priska's work, be it the flowing lines of a Renaissance era dress, the lush richness and detail of a Tudor noblewoman's gown, or the prim correctness of the gown and headdress worn by an Elizabethan maiden. She also has added Gothic, Medieval and Egyptian styles to her repertoire of dolls sold under the name Regalia Miniatures.

Her goal is to be as authentic as possible, so hunting for just the right fabric or accessory, she says, "becomes an enjoyable hobby in itself." That attention to detail is even more notable considering that everything is done in 1/12th - 1" scale. Her dolls sell from \$350-\$550.

That love for fashion and costuming can be found in what Priska considers her most challenging - and rewarding - piece yet, the opulent 16th Century German "Puff and Slash" gown. "It was

one of the hardest dolls I did," she says. "The puffs, that took me a long time to figure out."

Making dolls was a learning process, of course, from learning to pour and fire the porcelain, to china painting, learning the best way to drape and other techniques of working with fabrics. It all paid off when Priska was awarded artisan status in costuming with the International Guild of Miniature Artisans. Her most important lesson, though, came by experience.

"I think the most interesting thing I have learned is that no matter how clear a design is in my head, in the end each doll will dictate how I will proceed," she says. "Fighting this only results in a lot of frustration and wasted time. To me each piece comes alive at a certain point. As weird as it sounds they have a mind of their own which really is a good thing because it makes each one unique in their own way. I have learned to respect that fact and change direction if things are not working."

She's happy to give in and even happier - as are others - with the results.

"What I mostly try to show in my dolls is the incredible beauty and opulence of the rich fabrics, the extravagant jewels and the vibrancy of jewel tone colors," she says. "For me it's all about portraying beauty, nobility and royalty of days gone by."

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Elizabethan,  
16th Century

Clockwise from top: The 16th Century German "Puff and Slash" gown "was one of the hardest dolls I did," Priska says.

Typical Renaissance Faire or fairy tale style.

Early Tudor style with a Gable headdress, velvet and silk taffeta dress, based on Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first wife. The marriage was annulled in 1532.

Early Renaissance girl, circa 1300, with a "fairy tale" feel.

Loose, flowing robes fashioned after a Venetian Courtesan of the 16th Century. Being blonde was popular then, so hair was often bleached.

Styled after Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife whom he married in 1533, the gown features a "French Hood" headdress with a pearl-encrusted half-moon shape and long veil. After delivering a stillborn son, Henry charged her with treason and had her executed in the Tower of London in 1536.

This 16th century Elizabethan gown features a jaunty, small head cap, a tight stomacher and pulled-back hair in a bun covered with pearls.

Queen Elizabeth I wears a floral print gown with rich lace collar and a string of real antique pearls.