

FOCUS ON THE ARTS

Wickedly Hilarious and Supremely Talented Designer:

Oak Hill's own Kayci Wheatley

By Paula Kothmann

"Laughter is the corrective force that prevents us from becoming cranks". ~Henri Bergson



Kayci Wheatley at home
Photo by Nina Bildstein

Have you ever just looked at someone and knew that they'd be a lot of fun? Fun was my first impression of **Kayci Wheatley** upon meeting her ten years ago, in her funky glasses, vintage clothes, and deliberately undone 'do. She had the funkiest accessory of all then, a robust baby boy named **Hank** who wore whimsical duds while playing in the sandbox with the other Tarrytown babies dressed in Lacoste. When I asked her about his outfit, I learned that she and her family had recently moved from Los Angeles and that she designed children's clothing. She invited me to her home full of vibrant fabric swatches and tiny T-shirts with tongue-in-cheek messages.

Kayci needed more space to design and to display her art, and the family landed in a nice, new two-story home in Oak Hill. South Austin seems to have fostered her creativity because she not only designed children's clothing but also opened her own shop to sell her and others' unique clothing: **Moxie and the Compound**. When I was asked to interview Oak Hill artists, Kayci immediately came to mind.

PK: How did you get started designing children's clothes?

KW: After my daughter **Paullee [Wheatley-Rutner]** was born, I couldn't imagine leaving her and going back to work. So we "down

sized" our lives a bit, and my husband **Paul** was the sole money maker. When Paullee was 2 months old, she started drooling like a maniac! And for some silly parental reason we called her drool and spit up, **FLOOBY**. So I made a bib from the sleeve of a dress of mine, and lined it with vinyl so her clothes wouldn't be soaked through. My friends were loving it, and said I should sell them. So I made some pants and hat to match, went into **Fred Segal** in Los Angeles and asked them if they wanted to carry my line, and they said "yes"! I called it **The Flooby Company**, and it just grew from there. After 12 years in the design & wholesale business, I decided to open up a shop so I could sell my own designs for retail prices! At my shop I carry only Austin designers to support and nurture from within our very amazing little town.

PK: What's your arts background?

KW: None really. A few classes in high school and Jr. college is about all.

I was just always the gal who cut up thrift store clothes and changed them, ala Pretty in Pink!

PK: What inspired your artistic home?

KW: Is my home artistic? Well, thanks for that! I just like color and art on the walls. It makes me happy, and thankfully Paul (my hubby) is the same way.

PK Tell us about your character in *Keeping Austin Weird* (the play produced at **Zachary Scott Theatre** depicting famous Austinites, ranging from the transvestite **Leslie** to intellectual **Betty Sue Flowers**). How did you work with (Artistic Director) **Dave Steakley** and/or others at Zach Scott? Did your Oak Hill neighbors celebrate your celebrity?

KW: My character is just an actress playing ME! Oy. Dave interviewed me on video a few years ago, along with hundreds of other Austin-ites! I guess he liked what I had to say, and thought it was funny, so he put me in the play. I was extremely shocked, but much flattered!! The play is so funny!! Everyone needs to go right now and see it!! My Oak Hill neighbors have no idea, or should they care, who I am!

PK: Do you teach others art and/or design, including your kids?

KW: I'm not at all good enough to teach other people art and design. I truly have very basic skills. But I'm happy to bend people's ear with advice!!

Paullee is extremely artistic, both visually and in her writing, but she gets that from within, not me, I'm sure.

Despite her tendency not to brag, Kayci has a lot to be proud of. Moxie and the Compound received the distinction of "Best New Place to Keep Austin Austin" in the Austin Chronicle in 2003. Chronicle fashion critic **Stephen Moser** enthused over her style in his review of the "Stitch" fashion show in November 2006. The show featured beehived hipsters Paullee, **Camille Woodbury**, **Tania Kane**, and **Nina Bildstein**. While the show focused on ladies' apparel, the boutique has gifts and clothing for all ages.

Go check for yourself and celebrate this Oak Hill artist with broad South Austin appeal. Moxie and the Compound
909 West Mary
441-6699

www.moxieandthecompound.com*

Paula Kothmann, guest columnist for the "Scenic Sentry", is well-known in the Austin arts community for her articles and columns in various publications, and her affiliation with a number of arts organizations and projects benefiting Austin.