

# New England's Finest: *The Sweetest Things*

New England artisans craft beautiful (and durable) baby and toddler gear.



1. Designer Mary-Alice Dalton applies couture-quality details to her "Victoria Rose" dress (\$145 and up) and coordinating "Shaped Brim" hat (\$48).

*For more on Mary-Alice Dalton, see "Artisan Spotlight," below.*

**Children's Couture, Belmont, NH. 603-524-8801; madcouture.com**

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## THE OLD-SCHOOL COUTURE OF MARY-ALICE DALTON



PORTRAIT BY IAN ALDRICH

Though one could easily describe Mary-Alice Dalton's handcrafted children's clothing as art (see #1, opposite), she'd prefer not to think of it that way. "My work is meant to be worn every day, by an active child, and I design and construct every piece with that in mind," says the founder of Belmont, New Hampshire-based Children's Couture.

Dalton finds inspiration in her locale's dramatic seasonal spectrum. After 25 years crafting women's clothing, she turned her attention to fashion for the younger set so that she could get more playful with colors and fabrics. She sews every garment herself, but says, "I don't sew because I love to sew. I sew because the machine I know how to use is a sewing machine, and I know how to use it very well." Dalton worries that true mastery of crafts such as sewing

is falling by the wayside. "I feel that we Americans are losing our insight into quality work, and that's disturbing to me," she notes. "People don't try to master tools and techniques; they just want to make it fast." But that, Dalton says, "isn't my world."

Of course, her gush-worthy dresses and sweet, swirly tops are more expensive than those sold in mass retail markets. "I know I probably won't sell a parent or grandparent an entire wardrobe for the season," she says, acknowledging that there's room in every closet for items from her collection in addition to lower-priced basics, such as the turtlenecks she recommends to go with her jumpers. "I also know that in five years, or ten years, or more," Dalton adds, "that Children's Couture jumper will still be in great condition, either tucked in a closet for memory's sake or passed along to a relative or good friend. But that turtleneck will be long gone and forgotten."