

Architecture alumna builds costumes

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For the inaugural march of the Krewe des Fleurs, Katherine Champagne, who earned her architecture degree in 2009, ingeniously designed a floral collar that is worn like a backpack. (Photo by Ryan Rivet)

When the Krewe des Fleurs debuts as “Gilded Lilies” this Carnival season, the women in the new marching club will sport costumes designed by Katherine Champagne. A graduate of the Tulane University School of Architecture, Champagne has turned her focus from designing edifices to creating Carnival ensembles.

She envisioned the “Gilded Lilies” collars as large as she could make them, taking inspiration from the papier-mâché flowers emblazoned on floats in New Orleans.

The prototype that Champagne built was 45 inches wide, grand enough to make a big splash but compact enough to allow a wearer to go through a standard doorway by turning sideways.

"I know each woman is going to feel fantastic, like a million-dollar gilded lily, surrounded by other lush lilies dancing as a garden around them, like the flower scene in *Alice in Wonderland*," Champagne said. "They need to be able to wear them and not cry at the end of the night, so I included enough foam padding so they don't get cut or cut others."

Male "fertilize-hers" holding watering cans will be walking guards accompanying the Krewe des Fleurs, marching as part of the krewedelusion that follows the [Krewe du Vieux](#) on Saturday, Jan. 31.

Champagne commended the Tulane [School of Architecture](#) for emphasizing the fundamentals of design and teaching students to think creatively. She said that she learned how to "create a beautiful solution when given a set of problems and limitations."

She found her career path as an independent designer after working at George Hero Architects and then at Kern Studios, the leading parade float designer.

Champagne has this advice for those who will be graduating this spring: "Once you graduate, I know it's scary. It's easy to get lost in doing your day job and only experiencing New Orleans on the weekends. You can lose track of what you want to do."

“When you make Mardi Gras, you can't play Mardi Gras.”—Katherine Champagne, costume designer