

HALLOWEEN & PARTY EXPO

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Ballering to Bring Amazing Balloon Art and Expertise to Expo

By Amy Francisco

If it can be done, it can be done with balloons. At least that seems to be true for Carmen Ballering, an award-winning event designer turned instructor who creates sculptures– and yes, even haute couture– from uninflated balloons. And, like inspiration for other great artists, it all came to her in a dream.

“It's really unbelievable,” she says. “I had a dream one night that I was building sculptures with balloons, but they were uninflated. I saw exactly how I was doing it. When I woke up, I thought, 'Oh my gosh,' and I went to my studio to try it. I built my first sculpture.”

Ballering began experimenting with different techniques and improved her original Artex balloon sculptures. In 2008, inspired by fashion shows featuring costumes made from inflated balloons, she applied her sculpture technique to fashion. The results are astonishing: runway-ready dresses (and even a bikini!) that are stunningly sexy, yet they are made from simple, uninflated balloons.

There's a silver-and-black cleavage-bearing cocktail dress and a cream-and-black, floor-length gown with a modern version of an Elizabethan collar. Then there's the Gaga. “There is a black, yellow and white dress inspired by Lady Gaga,” says Ballering. “It's kind of a futuristic design and my favorite.”

Ballering's dresses have been featured in numerous fashion shows, but they're really just showpieces – expressions of her passion for balloon artistry. Her real work these days is with her Miami-based [Event Decorating Academy](#) (EDA), where she has taught aspiring party decorators the secrets of creating amazing – and safe – party décor since 2008.

“We want to teach people how to build secure framings so that they can avoid accidents,” explains Ballering, who has worked in the party industry since 1990. “Safety requires behind-the-scenes work that people don’t always think about. But it’s more important than just creating a pretty piece.”

EDA students learn the fundamentals of balloon decorating, including building arches and other structures, as well as expert draping techniques and floral design. Then there are classes on theme parties and props; quinceanera décor; and more practical matters, like marketing, pricing and building a portfolio.

Students come from around the world to attend classes in EDA’s Miami facility, but Ballering also takes her school on the road. In 2011, she taught classes in New York, Massachusetts, California and even Puerto Rico, her parents’ native country and where she started her first business (a gift shop) at age 19.

In 2012, Ballering and EDA will be back on tour. Offerings range from single classes in the \$100 to \$250 range to her unique, 12-day Certified Event Decorator course that teaches all the different aspects of decorating and runs about \$2,400. She teaches how to create everything from fabric gazebos and floral arrangements for weddings to “Sweet 16” centerpieces and life-size balloon characters.

“We also do a lot of retail classes [for party store employees],” she says. “We teach staff everything from building balloon bookcases to selling balloon bouquets to making arches and columns.”

And business is booming, despite the economy. “There’s always a party,” Ballering says. “It doesn’t matter what the economy is like, kids still have birthday parties and people still get married. We’re getting students from all over the world. Overall, I think the event industry is growing.”

Visitors to her booth at Halloween & Party Expo 2012 can see Ballering’s work up close and learn how to do some of it themselves. “Our goal there is to put awareness on balloons and how many wonderful things you can build with them,” Ballering says. “We’re going to be showing how to do advanced balloon sculptures and we’ll have classes on advanced fabric draping with floral design. We want to teach people how to incorporate it all together for a harmonious look.”

The Halloween & Party Expo is endorsed by the National Consumers Association, the Halloween Industry Association and International Balloon Association as well as Paper First Affiliates and Party Club of America, who conduct their annual meetings in conjunction with the show. The Expo is also home to the Halloween Costume Style Show, Industry Wide Celebration hosted by Party & Paper Retailer and Rubie's Annual Halloween Bash. For more information about the Halloween & Party Expo, call 877.347.3976 or visit www.HalloweenPartyExpo.com.

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