

Arts & Culture

Do you have Reno Envy?

White-trash chic strikes a whiskey-tinged local chord

By Kat Kerlin

Ever since high school, when he rearranged the letters in his own last name and found they spelled "Nutheads," Scott Dunseath has been into word play.

While this anagrammer didn't go on to become a world Scrabble champion, he became something just as unlikely--the innovator and soul proprietor of Reno Envy clothing line.

That's Reno eNVY, as in N-V, as in Nevada, ya doofus.

Don't feel bad. His own mother thought it was a play on "penis envy."

"There are cryptic, hidden messages in everything I do," says Dunseath, now 38, wearing shorts, tennis shoes and a black T-shirt with the line's most popular image--the outline of a trailer on a John Deere-green decal with Reno Envy printed beneath it.



Reno Envy owner and designer Scott Dunseath sells Julie Ibach an early Christmas gift
Photo By David Robert

Scott Dunseath will be selling Reno Envy clothing Aug. 30-Sept. 4 at the Nugget Rib Cook-Off, Victorian Square, Sparks, and Sept. 8-10 at the Reno Balloon Races. See Renoenvy.com for prices and more information.

There are also Reno Envy thongs, beanies, hats, shorts, sweatpants and polar fleeces ranging from \$10-\$50.

Within the clothing line is a white "wifebeater" with the word "balls" in blue, another shirt with "neck" in red, "trash" in white and "collar" in blue (redneck, white trash and blue collar.)

Some of them get a little more elusive, like the Jack Daniels parody design with "Whiskey Tango" at the bottom--in military and police circles, that's code for "WT" or, in this case, "white trash."

"It's like white trash is really chic right now," says Dunseath.

But mixed in with this tongue-in-cheek flavor is an actual sense of Reno pride. It may be a twisted pride, but somehow, the offbeat-but-trendy designs of tractor-trailers, whiskey and white trash ring true. They poke fun at Reno while loving it at the same time, which could be why the line has been more popular with locals than with tourists. The people buying this clothing not only accept Reno's gritty quirkiness but embrace it.



The backers of the Reno Envy clothing line are betting that everybody wants to look like a trucker.

Photo By David Robert

the stoner-skater crowd in high school, so snowboarding here came easily to him. He became a snowboard instructor while going to school at UNR and working nights at Red Lobster. He left his first job at a Sparks medical supply center to work for Dr. Ned Limbo, the clothing company sponsoring him on the slopes. That led to an 8-year job traveling around California selling Vans skate and ski wear as an independent rep. He didn't realize then that the experience was gearing him to design, develop and market his own clothing line.

"This was never part of the plan," says Dunseath while sitting in his home office, a few design sketches tossed on his desk. "I never in my life thought I'd own an apparel company."

Roughly five years ago, he was giving his address to a friend: "Reno, N-V."

"Reno envy?" said the friend. Ha, ha, ha. It was a running joke until Dunseath decided to do something with it. He put the logo on a cap just for fun and wore it around. People would ask where he got it, so he made a few more and sold them quickly, thus beginning the Reno Envy side project.

147; I didn't know if people would be into it or not," says Dunseath. "But it seems to have some stickiness to it."

His first public showing of Reno Envy was at the 2005 Reno Riverfest. People stumbled across his tent, and he sold 60 units. (He sold 1,250 T-shirts and hats at this year's Riverfest). He decided to go full-time with Reno Envy in April. He's since been a ubiquitous presence at nearly every outdoor event in Reno--Marathon de Mayo, Rollin' on the River, Tour de Nez, River Rock.

The envy is double sided, insinuating a local pride while perhaps instigating an outsider guffaw, as in "Reno *envy*? What's there to be so envious about?"

"If you live here, you understand this community is great," says Dunseath. "If you don't live in Reno, that perception is turned around 180 degrees. Everyone thinks we're a town of meth heads, crack addicts and prostitutes, and we are, but we're a lot more than that."

Envy rising

While Dunseath's family roots in Reno date back to the early 1900s, he came here in 1986 from the Bay Area. He ran with

At first, he thought he would just sell directly to the public through these events and his Web site-- where you can also hear one of the most extensive selections of Reno songs out there, from the obvious "Folsom Prison Blues" by Johnny Cash to the not so obvious "All the Way to Reno" by R.E.M. and "Reno (Español)" by Jonathan Richman. But now Reno Envy has made its way into a few local boutiques, casinos and skate and ski shops. The airport is "test vending" the line, and it'll be at Bobo's Mogul Mouse and Mount Rose Ski Resort this winter. A more permanent space is in the works, as are Tahoe Envy, Vegas Envy and NVUS (envious) lines. One of his newest creations is the "Sparks Farmers' Daughters' Market" design, featuring three buxom ladies, one crouching with melons held over her breasts, another with a pitchfork and bottle of booze, another peeling a rather phallic ear of corn. He also might customize the signature tractor-trailer design to include a bike or ski rack on top.

Reno Envy/ Reno, NV

Dunseath is still trying to figure out who his target audience is and just what Reno Envy is all about. He says its four "cornerstones" include recreation; business; arts and culture; and nightlife and entertainment, but he's not totally sure how those things intersect. It's a sentiment that sounds awfully familiar, heard from local politicians to artistic intellectuals to next-door neighbors alike--the sense that Reno itself is having an identity crisis. Are we "America's Adventure Place," as the chamber of commerce insists? Are we casinos and drugs and hookers, as the rest of America believes? Are we both? Reno Envy alludes to these ideas with what Dunseath calls its "white trash chic."



Dunseath's tees show a fondness for word play.
Photo By David Robert

"It's parody all over the place," he says of Reno. "We love it, but it's quirky, and it's funny, and it's this land of contrasts, and that's why people gravitate toward it."

He thinks they're drawn to Reno Envy for the same reasons. That, and there aren't really any cool Reno T-shirts-- Dunseath's bread and butter--around, as you may have noticed if you've had visiting guests recently. They're either ultra-tacky, with generic designs of blaring casino lights and old cars on material that's only a couple washes away from threadbare, or they're too preppy and Tahoe-centric.

"I think people really do like Reno," says Dunseath. This is a way to show off their pride, he says--in a way they don't have to be ashamed of.