



Anna Zinola

Behind the fashion scenes

Professions and careers besides those of the fashion designer and the model

Introduction by **Roberto Riccio**

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More than just designers and models

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INTRODUCTION

AT THE SOURCE OF EXCELLENCE

Trends, materials, colours, designers, models, photographers, luxury, beauty, creativeness: ask anyone what would they associate all these words with and the answer would be: fashion.

Fashion is visible – by definition – it catches the eye, attracts, seduces, makes itself powerfully heard. It's a world in perpetual motion, where time rules and flows at the beat of the seasons and collections, a dizzying kaleidoscope of emotions, trends and ideas. Fashion meets the needs of our constantly-evolving society. It draws and gives inspiration as in a game of give and take. Fashion feeds on people, cinema, art, music, tradition, innovation, technology, science, religion. It is fascinated by the body, space, matter, the visible and the invisible, in a harmonious blend of opposites.

FASHION IS SERIOUS BUSINESS, IT'S EVERYWHERE AND BELONGS TO EVERYONE OF US

Let's stop and wonder for a moment what kind of bond ties fashion to the people that populate the huge "international fashion lab", those behind the "behind the scenes" title of this book. Are all these professionals really aware of the enormous impact they have on the long chain that leads from production to consumption, as in a joyful, chaotic collective game with no beginning or no end?

They surely feel part of the fashion industry, but suppose we were to ask them to associate fashion with something, their answer would definitely be: passion, creation, obsession, work, satisfaction, humility, concentration, dedication, determination, quality, tradition, history, culture.

These are the common features found in the professions neatly and soberly elucidated by Anna Zinola in this book, where fashion is, tout court, primarily a huge and enormously lucrative, mostly Italian-French industry (a very special one indeed, one that bridges both our intellectual hemispheres), created and supported by thousands of professionals (over 775,000 people and more than 80,000 firms in Italy working in the supply chain) who play or have played a role in the creation of the Fashion Systems, and have seen them grow, expand and metamorphose on the global marketplace over the past 60-70 years: from groups to industrial districts, from creative networks to prosumers, and from the textile supply chain to distribution. These professionals – designers, patternmakers, visual merchandisers, PRs, fashion show organizers to name but a few – are driven by the same spirit we can simply dub as "passion for beauty".

Outsiders are usually unfamiliar with these professions and are unaware of what it takes to steadily turn "passion for beauty" into (at times extreme, often obsessive) specialization. Or, in the words of Cav. Mario Boselli, President of the Italian Fashion Chamber, to turn "beauty tout court" into "beauty accomplished", reminiscence of an anthropological interpretation of "Renaissance beauty".

The same goes for the growing wave of young would-be fashion talents from the emerging markets of China, Brazil, India or Russia, who take up fashion to make their dream come true, often setting off from Europe, more often from Milan.

Anna Zinola paints a vivid picture of the industry and fills an old void that guides readers through the maze of professions offered by such an incredible and wonderful world.

The book also aims to be an informative guide on the paths that lead to the making of the end product, starting from the bottom – from schooling – to the in-depth analysis of the process that turns a young, aspiring "designer" into a budding professional, allowing him/her to enter the pantheon of fashion.

We truly believe that this book and the "lessons" it teaches will deprive neither the readers nor the students of the magic, the dream, the pleasure, the dimension of endless discovery, the obsession, the excitement and the love that fashion offers us all.

Roberto Riccio Group
Managing Director Istituto Marangoni

DESIGNER, PHOTOGRAPHER, MODEL. THEN WHAT?

This book was written for the layman.

If you're in fashion, if you work in fashion, then everything you read next will sound familiar to you. You may even know more.

If, instead, fashion brings you a burst of emotions, well, this book is meant for you.

Me, I'm not part of the fashion system. But as an outsider, flipping through a magazine or staring at window displays, I've always stopped to wonder: what is there behind the scenes? Who is the mastermind of such perfection, one who can create a beautifully designed skirt or pair of shoes you've always dreamed of out of a simple drawing?

As an outsider, I would instinctively say designers: Giorgio Armani, Miuccia Prada, Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana (and the like) are often more famous than the celebs they dress. Then, photographers, some famous, some less. And finally, those gorgeous, sexy, once superstars, but still out-of-reach models.

So there you are. Designer, photographer, model. Then what? Who else keeps the fashion system ticking day after day, season in season out? Who are the folks that dress up stores, who turn a new label into success, and a 15-minute runway into a stunning spectacle?

The very purpose of this book is to answer these questions. I've learned that there truly is a world behind the scenes: the dressers, who change models during shows in split seconds; the bloggers, who post their shots and turn cool items into hot stuff; the globetrotting stylists, always on the move with their bags crammed with clothes; and the visual merchandisers, sweating with the workers at night to get the store ready for the opening in the morning. And so many

others.

This book explores the profiles of nine of them: buyer, stylist, PR, fashion show organizer, journalist, visual merchandiser, patternmaker, collection product manager, and licensing manager. Nine because I believe these are the key people who make fashion tick. Without patternmakers, for instance, those who turn designer ideas into paper-patterns, clothes wouldn't even get to the production stage. Without buyers, who pick and plan purchasing for stores, malls and department stores, shelves would be bare.

These people and professions have one other thing in common: they mainly work behind the scenes and out of the public eye. Hands up who's ever heard of a collection product manager or a stylist. This book helps them get back into the limelight where they rightfully belong.

Last but not least, these nine roles – especially the coveted patternmakers – are wanted by businesses on the hunt for youngsters fresh out of vocational schools. Visual merchandisers, collection product managers and buyers have the same great chance to find a job and start a career, while PRs, fashion show organizers, and journalists can opt to either work freelance or as salaried employees.

They may be just clothes, but for each painstaking detail, there's a lot of sweat, passion and hard work that goes behind it all. In the words of an awesome fashion beast such as Miranda Priestly: "This... stuff? I see. You think this has nothing to do with you. You go to your closet and you select... I don't know... that lumpy blue sweater for instance, because you're trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back. But what you don't know is that that sweater is not just blue, it's not turquoise or lapis. It's actually cerulean. And you're also blithely unaware of the fact that in 2002, Oscar de la Renta did a collection of cerulean gowns. And then I think it was Yves St Laurent... wasn't it who showed cerulean military jackets? And then cerulean quickly showed

up in the collections of eight different designers. And then it filtered down through the department stores and trickled on down into some tragic casual corner where you, no doubt, fished it out of some clearance bin. However, that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs and it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing a sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room from a pile of stuff.

FASHION BUYER: PROFILE

Role

He buys clothes for stores, chain stores, concept stores, department stores, etc.

Responsibilities

He buys fashion collections from producers or fashion houses and sells them in his own or managed outlet.

Works for

A fashion buyer works for a single boutique, for chain stores or in the large retail trade (for instance, department stores), but also for single-brand labels such as Zara or H&M. In this case, since sales are strictly single brand (same as label), a fashion buyer also follows the sales and creative side of the business, working side by side with the stylists and designers.

Qualities

He combines financial/organizational skills with creative flair and intuition. Good knowledge of English and often willing to travel abroad.

Salary

Gross annual salary starts from a minimum of €30,000 reaching €70,000 for those with at least 10 years' experience.

FASHION BUYER: THE TRENDSETTER

They're usually called fashion buyers, but defining them as mere purchasing managers would belittle their role. They are the people who choose and anticipate the clothes we see in shop windows or find on the shelves of boutiques and department stores. If purple is the name of the game in one season and orange in the next, if shelves switch from pointed to rounded shoes, much depends from them.

Fashion buyers have an array of responsibilities. They have to capture the latest trends, but also know how to negotiate and bargain the best price. They have to recognize the quality of fabric, but also know how much that certain item can fetch. It's just a plain question of passion and instinct, says Rosy Biffi, founder, with her sister Adele, of Biffi, with stores in Milan and Bergamo. They opened their first store in 1965, on Corso Genova, and are still there today. Her passion for fashion started at a very tender age and today she still enjoys wandering around stores and markets, or observing people on the streets. She was the first to bring French designer Kenzo to Italy and sell accessories by young, budding Gianfranco Ferrè. At the end of the Sixties, her husband Franco Limonta called Ferrè – swaying at the time from fashion to architecture – to design a small collection of leather clothing, marking his debut.

A further touch of magic is brought by the words of Tiziana Cardini, fashion director of La Rinascente (she chooses the brands sold there), when she elucidates her role. In an interview published in 2007 on www.exibart.com, she says: My job is somewhat obscure, definitely hard to place in a methodological context. The whole editing process mixes artistic and immaterial shades with somewhat pagan, imaginary nuances".

Instinct, passion, immateriality. But what does a fashion buyer actually do? Fashion buyers purchase collections from producers or fashion houses and sell them in their own or managed store. They work for a single boutique, for chain stores or in the large retail trade (for instance, department stores).

There are basically two kinds of fashion buyers: one works for stores (such as 10, Corso Como in Milan, Colette in Paris, Fred Segal in Los Angeles) or department stores (La Rinascente or Coin in Italy, for instance). His job is to build the right mix of labels or products for the outlet or outlets managed; the other handles private labels, working with brands like Zara or H&M. In this case, since sales are strictly single brand (same as label), a fashion buyer also follows the sales and creative side of the business, working side by side with the stylists and designers.

In both cases, the role is twofold: one more business-like, where a fashion buyer has to tackle with phone calls, lap tops and palm tops, costs, budgets, orders and delivery times; the other has a more creative twist, open to new trends, conscious of the right items, collections and styles that will meet the tastes of the customer base, and ever ready to sprint from suppliers to trade fairs or from showrooms to runways.

Organization and finance play a critical role. Buyers work with budgets they have to stick to and spend wisely. Overshooting means falling short of the season's needs. This is usually the case for large chain stores where product rotation is practiced to keep customer attention and presence high. Stefano Sorci, former buyer turned consultant and lecturer at Istituto Marangoni, says: "This is a crucial feature! Buyers working with private labels have budgets typical of medium-sized firms. It goes without saying that the bigger the budget, the tougher the work".

Buyers weigh the quality/price ratio of a label or apparel and then figure out the profit. Purchasing a costly product, for instance, may

lead to huge amounts of unsold stock and low sales volumes. On the other hand, cheaper prices would obviously bolster sales, but bruise margins. A jacket purchased at € 90 can be sold at € 290 or € 490. In the first case, profits would be lower and sales volumes higher. In the second, profits would double, but sales volumes would perhaps be lower.

A fashion buyer's responsibilities also involve the technical/management process. A typical buyer is familiar with production processes, schedules, contracts and budgets. He possesses computer skills and knows how to manage accounting and the inventory, and with a few easy clicks learns how many pairs of unsold shoes are left and the profits gained from a batch of jumpers.

Fashion buyers are obviously required to have perfect knowledge of materials and manufacture, and the God-given gift of telling quality from kitsch.

Then there's the creative side of the business, as mentioned by Rosy Biffi and Tiziana Cardini, where instinct and intuition counts. When it comes to identifying and selecting products, the fashion buyer's mantra is "exploration". Exploring means seeking and finding products and brands that stand out of the bunch to ideally suit consumer tastes.

This basically boils down to identifying collections that are striking, distinctive, but not too ahead of their times, as this would mean showcasing products that may not meet consumer tastes then, but may definitely become hot the next season. In an interview, Federico Giglio, purchasing director of Giglio stores in Palermo, acknowledges that: "the greatest risk of inventory is high fashion and "our exploration", in other words, collections that are way ahead of their times, purchased only to suit my tastes. But that's part of the business and just another cool way of dressing up the shop". So buyers may run the risk, for instance, of purchasing safari or tech-infused quilted jackets that capture the customer's eye, but never

leave the store, only to become the hottest product around a couple of seasons later. In the words of Stefano Sorci: "Buyers need to find new brands that satisfy and stimulate the ever-demanding needs of clients. But they also need to know how to best manage the established brands that are the core of sales".

Even misjudgments in the simple features, not only in colour or design, can greatly affect the outcome of a product. A fitting example is washing and maintenance. Because of the tight schedules and very few (expensive) launderettes around, preference nowadays is given to fabrics that are easily washed at home and need little maintenance, instead of the fashionable eye-catching daily outfits that need dry cleaning.

Asked where they scavenge around for brands and products, fashion buyers will always give you their stock answer: "here and there" or "at fashion shows". Although fashion shows, fairs and the Milan-Paris-New York tour (home to the key events of the season) are the classic destinations for most buyers, there are, however, unexplored areas, says Irina Kazakova, owner of Traffic and Traffic + stores in Moscow: "Apart from the fashion hubs of Paris, Milan and London, we tend to focus on other areas such as Scandinavia and Benelux – Antwerp, Amsterdam and Copenhagen – and on Asia (Japan and Thailand)."

A fashion buyer is typically a person with a suitcase in his hand, always ready to scurry from one fair to another, with a dash also to the new, fashion-budding cities populated by the new generation of would-be designers (Antwerp, home to one of the most celebrated fashion schools, and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, whose alumni include Dirk Bikkembergs and Martin Margiela), on the hunt here and there for an original piece or certain trend that can turn into a product or garment. Rosy Biffi says: "I observe people on the streets, and scout around stores seeking ideas to match clothes and accessories". Sorci adds: "Inspiration and creativeness are everywhere, even in the

colour of a pot or in the drawing on the cover of a book! It's a fascinating job that keeps you ticking".

Exploring means producing the right mix of designer and emerging labels, classic and new styles inside the same environment. Beppe Angiolini, owner of the Sugar boutique and president of the Italian Fashion Buyers' Association: "The aim is choosing and combining a wide variety of collections, creating a personal style that is the sum of different styles". Take, for instance, the Milanese concept store 10, Corso Como, opened and managed by Carla Sozzani (sister of Vogue Italy's editor-in-chief). Products range from shoes to vacuum cleaners and from perfumes to jam. Everything is inventive, original, unusual, nothing is commonplace. The store logo (black circle with dot in the middle) is printed on the price tag as if to say: you're buying a Prada bag chosen by 10, Corso Como, not just a Prada bag. Needless to say that prices are not for the faint of heart ... Another example is Colette in Paris, 700 square metres packed with ideas from all over the world, a trendsetter when it comes to fashion and design. The fashion guru in this case is the founder's daughter, Sarah.

Thanks to their purchasing strategies, these stores have turned into true brands. Clients flock there because they know that the products come from a reliable source and have been chosen well upstream. Almost every city, not only fashion capitals such as Milan or Paris, has its own special destination. Palermo, for instance, has Giglio: six boutiques with items ranging from childrenswear to young fashion, and from jeans to couture. These stores are mostly family run. The Giglio stores are currently managed by the fourth generation, with brothers Giuseppe and Federico firmly at the helm. Giuseppe runs the stores, which employ over 60 people. Federico, instead, is in charge of purchasing and is considered one of the world's leading fashion buyers. Federico says: "I started out with the aim of living up to my father's expectations, accompanying him as a "shadow" in his business trips. "Shadow" is indeed the fitting word, because he never

sought advice from me, and whenever he did, he would always go his own way anyway. One day, at Versace, the seller invited my father to write down the orders. He opened his newspaper and said: "It's your turn, Federico". The second time was when he booked only one seat on the Palermo-Milan flight instead of the usual two. I've been working alone ever since".

The next stop is Luisa via Roma in Florence, right near Piazza Repubblica. Owned by Andrea Panconesi, the store is a display of third-party collections and limited series of items produced in partnership with the hottest names in fashion, with the latest including Gianni Barbato python boots sold to 30 aficionados at a very handsome price.

Luisa via Roma also sells online. The store is fitted with Internet workstations that display items by brand and model, size and colour. What you would call infocommerce on the spot, where clients start the purchasing process at the store, then buy the product from the website wherever they are. "We have invested significant resources in e-commerce – says Panconesi – and have performed well: operating on the global marketplace has helped us cope with the crisis of local markets". Panconesi is an interesting example of how the fashion buyer profession is evolving, at least for fashion buyers who work in their own store.

Fashion buying is no longer merely a question of seeking original styles and getting the right mix. It's most of all finding new ways of attracting and retaining customers. Even by becoming producers. As "Boutique 1", the Dubai store that sells for various brands and also presents its own items: the Boutique 1 perfume, the Boutique 1 CD and the Boutique 1 lifestyle magazine on fashion and design.

Conversely, buyers who manage a retail establishment have less entrepreneurial functions, strictly speaking. The market "punishes" their misjudgments, although the shockwaves are less felt by their salary. Nevertheless, buyers hold crucial responsibilities and are often

confronted with a variety of problems. The toughest to tackle is perhaps finding products that sell across extremely different environments. The buyer working for a chain of department stores such as Oviessa has to find products that sell in cities big or small, in stores located in residential areas or in those populated by businesses. The mix for each store may change, but the (inevitable!) economies of scale require common purchasing patterns for all the stores. So when a buyer picks, let's say, a particular line of trousers, he knows that that product must meet the needs and tastes of clients living both up north in Milan and down south in Palermo.

What does it take to become a fashion buyer or break into a career in fashion buying? Teamwork is a must. A fashion buyer needs to interact with his teammates (other market buyers or visual merchandisers), those who arrange the items in the store. Other crucial skills involve negotiating (prices, delivery) and planning (schedules).

Buyers usually have a certain artistic flair and curiosity towards the different forms of art, and some are usually spotted at the inauguration of the latest design show or performance of an avant-garde artist. Such an attitude reveals yet another of their distinctive features: intuition, the ability to capture innovations and trends from the market, or even by observing people on the street, going to a concert or trawling through flea markets, as Rosy Biffi does.

The path that leads to a career in fashion buying starts not only at school (at vocational institutes), but also at the workplace, where the road is often long and bumpy. The first steps are generally taken in stores, where buyers get a first-hand taste of customer needs. Federico Giglio: "I started out working as an assistant storekeeper, later switching to pricing, and then becoming assistant sales clerk. I could only help, watch, listen and... fold the clothes. I was finally promoted to sales clerk: eight years ago, I became manager of Emporio Armani, then also of Giglio In. Nothing is taken for granted

over here, you've got to fight your way up". The same applies to buying: "When you start buying, your major concern is not to make mistakes. I've learned that this is impossible: no one's perfect. You should try hard to make as few mistakes as possible. At the beginning, you're extra careful and you never relax. Problems start just when you think everything's working. You have to learn to solve them. When a problem crops up, the first thing I usually do is talk it over with the team, and ultimately with the clients".

Yes, the road is bumpy, but also very rewarding, not only in professional terms. Salaries are attractive. According to the Michael Page recruitment consultancy, the annual gross salary starts from a minimum of € 30,000 and jumps to € 70,000 for buyers with at least 10 years' experience.



styling by: Jin Yu Jun / photographer: Chiara Canetta



styling by: Morgane Bataillard / photographer: Guillaume Sanson

How to become FASHION BUYER

Courses, master programs, day and evening classes: there is a wide range of educational offers for those seeking a fashion buyer career.

In Milan, Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com) boasts over 70 years' experience and organizes a master program in fashion buying. Classes are bilingual (Italian/English) and run full time for 8 months. Admittance is reserved to graduates or diploma holders who have attended a specialization school in fashion. Students wishing to attend the master program need to pass an orientation interview. The program alternates from buying strategy and the fashion industry to lessons on products (fabrics, materials, etc.). Students, about 20 per class, attend lessons at scheduled hours.

Istituto Marangoni also organizes a 3-year course in fashion business, with focus on buying techniques, management control and negotiation strategies. The course is meant for young diploma-holders and attendance is compulsory.

The master program in fashion buying management organized by Polimoda (www.polimoda.it) is held in Rome and is designed for graduates and professionals with at least 2-3 years' working experience. Intermediate knowledge of English is required. To register, students need to pass a series of aptitude tests and one in English.

Evening classes (from 6 PM) are organized in Milan by the European Institute of Design (www.ied.it). Lessons are held several times a week and run for 7-8 months. Attendance of the fashion buyer course is 3 evenings every week for a total of 170 hours, while the fashion buyer advanced course lasts a total of 200 hours. There is also a 2-year course that lasts a total of 370

hours, focusing on the various facets of fashion buying (product, distribution, trend analysis, etc.).

For those wishing to study abroad, the ideal venue is the Saint Martin's School of Arts College in London (www.fashion.arts.ac.uk). This prestigious school, whose alumni include designers of the likes of John Galliano and Stella McCartney, organizes many fashion buying courses. Excellent knowledge of English is required.

FASHION STYLIST: PROFILE

Role

He is the expert in style and image, and works side by side with the director, photographer or lighting specialist in making photo shoots.

Responsibilities

He plans, defines and coordinates all the steps of a photo shoot, elaborating the themes for the shoot, choosing and preparing the clothing, getting the best background, picking models, following the shooting, etc.

Works for

Mainly magazines (female, fashion, etc.) but also on TV. Famous stylists often work as consultants for designer labels.

Qualities

Well cultured, inquiring, likes teamwork.

Salary

Net salary may range from a minimum of € 700-1000/month for assistant or young stylists to more than € 1000/day for successful stylists.

FASHION STYLIST: THE INTERPRETER OF FASHION

A fashion stylist builds, defines and often sets the trends we see in magazines, crafting collections that perfectly balance the creative and commercial side of the business. A stylist may well work in the fringes – usually for newspapers or businesses – but his role is crucial. A fashion stylist is what you would call an interpreter of fashion. He brings collections to life by picking the models, choosing the colours, calling on the makeup and hair artists, ultimately creating the runway look. He shapes the images we see on cover pages or inside magazines (Vogue, Elle or Vanity Fair, to name but a few). In a way, a fashion stylist is the dark (and handsomely paid!) ghost writer of fashion.

A fashion stylist is an expert in style and image. His responsibilities differ if he works for a designer label or a newspaper.

In the first case, a stylist follows a collection virtually from start to finish: organization of its launch, management of the show, preparation of the advertising campaign and styling of the store display. The underlying idea is that the success of a label depends essentially on its image.

The ultimate goal is to identify a successful mood or style for a collection that fits the image of a brand. If, for instance, a stylist is working on a collection by a young and aggressive designer, he would need to imagine an original look that is consistent with the identity of the brand. So, away with those romantic or classic elements and make way to that rebel, unconventional style. But originality and consistency alone would be pointless if they were not to follow the trends – or macro-trends – of the moment. Therefore, images of a soft, curvaceous feminine woman would find it hard to emerge in an

androgynous season.

Likewise, once a stylist has defined the "right" image for a collection, he must stick to it all the way, from the fashion show and the advertising campaign to the clothing used in shoots. If a show presents a romantic, oneiric style, the campaign should follow the same aura. Makeup should be light, almost evanescent, the background should have soft, ethereal colours. With a casual look, instead, the show and the campaign should be dominated by jeans and leather jackets displayed on a wild-west kind of musical background. The idea is that the public needs to feel a common thread that ties it all together, regardless of the medium used.

This thread should of course pass not only through all the ways a collection is presented (show, store styling, shoots), but also through how it's campaigned. Everything from magazine advertising to the online campaign and from posters to TV spots should move to the same tune. That's why stylists should know inside out the various forms of communication and fields of image production. Visual culture – whether print, video or the Internet – should hold no secrets.

What do stylists do for a fashion or society magazine? Mauro Padula explains that after his university schooling and a master at Istituto Marangoni, he started working hard for Sposabella: "A stylist does heaps of things for a magazine! He coordinates all the process, from planning and page layout to making the photo shoot. So he has to seek the themes, pick and prepare the clothing (meaning ironing them, if necessary), create the background, and choose models, going through the whole process side by side with the editor-in-chief, photographer and lighting specialist".

There are basically four steps in the process. One is creating a theme to build around the images. Themes can be inspired by the latest fashion shows (the Sixties) or simply taken from off the street (a certain hair style) or be based on a movie or tune. Planning, instead, involves teamwork with, for instance, the editor-in-chief, staff and

photographer, Decisions are taken on what clothing to use, where to make the shooting, and whether to use colour or black and white. At this point, the stylist looks for the clothes and accessories for the shoot. Padula says: "This is an exciting moment, it's fun but physically stressful. I was once around and about in Milan, catching buses, the bags overstuffed with clothes picked up at company showrooms". Then at last you get to the set: everything's ready for shooting. Things get tough when the set's in a far-off, exotic place. Something that Mauro Biasiotto, stylist for "IoDonna", the women's supplement of Corriere della Sera, knows too well: "as a student at Istituto Marangoni, never could I have imagined the trips I'd have made! China, India, USA, Africa... It's great, but it can be hectic sometimes... in India, I had to carry six bags of clothes, packing and unpacking God knows how many times, only to iron them when I got to the set".

What are the hallmarks of a stylist? Curiosity first and foremost, an eye for nuances, capturing the right elements for a collection in that specific moment of time. Design, photography, graphics: there are lots of sources of inspiration: the inauguration of an exhibition, a concert, furniture, even a basketball game or football match. Anything to feed on. "Sources are everywhere: music, theatre, concerts, people you meet on the street" – says Biasiotto – "every time I look around it's as if I take a snapshot". Even movies can help. Stylist Sciascia Gambaccini explains: "Not fashion films like *The Devil Wears Prada*. I adore Wes Anderson, director of *Meet the Tenenbaums*. His styling is so cool. I love the works of John Currin, Jeff Koons and Richard Prince: they present a humorous portrait of fashion. Other colleagues of mine get their inspiration from the past, on the streets or by recalling moments of their hometown". Internet is another great treasure trove of ideas, surfing through blogs and websites on fashion and celebrity styles. Not to mention websites (the sartorialist or jak&jil) packed with pictures of cool or extravagant styles you can meet, for

instance, on the streets of Paris, Rio or Los Angeles.

Magazines are the most useful resource. As Gambaccini puts it: "Magazines are the playground of the greatest talents in photography and styling". There's so much to choose from. Vogue, however, remains the standard-bearer of fashion mags (the Italian, English, US and French edition, even the Russian edition). Followed by trendier magazines such as W, ID or Another Magazine, featuring emerging talents or matchings of daring and extravagant designs. Fashion stylists never lose one single edition of a national or international magazine. They dissect them, as if they were school books, to look for ideas and inspiration, just like the scores of fashion shows they follow (good, bad, featuring famous or new designers).

"It's like putting the pieces of a puzzle together" says British fashion star Victoria Bartlett, 20 successful years working behind the scenes at Prada, creating her own collection, and working for a young brand like Miss Sixty, where she realized every stylist's dream: putting some of the hottest models on the runway. However, dreams often have to clash with tight budgets, which often means so long to the hottest models and to those cool Caribbean backgrounds, which are replaced by more modest, fit-tobudget surroundings.

Teamwork is another fundamental aspect. Whether for companies or magazines, stylists work together with people having different backgrounds, approaches and visions. Padula sums it up: "Good teamwork involves closeness and cooperation. Biasiotto emphasizes: "You need a great deal of patience to work shoulder to shoulder with different people, and determination in getting the job done". In companies, you need to adjust to the designer's mind. Victoria Bartlett says: "understanding what goes on in there is a shrink's job... you've got to penetrate his mind and bring the collection to life, removing the delusions of grandeur without messing up the creator's vision". An amazing mix of communicative power and saneness, which means playing the shrink and turning yourself the next moment into a

market strategist, using the proper pitch, and knowing when to keep quiet and when to speak up, when to encourage or kindly discourage.

Strong and long-lasting partnerships, like in the best marriages, are formed when designer and stylist connect. Take, for instance, Karl Templer, the styling guru, and Francisco Costa, the designer behind Calvin Klein's female collections. Asked what he does, Templer answers: "I'm a source of inspiration and a sounding board, because Francisco is lost in his world and he's perpetually on the lookout for new ideas". That's why Templer's role also involves keeping the designer in the know on the latest trends and buzz, on anything from a band to a new actress. So it's (also) through his eyes that Costa sees the world and gets inspiration for his collections.

Kate Young, instead, is stylist and partner to New York-based Israeli designer Ygal Azrouel. Kate (an Oxford graduate and Vogue alum as personal assistant to Anna Wintour) explains: "My job is to help the designer squeeze out his inspiration... without overdoing things". In other words, making himself understood without getting himself misunderstood. For instance, she snaps when she sees a model wearing a lumberjack shirt with the huge checked pattern and harem pants, and suggests a micro-top with pants or something else with the shirt. "It's as if she were tidying up my closet" says Azrouel.

The partnership between Marc Jacobs, creative director of Louis Vuitton, and Katie Grand, dubbed by The Daily Telegraph as "one of the world's most powerful stylists", is still going strong. Grand, born in England in 1971, has worked for the leading fashion magazines (including Dazed & Confused, Pop and The face) and launched The Love Magazine which she still heads. Her career is telling: as most of her peers, she has mixed her fashion writing and stylist work. Another striking example is Parisian Carine Roitfeld. The editor-in-chief of Vogue France (considered arch-enemy of Anne Wintour, her powerful counterpart at Vogue USA) is also stylist of Tom Ford, since the days the Texan helped kick-start Gucci.

Styling and fashion writing is a very common mix. Most fashion stylists who work for designer labels are (or were) stylists for fashion magazines. The two sides have lots in common. In both cases, the idea is to "tell" a story through images, to present a certain idea (of woman, style or fashion) choosing the garments, the models, the setting. There is, however, one difference. Newspaper stylists work for a publication: their "presentation" is meant to be published in a magazine and to be seen by readers. Stylists for a designer label work for a brand: their "presentation" is meant for a multitude of channels and locations (from print advertising to store styling) and to be seen by current or potential clients of the brand.

Curiosity and empathy are a must, but a touch of enterprising spirit completes the picture. A stylist should always remember that his creations are fundamentally meant to stimulate the desire of purchasing and to feed the selling circuit. A powerful display doesn't always bring sell-out crowds. An overstated one may even leave the clothes stale on the shelves. Mismatches may have the same bad impact on sales. Matching, for instance, medium-high priced garments with over-priced accessories may create an overall feeling of unaffordability. "You need to mix high and low prices, without dazzling the public during a show. When I'm on a project, I prefer working with a sales specialist throughout the process, creating a strong tie between me, him and the designer", explains Carlo Pregnolato, who works for a number of companies in the Made in Italy sector. That's why stylists need to have some degree of sales acumen in order to grasp the business side of the fashion industry.

So, as mentioned earlier, stylists may be out of the limelight, but they do definitely play a key role in the business. In some cases becoming true icons, coveted by companies and star actors and singers. Take Rachel Zoe, Hollywood's most acclaimed stylist. She chooses the look of redcarpet celebs of the calibre of Lindsay Lohan, Cameron Diaz or Keira Knightley. Speaking of her work, she says: "I

stick to rules. I hate black dresses at award shows. It's too bad for the camera. I hate grey, brown and some green shades.

Five minutes to the show and I'm still making up my mind on what dress to put on the girls. There's always that feeling of rushing Cinderella off to the ball". Gone are the days when Cher showed up at the Oscar night with a beaded hairdo, or when Jane Fonda sported a pantsuit when she accepted the statuette!

Rachel Zoe dresses up celebs for the glamorous events, but also takes care of their everyday look. The clothes worn by the stars shine bright in the sales charts, regardless of the situation they've been shot in, whether in prison or at a premiere. As Zoe says: "People should always look great and dress sharply. Even in court". One of her first clients was Nicole Richie. Zoe gave her the fab look back when she was known only as Paris Hilton's friend. "Some of the clothes she wore appeared the following season because of the rave reviews they got".

How much does a stylist like Rachel Zoe earn? Her fee can range from \$4000 to \$6000 a day. That's the amount Hollywood stars are willing to dish out for her services. Plus the perks, meaning clothes, accessories and the jewellery she gets from designers to "place" their labels on her clients. They say that her Beverley Hills residence is jam-packed with clothes neatly organized by designer, style, season and colour shade. A room serves as a fur closet, another's packed with jackets and foulards, even her garage has morphed into a show room for her clients.

Her fame transcends the close-knit world of fashion. The Zoestyle has become a statement for the "common mortals". Her autobiography-guide to the world of fashion (tips on what to put in your suitcase heading to Europe or how to get the great screen presence) is a best-selling title.



styling by: Camilla Sossi / photographer: Shareen Akhtar

How to become FASHION STYLIST

A fashion stylist works behind the scenes, but the career has lots of followers in fashion schools. The growing importance of a stylist's role in the fashion industry has led to the organization of specific educational offers.

Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com) organizes a 3-year course and a master program lasting 8 months. Daily attendance of both is required. The course is designed for diploma-holders, while the master program is meant for graduates or for those who have attended a post-diploma fashion school. Classes alternate specific subjects such as fashion styling or graphic design and lessons on the business side of the industry, providing students with both the technical and artistic-cultural background.

The European Institute of Design (www.ied.it) organizes a 10month master program, with classes running from Monday to Friday. Attendance is required. The program is divided into three macroareas: the first introduces to the business dynamics of the fashion industry; the second focuses on creativeness and visual approach; in the third, students work on developing a range of ideas through, for instance, a photo shoot. An individual internship is organized to put learning into practice and to get to grips with the job.

Those seeking a full immersion path should consider the Fashion Styling Course at the Domus Academy (www.domusacademy.it), held in Milan in summer (June-July), organizing theoretical classes (such as fashion and beauty trends and photography trends) and drills.

The reference abroad is the Central Saint Martins College of London (www.csm.arts.ac.uk), which offers a variety of beginner

courses and master programs for professionals. In the US, Parsons, the New School for Design (www.parsons.edu) inquired for admittance. New York also hosts courses organized by the FIT - Fashion Institute of Technology (www.fitnyc.edu). Sydney and Melbourne in Australia present the Whitehouse Institute of Design (<http://whitehousedesign.edu.au/>), which organizes a 3-year styling course divided into four main areas (context, communications, methods, synthesis).

PR SPECIALIST: PROFILE

Role

He is in charge of public relations on behalf of a company.

Responsibilities

He develops, establishes and maintains relations between the company/companies he works for and the press, institutions, businesses, etc.

Works for

A corporate press office or a specialized PR agency that follows a range of brands and/or products.

Qualities

Knowledge of the inner workings of the communication world (media, organization, etc.). Nice, open person with a razor-sharp memory.

Salary

Net monthly salaries vary depending on the workplace (company press office, major specialized agency, small independent firm). Basically, new entries get € 700/900, while seniors with at least 10 years' experience earn around € 2,500.

PR SPECIALIST: LORD CHAMBERLAIN AT THE COURT OF FASHION

A PR specialist (usually called PR) is the Lord Chamberlain at the court of fashion. Iron fist in a velvet glove. Courteous, meticulous and with a razorsharp memory, a PR never forgets a name. His address book is full and always kept up to date.

It's an exciting and tough job. Alongside specific skills, a PR needs to possess innate qualities: nice, professionally determined, organized mind, on the dot, clear, with a bent for news, a PR makes his clients feel at their best always and everywhere.

A PR builds relations. He establishes and maintains contacts with the stakeholders of the company or companies he works for. He communicates with institutions, the press and with other businesses. Take, for instance, the sponsoring of an exhibition. A PR manages the communication stream with the hosting establishment and with other companies taking part in the event. He sends out news to journalists and raises awareness to go visit the show or attend an organized preview and then write about it on their publication. Another case would be a top model or actress coming to Italy to promote the launch of a new collection or perfume. A PR manages the event and networks with all the players involved: the journalists for their interviews, the public drooling for an autograph, or the celeb's unpermissive image consultant.

A PR manages a communication process from all its angles. In order to do so, he needs to have deep knowledge and practice of communication tools: from advertising media (print media), used traditionally to promote goods or services, to the new, more interactive and powerful Internet avenues. Dolce & Gabbana, for

instance, have blended both old and new to create Swide (alongside their Facebook profile), a website built around their creative world, where users can not only find the hallmark features of the Dolce & Gabbana style, but can also interact with the brand and the designers.

Fashion PRs are relying more and more on the new media (social networks, websites, newsletters and the like). As Vincenzo Dell'Olio, operations coordination manager at Coffee Grinder explains: "The evolution of the new media – chiefly the Internet – has shifted the focus and changed the communication tools and processes, moving towards new, more fluid, more receptive and less stiff forms than traditional print media". Franco Guzzi, chairman of Cohn & Wolfe Italia, adds: "The fashion industry is realizing that fashion shows, glamour events and celebrities are only part of the picture in brand promotion, and are consequently focusing more on building relations and interfacing with clients, shifting their brands into different dimensions to enhance their relevance in the eyes of the public. There are some revealing cases of brands that are choosing to open up and interact with their audience. Louis Vuitton, for instance, makes clever use of social media, using its accounts to feel the pulse of the brand".

A PR, therefore, needs to have a whole set of skills to understand the inner workings of communication. To bring an emerging designer to the fore, for instance, he should choose what's best between a social network and a red carpet affair at a film festival. Likewise, a PR should know inside out the agencies that create and produce advertising, and the media centres that choose how to plan ads on newspapers or TV networks. And he has to stay alert to consumer tastes and directions. Losing sight would mean falling off track. Clothes are sold for what they represent, rather than for the clothes in se. A PR's task is, thus, to represent fashion through images, language and events, using the media to raise the awareness of both consumers and industry professionals (journalists, photographers, bloggers).

Over the past few years, PRs have started to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to fashion, casting their eye across multiple contexts and sectors. Multidisciplinarity is likely to spread further. Laura Magni, manager of the homonymous agency and fashion manager of the AnnaBi Group explains: "The PR system in the fashion industry has radically changed over the past 15 years for a good number of reasons: e-mail communication, the speed of digital photography, the decline of the publishing industry, the spreading of creations for disposable fashion, the increasing pace of the market, no longer restricted to half-year seasons. All this has led to the need for reshaping communication processes. PRs are now forced to seek opportunities across the industry – public speeches, co-marketing operations, local micro-events, international media partnerships – and through every possible channel: magazines (readership is in decline), radio stations, TV networks, blogs, one-to-one approaches and also cross-sector contamination, blending, for instance, art, topicality or food. Fashion needs to transcend, draw from various sources and feed on cross-sectional consent".

A crucial quality for fashion PRs is using the right tone at the right moment. As journalist Lina Sotis once wrote: "A PR's secret weapon is his smile, his voice the loaded bullet. One blunder can break a career". She jots down her half-joking golden rules for PR specialists: "First: know and remember lots of people. Be kind, but not too submissive. Elegance is a must, but never play the star in front of a client. A PR should enhance a client and should never be remembered for the look, but only for the kind smiles and ever-readiness. Finally, bags of patience. In case of crack-up, remember Victor Hugo: "Genius is constancy". Constancy means resistance; patience, more or less. Quotes in moments of despair do help".

What does a fashion PR actually do? Primarily, his daily task revolves around the presentation of collections. Ahead of trade fairs and fashion shows (for instance Pitti in Florence or Milano Moda), he

prepares the press releases on the brands and products he follows. He then sends out the press folders (press release and images) to journalists, each specialized publication receiving its specific folder: wedding dresses to Vogue Sposa, Sposabella and women's magazines, casual womenswear to magazines (Panorama, Vanity Fair), women's magazines (Donna Moderna, Gioia), monthlies (Marie Claire, Elle) and so forth. He then organizes an open day to show the sample of the collection to the press.

Basically, open days are held non-stop from 10 AM to 8 PM. Journalists, stylists and the media are invited to get a sneak view of the clothing that will (hopefully) appear in their reports and articles.

In the idle months between one collection and the next, PRs prepare and send press releases to keep journalists on the ball. It could be anything from the re-presentation of garments tuned to the mood of the moment to an item worn by a celeb, the opening of a new flagship, financial news (highlighting the good results). Financial releases are distributed to business desks, while press folders on the latest runway trends are sent to fashion magazines.

Work patterns may vary, depending on the PR's firm. Fashion PRs can work for a single designer label or for a range of brands. In the first case, they usually serve as employees inside the press office working on a specific brand or on several product areas of the brand. In the second, they work as hired consultants (for 6, 12 or more months) for a number of companies, following a range of brands and products.

Generally speaking, the big fashion companies have various PRs working in different areas: the product PR, the corporate communication PR, the sponsoring and celebrities PR. Take, for instance, Caitlin Ni Chatain, an education at Trinity College in Dublin and Istituto Marangoni of Milan; she is the licensing PR at Gucci.

Small and medium firms, instead, may have a PR working inside the press office and dealing mainly with the product, but for a number

of reasons (unmanageable workload, labour costs) often choose to outsource the process to an agency that takes care of PR with the media and open days for the press. If companies have no office or showroom in Milan (the place to be to stay in touch with newsrooms and the media in general), PR agencies are also used as meeting places or for press displays and interviews. "Lots of brands with interesting growth prospects" says Fiorella Passoni, general manager of Edelman in Italy, "tend to have a PR agency in charge of their communication".

Over the past few years, PR investments made by clothing and accessory firms have been on the rise. Up to a decade ago, most of the money was spent in advertising. Today the situation has flipped. The priority is given to events and targeted communication that allow companies to connect with their clients. As a result, independent firms working with a range of brands have gradually increased. Margarita, founded in Milan in 2002, for instance, can boast cool brands such as Fiorucci and Lollipops from France, specializing in bags and accessories. Other big names include Karla Otto. This stunningly-looking ex model runs offices in Milan, Paris, London and New York, catering to clients of the likes of Marni, Pucci, Jean Paul Gaultier and Viktor & Rolf; Barbara Vitti, 30 years of top experience in the field, founder in 1971 of her agency in Milan: "Back in the Seventies and Eighties, public relations, press office, advertising and special events were a one-man show. Designer, PR and the creative staff were all tied in a clan-like bond, working, travelling, vacationing and having fun together". In an interview, she admitted that her choice of leaving fashion journalism was simply for the better money in a PR career: "I got the chance to work with the Grand Hotel magazine writing a column called "Moda e Motori". Me and a photographer used to go out shooting models with the new cameras. It was hectic, but fun. I also spent a stint as a fashion journalist at Grazia, but the salary was tight and I had to help out the family. So I tried public relations, which

turned out to be the job I like most."

But the undisputed fashion PR king is Beppe Modenese, who is also honorary president of the National Chamber of Italian Fashion. Dressed in his signature impeccable style (grey suit, cuff-links and hallmark red socks as a tribute to Balthus), he has met and worked for the cream of the fashion crop. Dubbed by US Women's Wear Daily as "the Prime Minister of Italian fashion", he tells his story in an interview: "My passion for fashion started very early in the Fifties. I come from Piedmont and I attended the Economics University in Turin. I soon realized that I felt out of place there so I moved to Milan, managing an art gallery. At the time, I came across people from the TV business, who offered me the chance to host a feature on antiquities and furniture named "Vetrine". Thanks to my connections with the designers back then, I went on to present programmes highlighting the social side of the fashion world. Those were the early, pioneering years of television. As fashion became a growing interest, began venturing off to Paris to get a close look at the French tailors. This turned out to be an education for me. After that, I worked for international firms like Coco Chanel and Du Pont de Nemours, which helped peel off my provincialism, in a world where we were all provincial in a way. For Du Pont, I also used to organize international conferences designed for the Italian fashion world, taking regular flights to the US and to Norway, Sweden and Germany, which is about the time I started getting noticed. When I began organizing fashion shows in Milan (Ed., in 1978 Beppe Modenese was invited by the Clothing Industrialists' Union to work together in setting up a fashion show in Milan), I was able to rely on my connections to invite the press and buyers from all over the world. That was an exciting experience. I came up with the bright idea of convincing designers to take their shows to Fiera Milano, which gave me a hand by arranging the spaces. Ken Scott, Walter Albini, Laura Biagiotti, Mario Valentino, Claudio La Viola and Enrica Massei were the first designers to hold

their shows at the new Fashion Centre in October 1978, followed a year later by Krizia, Ferré, Versace and Armani. It was a stunning success. The event gradually gained credibility and its own identity, becoming the world's leading prêt-à-porter show. Fiera Milano was just a stroll away from the town centre, easily reachable by bus or taxi. What used to scare exhibitors most was the feeling of being in a place where everything was too cliché, too commonplace, too commercial. So I added innovative services that could distinguish the various exhibitors: the Saint Andrew's restaurant (the best at the time), a confectionery store, the hairdressers and makeup professionals, the Cardazzo del Naviglio art gallery, the Einaudi book store, Luisa Di Gresy's jewellery store, even a theatre where clips from famous fashion-related films were screened. The idea was to create a brand-new atmosphere where visitors had the feeling of still being inside the city".

Modenese is known for his compulsive attention to every single thing. When he follows an event, he personally sees to the tiniest detail: from choosing the location or the decor to even building the menu. "What is the secret to organize a successful event?

Basically, you need ideas and you need to put them into practice. Then you need reliable assistants, not too many, who are on the same wavelength as you, but not fully. You need to stay humble. You need to be well-informed on people and places that can manage and host an event. But most of all, you need lots of creativeness!"

Skill, readiness, kindness and creativeness are the key words for the "perfect" fashion PR. What is the salary? Salaries range a lot depending on whether a PR works inside a company's press office or for an independent organization working with a portfolio of clients. Generally speaking, the monthly pay ranges from € 900 for newcomers to € 2,500 for seniors with at least 10 years' experience.



styling by: Hyun Min Joo / photographer: Oltin



styling by: Elsa Tordjman / photographer: Daniel Topic

How to become PR SPECIALIST

Degree courses and post-graduate master programs: the educational offer is indeed wide-ranging for those seeking a career in fashion PR.

Students can choose the 3-year degree course organized by the University of Udine at Gorizia (www.uniud.it), learning the basic knowledge and competences in the psycho-social, economic, linguistic and communication fields.

In Milan, the IULM (www.iulm.it) organizes the degree course in public relations and advertising. Accredited at a national level by the Ferpi and Assorel trade associations, the course includes exams such as PR strategies and management or the economics of communication.

Those seeking a more in-depth path can choose master programs. Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com) organizes an 8-month restricted master program. Lessons are held both in Italian and English. Admission requires university studies or attendance of a specialized post-diploma fashion school.

The European Institute of Design (www.ied.it) organizes the master program in fashion communication and PR, designed mostly for graduates and professionals already working in the field. Classes extend for a period of 12 months, alternating theory, workshops and design work. The best students are offered an internship with companies in the industry. Admission is assessed on the basis of the resume and on an individual interview with the school staff and coordinator of the master program.

FASHION SHOW ORGANIZER: PROFILE

Role

He plans, organizes and coordinates fashion shows.

Responsibilities

He plans and follows the "event" from all angles (choice of location, casting of models, lighting and sound supervision, order of appearance).

Works for

He works as a self-employed professional, directly for designer labels, or in companies specialized in fashion events.

Qualities

He combines knowledge of the fashion system and the history of society, and technical know-how (direction, screenplay, photography, etc.). He has an instinctive propensity towards the management of human resources and a strong focus on problem solving.

Salary

A self-employed professional's salary varies depending upon work days and the budget allocated for the show. Monthly salaries for junior positions in companies specialized in fashion events start from € 700/900.

FASHION SHOW ORGANIZER: THE RUNWAY DIRECTOR

How long does a fashion show last? Usually 12 to 15 minutes. The lights go down, the music fires up and in come the models at an average of 46-/48 per show (only 38 with Gucci-Tom Ford). Lights go down again, then all the models gather to greet the designer. Some (Giorgio Armani) step onto the runway, smile, wave to the audience and enjoy their share of the applause. Others (Miuccia Prada) make a fleeting appearance from behind the curtains.

Ten or so minutes. The time to make or break months' work. The wrong model, a bad change of dress or poor lighting and the outcome can turn for the worse. There's a scene in the documentary film "Valentino. The Last Emperor, when Valentino, in a meeting to discuss the planning of a show, snaps and says: "now don't you send me dwarf models!"

Fashion shows have become a ritual moment, so it goes without saying that these moments need a specific professional to manage the process. A fashion show organizer manages the entire affair down to the smallest detail together with the designer. You could call him the runway director.

He is the pro that turns those 10 minutes into a moment to remember. It's a daunting task, one that requires meticulous organization, attention to logistics, a great eye for image and good communication skills. A great organizer is eclectic and connects with people ranging from the light technician to the press office staff. He is budget-conscious, but caring about the idea and style that define the collection. And although the audience may not always (rightfully) know it, those 10 minutes of beauty and luxury mean weeks of hard work

and big investments.

Once the assignment has been taken, the first step in organizing an event is choosing the location and date (day and time). It looks easy, but it's still one big aspect, given the tight schedule (3 to 5 days). Add to that the scores of defilés and show room displays being held. Buyers, journalists, press office people embark on a nail-biting experience. As Paola Bottelli, in an article appearing on luxury24, Il Sole 24 Ore's luxury website, ironically admits: "Milano Moda Donna (the womenswear display), 10 AM, Fiera area: Day Two of fashion shows. Skirmishes break out at Gaetano Navarra's show in the front row populated by women daily newspaper writers: wake up at dawn to check the competition's press review (both print and online), early morning press conferences to be in the know of the new designer trends, tightly-packed schedules for about 12 hours or so before getting to the desk. Nerve-racking from the start. Maybe there's time for a coffee, but forget the snack. You have to cross Milan to get to Just Cavalli at 2 PM for the ritual media event. The traffic jam on Corso Italia smacks of Africa, only with a flea market; the long procession of jumbo trams blast out amidst the shuttles of the Camera della Moda and the ATM, the shiny rental cars screech to a halt just a few inches away from pedestrians on a rampage against "the fashion mob, 'cause they're allowed to drive on Sunday despite traffic restrictions, while we're forced to walk it"; and the bike riders zigzagging on the sidewalks.

One hour and it's show time for D&G: 20 minutes to get to the former Metropol cinema, catching chunks of conversation while the hall fills up. Dash off to Fendi on Corso XXII Marzo: long wait at the Ladies. Back downtown in Via Manin to get a glimpse of the first ten appearances of the Krizia collection as a tribute to the veteran of Italian fashion Mariuccia Mandelli. Bounce back to where you were just one hour ago. It's trendsetter Miuccia Prada's turn gushing about her season's "obsession" in a press conference (usually cloned from

fast fashion, sometimes even from competition). Questions, notes, idle time, at last something to chew on, those delicious anchovy canapés, a runway with contemporary jazz in the background, a thunderous applause to the lady emerging from the backstage. «My head's on fire», says a fashion editor, up and around since dawn. It's time to sit down, open your laptop and squeeze the day's events in a nutshell, while others are off to see the inauguration of the Giorgio Armani exhibition, or have lunch in a stylish restaurant. A few hours and we're back on our feet again: today's another day, perhaps the heaviest. The system is imploding".

Choosing a schedule that almost bumps into another show or a far-out location may mean disaster. You might end up with that dreadful empty chair effect or start terribly late, overlapping with other fashion events. Generally speaking, fashion shows in Milan are held in the city boundaries to cut travel time as much as possible from one place to another. Lots of designers use their own sites. Armani has a theatre located in the Tortona area, while Dolce & Gabbana and Prada use a large site at Porta Venezia. Other designers have opted for an army school or swimming pool. Ennio Capasa, creator of the C' N' C Costume National brand, has chosen the Duomo parvis for his runway. "Designers without a site choose a cool, central and easily reachable place, and stick to it, making it identifiable with the label", as was the case for Gazzarrini, who chose Galleria Meravigli for a few seasons. Richmond's show has been held for years at the Porta Venezia Gardens, Versace opted for Piazza Affari for two seasons, while Gucci presented his collections for a good five years inside the Museo della Permanente, also used by Valentino.

Any spot can be turned into a runway... if you can afford it. The coolest, downtown locations, those needing elaborate scenic design and logistics, are the ones that cost a bomb. Besides place and timing, fashion show organizers must set a budget, which can greatly vary depending on target and organization. Budgets for fashion shows

typically range from €40,000/50,000 to over € 400,000, meaning € 20,000/minute! This may sound outrageous, but consider the amount of people that make a fashion show tick: models, security staff, press office, people catering to the guests, hairdressers, makeup artists, dressers, director, and the lighting specialist.

Once location and date have been chosen, the planner starts with the casting, selecting the models. As a rule, he relies on an agency to do the job, but he ultimately watches over the process. He then sets the fee for each model, which starts from € 1,000 per fashion show. Top models (Naomi Campbell, for instance) ask for more, rumour has it around € 40,000 for a pair of walks. Linda Evangelista once candidly admitted: "Me and Christy (Turlington) don't get out of bed for less than \$10,000".

Casting is crucial: you have to "tune" the figures to the attire and the atmosphere of the event. If a collection identifies with a soft, sensual woman, the pick is California model Lizzie Miller, 1.80 m, and a size 44. A casting director has a very special role. He must be gifted with curiosity (he has to know the models he picks inside out), sharpness and enough intuition to capture and anticipate the trends of the forthcoming season.

The next step after building a team is styling a look (clothing, accessories, shoes, etc.) that's tried out on a model. Photo shots are taken for each look and used to set the order of appearance, which is based on two elements: getting the right "pace", starting with eye-catching clothes, gradually alternating with less "important" items and closing with a spectacular ending; and measuring the timing: each change of clothes takes a model about 30 seconds assisted by the dresser. An elaborate skirt or a shirt with too many buttons may prolong the schedule and delay appearances.

The technical features – lighting or sound direction – are left to a specialized agency, while the hairdressers and makeup artists do their stuff during the fitting and final show. "We bring along a tool box of

makeup, power puffs, tissue paper and brushes", explains makeup artist Max Della Maggesa, "plus small yet invaluable hand luggage just in case: out of experience, you learn how to stuff it up with the most unthinkable things". Things such as shots of disposable eye drops to reduce the flow of tears, or vials of extra-virgin olive oil against herpes and spots from makeup. Even sea water, as hairstylist Pierpaolo Lai says: "Sea water sprayed on hair gives a wavy, opaque and slightly whitened look. I vaporize it on hair styles to fix them to get that nostalgic, but very sexy look no cosmetic could give".

The musical background is the soundtrack of the show. It identifies the spirit of the collection. Models say that the right theme makes them move better on the runways. A DJ is usually hired to get the proper beat. The top names in the field include sound guru Frederic Sanchez, who worked with Prada, Maison Martin Margela and Jean Paul Gaultier, and Sound System, the Parisian duo hired by Dior. The current fad is to call live bands on the runway. "It's a natural trend", says art director Valerio Tamagnini, "it looks better to have them on the runway rather than a DJ half-hidden backstage". Sometimes, musicians become testimonials of the brand, such as Lily Allen and Kim Gordon. Others, such as Yohji Yamamoto, like to organize the gig and even play the guitar. "The point", adds Tamagnini, "is to give the idea that a fashion show is a moment of communication tout court meant for people in and out of the industry. Alexander McQueen, for instance, presented his show on the web. It's a question of organization, courage and faith in what you're doing".

Last but not least: set design. Whether it's a specially created short film, digital images (like the swirling tree branches created by US Jennifer Steinkamp for Valentino) or hand-painted backgrounds, the idea is to capture the attention and enhance the collection. Star set decorators include Frenchman Alexandre de Betak, dubbed as the "Fellini of fashion" for his dreamlike and elaborate fashion show extravaganzas. He has worked for Victoria's Secret, Dior, Viktor &

Rolf and John Galliano, for whom he created a snow-blown tunnel with rays of laser light. He was also organizer of the Düsseldorf exhibition "Catwalks: the most spectacular fashion shows" (of the last 30 years).

The outcome of a show depends also on getting the right mix of audience: buyers, celebrities and journalists are the three most coveted groups, those who make or break a runway. Each of them has their own specific role: buyers are the business people, those who purchase the collections and sell them in stores to the end users. Celebrities capture the flashbulbs of the media.

A star actress or singer grabbing a front row perch garners the attention and also bolsters the brand. One wonders if their presence is merely a question of chalking up glory or getting a peek at the collections of their favourite designers. The website www.fashionista.com has come up with four lists on how much brands pay for celebrities to sit in their front rows. The A-List includes the best-paid stars like Madonna, Rihanna and Beyoncé, followed by the cheaper B/C-Lists, and the D-List, which is a black list!

Catwalk planners are now gradually cutting celeb presences, not only for budget (crisis) reasons. As Robert Duffy, chairman of Marc Jacobs, puts it: "I'm sick and tired of reading comments in the press the day after the show on who was and who wasn't there and no mention of the collection. So this season we're going back to the good old days, a fashion show with the real people. And that's that". Stars are cool, but the stars of the show remain the clothes and the runway.

Journalists have a clear function. If buyers stock the store with clothes, journalists can make them attractive, desirable, must-have basic wardrobe pieces. Flashing a certain bag or model of a jacket on the front page can make sales surge. Sometimes their very presence (or absence) at a fashion show is in itself news that makes the headlines. Anne Wintour, editor-in-chief of Vogue USA, known for her

oversized dark glasses and icy demeanour, is a revealing case. She is the breed of person that can make fashion shows reschedule to her convenience, as was the case in Milan in February 2010. When she announced that she would stop in Milan for only three days, designers had to quickly reshuffle their dates. Adjust here, adjust there, the "Settimana della Moda" morphed into an intense four-day affair.

So being a fashion show organizer requires hard work and a good deal of qualities and skills. A typical organizer is familiar with the world of fashion, the history of society and the particularities of the brands he works for. He is acquainted with film direction, screenplay, shooting and photography techniques, key features in preparing a show. Working with a good number of external providers, he is able to keep contact with a wide range of professional environments. He networks with model agencies, PR offices or with technical assistance companies. He has proper know-how and an instinctive propensity towards HR management.

Another important quality is an aptitude for problem solving. Things never always go smoothly. Glitches may occur before, during and after a fashion show. A fashion show organizer must keep his cool and do whatever he can to solve problems. "Once, with Donna Karan, the fitting lasted two whole days", says Della Maggesa, "the inspiration came when I started cleaning a model's face, leaving only kajal on her eyes. As soon as the stylist saw it he yelled "Perfect!" Another time, we had to change the makeup at the very last moment because the lights made it look too heavy". The first commandment for people working in the backstage is: never panic.

Creativeness is just as important. Curiosity, passion for the new and innovative. Runway gurus combine organization, common sense, creativeness and aesthetic taste. The end result is a perfect machine that creates a show that amazes, involves and captures the audience, whether live or online. Many shows can now be viewed in streaming mode and watched by an enormous number of users. Take, for

instance, the shows organized by Alexander McQueen or Marc Jacobs. Not to mention the 3D technology Burberry uses, providing its online audience (invited to special events in New York, Paris, Tokyo and Los Angeles) with special specs. The aim, as Christopher Bailey, Chief Creative Officer of Burberry explains, is to: " give people all over the world the chance to feel the vibe of the event. 3D technology brings the global audience to the London show and lets them see the colours and fabrics, listen to the music and feel part of the moment where everything ultimately metamorphoses into a unique experience". It goes without saying that show organizers must now come to grips with the new virtual frontiers of fashion shows and the language of the new media.

Where do runway strategists work? They are usually self-employed or work for agencies specialized in fashion events. Very few fashion firms have that particular function in their organization. As freelance pros, they are usually hired and paid depending on work days and on the show's budget. This is the case for the top names who can boast solid experience in the fashion industry. The agency workers, instead, manage part of the client portfolio and get a monthly salary that can be either fixed or fixed and variable depending on workloads and/or if he lands new clients.



styling by: Alice Lefons / photographer: Chantal Storrs-Barbor



styling by: Marlie Rouso / photographer: Florent Brunel

How to become FASHION SHOW ORGANIZER

The password is Master. Those seeking a career in fashion show organization attend specialist programs. Post-diploma or postgraduate courses allow students to build up the necessary (not only technical) competences. In many cases, these courses allow them to put their ideas into practice through internships with companies or specialized firms.

In Milan, Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com), as part of its 3-year courses and annual master programs, offers a series of indepth initiatives dedicated to fashion shows. At the end of each school year, students organize a fashion show open to the public where they showcase their own collections.

In Milan, the European Institute of Design (www.ied.it) organizes a master program on a weekend formula. Lessons extend for a total of 200 hours and are held twice a month on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. The program is designed for fresh graduates who wish to seek a career in the fashion world and for those who are already employed and wish to expand their knowledge.

The master program organized by Polimoda (www.polimoda.it) in Florence treats the organization of events in the fashion system. The program lasts 6 months followed by 3 months of internship. Admittance is reserved to graduates, graduate students or professionals with at least 2/3 years' experience in the field. Knowledge of English is a must.

FASHION JOURNALIST: PROFILE

Role

He is the journalist who writes on fashion and society either as a freelance or in an editorial department.

Responsibilities

He writes (for a publication, TV, web, etc.) on topics regarding the fashion system (presentation of fashion shows, launch of new brands, mergers or acquisitions).

Works for

He works as a self-employed professional for one or more publications, or inside an editorial department.

Qualities

He has good writing skills, fine-tuned through practice. Well cultured with a curious mind, alert to what happens on a social, economic and cultural level.

Salary

The salary of a freelance journalist depends on articles written and media source. Journalists working in an editorial department, instead, receive a monthly pay depending on the position held.

FASHION JOURNALIST: THE STYLE WRITER

Whether magazines, dailies, web, or television, the job remains the same. Fashion journalists use the written word to portray fashion shows to a wide audience. They anticipate the trends of the coming seasons and interview the designers. They understand, read and communicate the dream and the drudgery behind the dazzling and glamorous world of fashion.

The career has established itself parallel to the growing presence of fashion across the media landscape. Fashion journalists write on style (collections, trends) and also deal with the financial side (company/ business news) of the industry. One of the most respected names is Giusi Ferrè. Lead writer of *Corriere della Sera*, she writes a column on weekly supplement "Io Donna" and on Monday insert "CorriereEconomia". A signature flame-red punk mane, she fronts the docureality aired on *Lei* (Sky channel), giving tips on the best attire to wear for all sorts of situations and how to avoid pitfalls. Another celebrity is the blonde page-boy hair-styled Natalia Aspesi, who writes for *La Repubblica*. She herself has become part of the history of Italian fashion and is usually interviewed by her peers on wide-ranging issues regarding lifestyle, society and fashion. Renata Molho, instead, is the fashion and society critic for *Il Sole 24 Ore* and author of "Essere Armani", the biography of Giorgio Armani. Anna Piaggi, writer of column "Doppie Pagine" in *Vogue*, is a fashion legend and front row staple. Her rainbow-toned, eccentric wardrobe (a combination of wide hats, vintage capes and period accessories) is an eye-catcher from a mile away. Her presence at a show is an event in itself.

If designers turn to journalists to publicize their creations, journalists explore fashion as an interesting key to understand the

constant changes in society.

Other fashion journalists, instead, work for trade publications: monthlies (Vogue), female (Gioia, Grazia, Donna Moderna) and magazines (Vanity Fair). Their approach, in this case, is slightly different and tuned to a fashion-conscious/fashion-addicted reader, dissecting trends down to the smallest detail rather than familiarizing the reader with current or upcoming trends. An article or reference on the cover page of some of these magazines can decree the success or the beginning of the end of a designer label. A growing number of journalists, especially fashion journalists, are morphing into opinion makers, setting the trends and tastes and influencing consumption, sometimes even more than the designers or testimonials themselves. Perhaps because they're blessed like (almost) no other with the intuition and experience of recognizing what's up ahead and knowing the true desires of consumers. Anna Wintour is a revealing example. The empress of fashion and long editor-in-chief of Vogue USA is the source of inspiration of the book then film "The Devil Wears Prada". Wintour also stars in the documentary film "The September Issue", considered the all-important issue of the year. The scenes depict the empress in a few moments of her work routine (presence at fashion shows, staff meetings, lunch with buyers or designers) and show her fiery relationship with Grace Coddington, creative director of Vogue USA and her personal assistant. In France her counterpart is Carine Roitfeld, editor-in-chief of Vogue France, slated to replace Wintour (so it's said) at Vogue USA. England boasts Isabella Blow. She cut her teeth at the Sunday Times, where she proved her talent to spot and bring new designers into the limelight, later becoming editor of the fashion section of Tatler. "Fashion is a way of expressing yourself and being creative", says Blow. "My source of inspiration, both in life and at work, are people, and the people I care about, then art and literature. I need to feel empathy with the people I work with... or they should be very strict". In Italy, the queen of fashion journalists is

Franca Sozzani, since 1988 at the helm of Vogue Italy. Known as being a Stakhanovite (she is managing editor of the Condè Nast publishers in Italy), in an interview, she once stated: "I never go out in the evening. I prefer spending my time with friends. Why should I go to other people's parties? I only go to mine because I have to...".

What's the difference between a fashion journalist and one who writes on politics, economy or sport? Basically, they share the same fundamentals: good writing skills, love for research, verifying sources, and constant writing practice. A journalist eventually carves his own particular style, making his articles not only interesting, but also instantly recognizable.

Curiosity, and an interest in the world around them, is key here, perhaps more than in any other sectors. "Keeping abreast of things, of anything that can attract attention: from Celebrity Survivor to the latest merger of a major luxury group", sums up Maria Giovanna Poli, who writes on Vogue Italy. On-going learning of the history of society and fashion, aesthetics, the history of the cinema, and also of marketing or sociology. "It's easier", said Paola Bonazzi from Glamour, "for those who love cinema, with all its references, for those who recognize historical quotes of style, who are familiar with the history of society, music... making fashion means getting inspiration from something seen or heard, it means making historical quotes current. And it means being curious and knowing that it takes more than just saying what to wear at a party".

So it takes more than being just a reporter at a fashion parade and writing on the "who is who". You need to know the inner workings of the world you're writing on and identify the implications in sociological, anthropological and economic terms. As Maria Giovanna Poli explains: "You've got to know what you're writing about, even if you write pieces that look like shopping lists of fashion items. Cosmic misunderstandings are always lurking. Not to mention the articles that are the result of a personal blend of reminiscences and visions

recalling various forms of creative expression like design, architecture, art and the history of fashion, which proves the importance of knowing not only the history of society, but also other fields bordering with fashion".

Sometimes a fashion journalist might find himself writing on something just picked up a few minutes earlier, from material written in English. "The first time I set foot into the world of glossy fashion publishing", recalls Poli, "I was shaking like hell and didn't know how to act. I sat in front of a computer with a huge press folder in English on my lap. The job was to jot down questions for an interview with Ivana Omazic, stylist of Celine, for the 60th anniversary of the firm. I realized I had to start working really hard from the front line".

Features may also regard real products, so journalists each year have to follow the fashion events of the season or pay a visit to the trade fairs showcasing accessories such as shoes, bags or eyewear. This helps them get an intimate feel of the items to write on in the coming months.

Fashion has increased its presence on TV too, with programmes such as "TvModa" (Mediaset) and "OltreModa" (RAI 1). Many newscasts feature reports from the runway and the latest news from the fashion system. Digital terrestrial channels have also increased opportunities for fresh journalists to cut their teeth in television.

As of recently, fashion has flourished more on the web, thanks to the multitude of on-line fashion publications feeding on written, audio or video material, and through the swelling number of fashion blogs. Fashion bloggers are becoming front row staples at runways, breaking out of the niche and scaling the "ivory tower" of fashion. "Fashion professionals are being stripped of their bossy power", said fashion guru Ted Polhemus, "everyone seems to realize it, except them". Tavi Gevinson, the young US fashion blogger who quotes Hitchcock and Bob Dylan and is dreaded and courted by designers as much as Wintour, candidly admits: "Fashion is a fascinating game".

She writes a blog called Style Rookie read by over 4 million people, giving her personal take on fashion, posting huge crooked pictures and zany captions like "You know: this shirt comes straight from the Salvation Army", and getting loads of comments in a matter of minutes from fans of the likes of Karl Lagerfeld. Her success is global: the Daily Mail, Guardian, Usa Today and Nbc have dedicated her features, she has graced the cover of Pop magazine, she has made a video rap tribute to Comme de Garçons, and Harper's Bazaar lets her comment on fashion shows.

Thanks to bloggers, street fashion meets the runway. That's where everything started. The sartorialist (born from the genius of Scott Shumann) and Jak&Jil were the pioneers in taking snapshots of the coolest clothes worn by simple passers-by on the street. In both cases, the underlying notion is that fashion is a shared passion and that red carpet affairs and catwalks aren't the only place to find gorgeous outfits. Hot spots are everywhere: Paris, Milan, London, New York, Helsinki, Teheran, Tokyo or Mexico City. It's fashion in flesh and blood, reinterpreted and worn by the real people every day.

The web has brought a blast of fresh air to the fashion system, to fashion journalism and so many other worlds. In the words of photographer and communicator Nick Knight: "I love the discussion on fashion sparked by fashion blogs, as if it were football or whatever. It's no longer treated as a taboo or kept under lock and key by the fashion guardians". Anyone can have their say on the latest clothes shown on a runway or on a style seen on the street. Today there are lots of opportunities to get noticed, and to start seeing your pieces published", explains Maria Giovanna Poli. "The web and its sites – professional or less – are an endless avenue of opportunities for fashion and trends. You begin working with one, even if it means not getting a cent out of it, and when you start seeing your name googled, apart from your own satisfaction, things may start rolling and you never know what comes next...".

What are the typical qualities of a fashion journalist? Maria Giovanna Poli in brief: "You need to mix two ingredients that seem apparently opposite: a good dose of humility, sprinkled with indulgence (not to be mistaken for submissiveness) and a large slice of daring and nerve. Dust with generous foresight and savoir faire. Courage and self-esteem are needed to venture along paths that may seem bumpy at first, perhaps because it's your first ride. Humility is needed to cushion the blow that's bound to come when your ideas are misunderstood or a tad twisted. Foresight and savoir faire are useful to tackle the obstacles and reach the core of the problem, leaving your mark, despite the constraints". And so, a fashion journalist has to know how to handle his job and be open to learning, to understanding it well, being aware that you have to start from the bottom and work your way up. Here's an example (a true story). A journalist gets to interview an emerging designer still largely ignored by the general public, coming from England and stopping by for just a couple of hours in Italy. The interview is typically scheduled on a Saturday afternoon of July when everybody's at the beach and there's absolutely no one in the editorial department willing to give up their weekend in the sun. Silvia Nucini, journalist for Vanity Fair, tells the story on her blog Matrioska: "Alexander McQueen was my very first interview. Call it chance or rough luck, the interview had to be scheduled on a Saturday in Vigevano.

The weatherman had forecasted a spectacular weekend so no one in the department was willing to give up their seaside weekend. «Go interview McQueen». That was an order because I was the greenhorn on the staff. But I couldn't care less because I was so thrilled. So I got to the place wearing a pair of skyscraper high-heel sandals, a notebook held tight in my hand for at least two hours and a friend alongside me acting as a lucky charm (she was supposed to be the fashion victim) and the driver (driving with a notebook in my hand would have been tough). McQueen had been invited to Vigevano to

collect a prize and an outdoor buffet had been organized in his honour in the Castle park. Me and my friend instantly dashed towards the drinks to ease the tension. He turned up at my fourth flute of champagne and I remember with horror screaming: «Hi Alex». But he was a sporty type and instead of giving me a sickened look, he surprisingly gave me a pat on the back. He had this strong cockney accent, the kind of person that's born on the wrong side of London, but I could understand him perfectly well. I can't remember almost anything about the interview (shoes, inspiration, the courage to defy destiny – which would have likely meant a life spent in a factory – to follow his dreams), but what struck me most was the feeling that this man was living in the wrong body: too big and bulky. Only the large, watery eyes seemed to recall gentleness – his manners and thoughts naked just under the surface. We drank a lot and I remember at a certain point he was holding my notebook, while my friend was telling me from a distance to read her lips: «You're going to get sacked». Our meeting was interrupted while we were laughing our heads off for who knows what by the arrival of some town councillor that was dying to meet him. I waved him goodbye and tripped walking backwards. He winked back to me and raising his glass said: «Good luck». The magazine was happy with my first one-page article and told me that my next assignment was an interview with Claudia Schiffer. I've never drunk during an interview ever since".

Another key feature is having good writing skills. It's a talent that needs to be nurtured constantly. A journalist should practice writing over and over again. And read a lot of essays, novels, foreign magazines and gossip to nourish his language. He must try to carve his own distinctive and instantly recognizable style, without forgetting the editorial line and the publication's target group. Vogue has a style, a mood to communicate with its readers that differs from Donna Moderna or Amica. Likewise, writing on fashion on the pages of Corriere della Sera will be a touch different from writing a piece

published on the Corriere's Saturday female insert. As a result, words, punctuation and length of the articles are selected and adjusted each time. The idea is to combine two needs: on the one hand, to preserve and enhance your distinctive style; on the other, to adjust it to your magazine or magazines.

What are the most common career pathways? There are basically two options: either working freelance for one or more publications, or inside an editorial department. Both have their pros and cons. Working freelance gives you more freedom to move around and is the best choice for those who hate being shut inside an office and like to get an intimate feel of the trends. But it also means keeping your cool when the going gets tough and workloads are too heavy or too little and money's tight, which is usually the case (not only!) at the beginning.

Working inside an editorial department allows you to get an intimate feel of the job and watch the whole process flow in front of your eyes, from the moment a theme is chosen to when a task is assigned, to writing the piece, proofreading it and delivering on schedule. Once you're "inside", you build yourself a career, rising the ranks until becoming head of the editorial staff or (why not?) editor-in-chief. Working from the inside means enduring the hassle typical of an in-house position.

As for salaries, freelance journalists get paid by article. Each piece is paid depending on the publication and length. The big names, instead, negotiate their own special fee. In-house staff is paid a regular salary depending on the position held.



styling by: Gaia Parasecoli / photographer: Gaia Parasecoli



styling by: Fanny Szokoli / photographer: Krisztian Eder

How to become FASHION JOURNALIST

There is a wide range of offers. Students choosing a university pathway can attend a postgraduate degree course in journalism, which is organized by lots of universities nowadays, including La Sapienza at Rome (www.uniroma1.it) and the Catholic University of Milan (www.unicattolica.it). Such courses obviously provide general knowledge and competences and are not specialized in fashion journalism.

There are a number of fashion-oriented specialization schools and master programs. In Milan, Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com) organizes a master program in fashion promotion, teaching the techniques and tools of communication for the fashion world. The program lasts one year and admittance is reserved to graduates.

Professionals, instead, can choose the master program in communication and fashion journalism organized by Eidos Communication (www.eidos.co.it). Lessons are held in Rome on Saturday and Sunday for a total of 128 hours, or 8 weekends.

The Fashion Course developed by Accademia del Lusso (www.am5.it) is an evening program of 180 hours, divided into 3 modules of 60 hours each.

There are lots of opportunities abroad too. In the UK, the London College of Fashion (www.fashion.arts.ac.uk) offers a 3-year course on fashion journalism. Excellent written and spoken English is a must.

In France, the Journalism School of Toulouse (www.ejt.fr) organizes a course on fashion writing. In the USA, the Academy of Art University of San Francisco (www.academyart.edu) organizes courses and specialization masters.

VISUAL MERCHANDISER: PROFILE

Role

He designs and/or manages window and indoor displays for retail shops or department stores.

Responsibilities

He dresses up the outlet, taking responsibility for the look of the store in order to attract client attention, with the aim of promoting goods and maximizing sales.

Works for

A visual merchandiser usually works for department stores or for large organizations of single-brand stores. He also works freelance, offering his services to stores and boutiques.

Qualities

Creative, with a flair for aesthetics, good manual dexterity, and good communication and marketing knowledge. He easily relates with people and is usually willing to travel.

Salary

An in-house annual salary starts from € 25,000 gross, rising to € 70,000 for professionals with at least 10 years' experience. Freelance pay depends on the amount of work done.

VISUAL MERCHANDISER: THE MAGIC PIPER OF RETAIL

Once upon a time there was a person who used to arrange shop and department store windows and went by the name of window dresser. Today he goes by the name of visual merchandiser and now arranges the whole retail outlet and the window, sorting items in a way as to make them attractive, appealing, desirable, therefore easily sellable. When we pass by a window, stop with a "wow" and go inside, it's his credit. If we step inside and go "wow" again for a pair of shoes shown in a certain way, under a certain light and on a certain section of the shelf (and we end up buying them), it's his credit.

The visual merchandiser's task is to make items "speak out". To do that, he builds the ideal set for the products and enhances their distinctive features, by maximizing their appeal. He does it with the intent of increasing the store's sales and turnover. So, for instance, the visual merchandiser arranges clothes so they can be easily touched, increasing their sensory appeal and the desire to try them on. Likewise, accessories are placed near the items, encouraging the shopper to test combinations, hence make multiple and complementary buys. The buying process is also led by the pathways, the consumption time, and the design of theme areas (based on colour or style). In an article published in *Corriere della Sera*, Felice Fava points out that: "A visual merchandiser's work is ultimately measured by the rise in sales, not by the beauty of the store design". Arranging the items properly inside the store means helping it "self-sell" and reduce (in the best of cases, deplete) stock, which basically translates into increasing profits.

The visual design of a shop window or a store is all the more important in a world as voluptuary as fashion. A shopper doesn't buy

the umpteenth pair of jeans or shoes because he needs them. He buys them because he is stimulated by elements such as the mood of the window or how clothes are arranged. About 50% of fashion purchases (clothes, footwear, bags, accessories, etc.) are impulse buys. Almost every one of us has had the experience of stepping inside a department store just to "have a look" (or to warm up in winter or cool down in summer), and to come out with at least a bag full of unexpected and (often) unnecessary items. A visual merchandiser is what you would call a modern magic piper who reads our (more or less subconscious) dreams and desires and draws us to the store.

Multisensory merchandising has lately added a few more angles to his role. This technique taps into the power of the five senses – through shapes, colours, combinations, lights, and perfumes, using for instance, swaying hangers knocking against each other and tinkling softly like chimes, or arranging clothes to facilitate tactility – engaging the shopper in a total experience.

Building an engaging set is however only part of the job. A visual merchandiser needs to set up the ideal store that harmonizes with the codes, values and image of the brand. So if a brand identifies with simplicity and nature, the store needs to convey an idea of genuineness and artlessness.

Likewise, luxury brands like Prada will display their clothing and accessories in a different way altogether from more affordable brands like Zara. The same concept applies to Tezenis and Intimissimi, even if the two brands are part of the same group.

What are the typical skills and knowledge of a visual merchandiser? A good creative eye paired with keen aesthetic judgment most of all, as the sense of colour or proportions is key in optimizing space planning. But also marketing and communication knowledge, since the ultimate aim of window dressing and store design is to prop up sales. Stefano Pizzardo, who has worked for a

wide range of firms in the industry (Valentino Fashion Group and Mandarin Duck to name but a few), points out: "Creativeness is surely part of the profile, but a visual merchandiser needs to focus on the "figures" rather than on "feelings", installing displays based on sell-out and stock data and keeping the company's target for that specific store clearly in mind".

Another basic feature is manual dexterity. Whether a rookie or an old hand, a visual merchandiser sometimes finds himself involved in the process of actually building the set armed with the tools of a skilled carpenter! Valentina Grigoletto, a degree in public relations and a master in fashion promotion at Istituto Marangoni, explains: "When it comes to opening or reopening a store, you mingle with the workers, deciding on how to arrange the furniture, assembling the equipment, unpacking the boxes, selecting the articles, storing all the rest, a touch of ironing et voilà... mission accomplished after 10 nonstop hours of hard work by everyone, an empty space covered in dust turns into a brand-new store ready to open to the public".

Relational flexibility is equally important, as the visual merchandiser interfaces with a wide range of professionals having different backgrounds and working by different objectives. He relates regularly with the store executives, who find themselves on the front line with their clients and have a clear understanding of issues and problems such as space management or rotation frequency of window displays. He also interfaces with marketing, communication, and sales, who often have a more strategic vision and consider stores en bloc, instead of separately. In order to cope with the complexity of communication and succeed in mediating between all the different needs, a selling stint is considered a useful experience. As emphasized by journalist Felice Fava in *Corriere della Sera*: "A hands-on experience as a sales clerk is extremely important to learn the needs of both the trade and the client". As was the case for Valentina Grigoletto: "When I joined Calzedonia, I started my apprenticeship

working for three months in various outlets of the Intimissimi underwear chain in Verona, Rome, Desenzano, Bologna, Bari and Bergamo... I started working as sales clerk, supervisor, cashier, and store-person, understanding a product from all its angles and how it's sold, and getting a personal feel of the meaning and implications of the daily management of a store".

As in almost all fashion-related businesses, a visual merchandiser must have a curious mind and be informed about the latest novelties and trends. As put by Pizzardo: "You need to be always in the know of things, your skills constantly honed and ever-ready to capture the new trends. Curiosity and a clear vision of the surrounding environment are your best assets, and your source of inspiration to grow personally and professionally". The great Giorgio Armani, for instance, cut his teeth in the fashion world as a visual for la Rinascente department stores.

Last but not least: willingness to travel. A visual merchandiser may have lots of stores to follow and the pace can be hectic in certain moments of the year, with flights dashing him from one place of the globe to another. Andrea Signori, visual merchandiser of Mandarina Duck single-brand stores, on Duck side, the brand's blog, tells his side of the story: "Last trip: Bologna, Canada, Panama City, Bologna. Wednesday 30 May: Bologna/Amsterdam/Minneapolis/Edmonton (Canada). Wrapped in a sweat shirt and scarf, here I am with two big clichés to subvert: 1): it's cold in Canada. Temperature at landing, 27°C, dry weather and a swarm of mosquitoes that look more like blimps; 2) the hostesses are all young and gorgeous-looking (the average age on the two Northwest flights was above 50). To my surprise, my room at the hotel is the Polynesian room, the epitome of kitsch – the Jacuzzi is bigger than my own bathroom. Thursday 31 May: in front of the new Mandarina Duck store, on West Edmonton Mall, right inside the seal pool, a crew is shooting scenes of a movie starring Patrick Swayze

(and I'm ever so tempted to ask him to challenge me in a Dirty Dancing mambo, but business awaits me). Friday 1 June, 1.00 AM: Valeria phones me up in the middle of the night telling me to rush to the airport in four hours' time because the flight has been rescheduled earlier. With a face that's a cross between a Picasso and Munch's "The Scream", I drag myself to the airport. Edmonton/Minneapolis/Atlanta/Panama City. The same legion of "gorgeous-looking" hostesses and the passengers on the final leg of the trip looking like they have just stepped out of a bus in the Andes. Tuesday 5 June: after a night's work at the Panama store, I take off, destination Bologna (Panama/Houston/ Amsterdam/Bologna). Due to a booking misunderstanding, I get a business class seat. Delicious meal and a glut of films still to be released in Italy, and not even a wink of sleep. Thank God for weekends...".

Work schedules can be tough too, with business usually squeezed in the evenings, during lunch breaks or in the morning prior to opening in order not to disrupt the store. Grigoletto says: "Speed and flexibility are a must, because every decision must be implemented ASAP. This means often skipping dinner, lunch and weekends. It also means total availability and commitment, sometimes to the disadvantage of personal and social relationships. In my view, this role is suited to people who really want to put themselves on the line and dedicate all their energy to a career that can be very tough on the body and mind, but can be also as intensive and exciting".

Who does the visual merchandiser work for? Usually in-house for department stores (like Coin) or for an organization with a large network of single-brand stores selling, for instance, underwear (Yamamay, Tezenis, Calzedonia), accessories (Accessorize, Coccinelle, Furla), or cosmetics (Bottega Verde, Lush, L'Occitane). There are great career opportunities also in hypermarkets (Auchan, Carrefour) and in perfume retail outlets (Sephora, Marionnaud, Douglas). Even the cosmetic firms that provide retail rental space

inside perfumeries have dedicated staff responsible for store design.

In house, the new recruits usually deal with operating aspects, paying visits to the sales outlets, checking their consistency with the company's image and product assortment. Tasks also include preparing store and window displays for the launch of new products or special displays for trade fairs and events. Valentina Grigoletto explains: "Duties may range from preparing the flagships located in the major cities across Italy, to making photo shoots of layouts and window displays and sending a visual merchandising pack to all the other stores to ensure consistency with the company brand and image. Furthermore, window and in-store displays are made for new openings or renovations. The most original and creative moment is the Fashion Gallery, an enormous hall prepared during the fashion show season, each time displaying a new theme, such as the moon landscape, the Sixties and rock music. The Fashion Gallery hosts dummies wearing the products of the new collection, to allow consultants and owners of the stores to see and touch the products and make the first orders".

A visual merchandiser can eventually work his way to the top and become manager. As a manager, he is responsible for management, control and staff training. His task is also to conceive and design the displays, usually together with the marketing department. When preparing displays or events involving the stores, the visual merchandising manager interfaces with marketing and communication in order to make the best use of displays, since he is definitely the person who knows inside out the technicalities of displays in each single store and can help choose the ideal material, lighting, colours and so on.

Gross annual salaries range on average around € 25,000 for novices, rising up to more than € 70,000 for professionals with at least 10 years' experience.

A visual merchandiser can also choose to work freelance, offering

his services to a number of brands under a temporary agreement or preparing on-the-dot displays. The fee obviously depends on his fame and experience. Some of the younger professionals, at the start of their career, offer their services to retailers free of charge just to make a name for themselves. If the result is satisfying, the second time around is on a paid basis.

Pier Polga, long-standing president of the Italian Window Dressers' Association, says: "The image offered by stores is really disappointing. There are lots of opportunities in the sector. If shopkeepers were to realize the importance of a beautiful window display, they would increase their sales and give work to thousands of youngsters".



styling by: Arianna Scotti / photographer: Daniele De Carolis

How to become VISUAL MERCHANDISER

The visual merchandiser is becoming an increasingly important figure in the fashion world. There are a growing number of educational offers for those seeking to pursue this career.

The master program in Fashion Promotion, organized by Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com) includes an in-depth area dedicated to the techniques and strategies of visual merchandising. The course lasts 8 months and is intended for young graduates. Classes are held in Italian and English.

The master program organized by Polimoda (www.polimoda.it) lasts 6 months and is held in Florence. The program is designed for young graduates or professionals with at least 2-3 years' experience in the retail sector. Admittance is accepted prior to the passing of a selection procedure.

The European Institute of Design (www.ied.it) organizes a summer course in Florence. The course lasts a total of 75 hours and is divided into theory and practice (for instance, guided visits to in-store and window displays around the city). During the summer session, Domus Academy (www.domusacademy.it) offers a 10-day crash course, divided into lessons, visits and workshops. The course is organized in Milan and is intended for those seeking a career in the visual merchandising field.

Numerous educational offers, varying by length and depth of learning, are organized by the Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design of London (www.csm.arts.ac.uk). Excellent knowledge of written and spoken English is a must.

PATTERNMAKER: PROFILE

Role

He is the clothing planner who develops a paper pattern, based on the designer's drawing, for mass production.

Responsibilities

The patternmaker transforms the designer's drawing into a paper pattern, which is then used to cut and sew a prototype. Starting from this sample, he defines the pattern to be used for mass production.

Works for

The patternmaker usually works as an employee for clothing or footwear firms, more seldom on a freelance basis. He may also open his own workshop producing tailor-made items.

Qualities

He has an excellent aptitude for teamwork and a keen eye for aesthetics, detail and technical know-how. Meticulous, with great powers of concentration.

Salary

As an employee, a patternmaker earns from € 1,000 to € 1,500 gross per month. Skilled workers with years of experience can get over € 70,000 gross per year. Freelancer fees depend on the amount of work done.

PATTERNMAKER: THE ARCHITECT OF CLOTHING

The patternmaker works far from the limelight, but plays an essential role in the fashion industry and is highly sought after by companies. He is the person who converts a designer's sketch for an article of clothing into a paper pattern that can be translated into fabric. In a way, he is the architect of clothing. An architect converts the idea of a house into a project, then into a house. Likewise, the patternmaker converts the idea of a garment into a paper pattern, then into a garment.

What does a patternmaker actually do? The process is highly elaborate and starts with one very important step: creating the pattern from the designer's sketch, which may include suggestions on the materials to use (fabric, colour, etc.). The patternmaker must be consistent with the designer's idea and emphasize its creative and original features. So if the designer sketches an evening dress with soft, enveloping lines, the patternmaker must create a pattern to highlight the softness and gentle fall of the fabric. If, instead, he sketches a square-shouldered jacket and narrow waist, the pattern should replicate the same features. The patternmaker also has the tough job of ensuring wearability. A pattern should be consistent with the designer's idea, but should also give the wearer an immediate feeling of comfort. An outfit may be cool, but if it's not wearable, it's unlikely to be sellable.

Wearability is a multifaceted concept. It means an item that's easy to move in, simple to put on, and adaptable to the body and movements of the wearer. In short, comfort in any situation and whatever you're doing. It's a feeling that all of us have with a certain skirt, jacket or pair of trousers that becomes our favourite item in the

closet, one that makes you feel at ease whether you're at a party, business meeting or an important exam.

Costs are another aspect to consider. The paper pattern is the source of every garment. The more elaborate the pattern – which may imply lots of cutting – the more complex the production process. Conversely, the simpler the pattern – made with few assembled pieces – the quicker and cheaper the process.

The creation of a paper pattern is therefore an intricate process as it mixes wide-ranging and sometimes diverging needs: the designer's creative mind, wearability and production costs. In this step of the process, the patternmaker is the liaison between style and production, and between design and industry.

But this is only the beginning. The paper pattern is then used to cut and sew a sample item – a prototype – in a basic size. The patternmaker watches over production by providing suggestions on how to cut the fabric or the sizes to choose for each element (front, back, sleeves, collar, pockets, etc.). This sample is then considered in terms of its appearance and wearability: from the effect of the fabric to the size of finishes and overall proportions. The patternmaker's task here is twofold, solving any problems (to widen an arm hole or lengthen a hem) to make the pattern perfect, and ensuring industrial replication, since the prototype is intended to be the base pattern for mass production. However if the patternmaker realizes that part of a garment is too complex a task, and may result in an increase in costs and production time, he acts accordingly and tries to streamline the process, without departing from the original sketch design. The sample may undergo many adjustments, which are part of a step-by-step process to reach the end result, namely, a pattern ready for mass production.

The patternmaker has another important responsibility. He must adjust the garments to the various sizes, keeping style and wearability features unchanged. A pattern size 38 of a certain jacket, for instance,

is not totally identical to a pattern size 44, though it may seem the same to the eyes of a consumer. The patternmaker's task is to make the jacket "work", whatever the size, and whatever the country. Owing to the progressive internationalization of markets, patterns must be adapted to fit the different build of buyers and clients from Korea or from the USA, depending on the different geographical regions where a collection is launched.

Until recently, the patternmaker used to develop patterns by hand, tracing the lines of the items and showing where to cut, sew or tighten. Thanks to the new technologies and computers, patternmakers have started to use specially created software. However, Antonio Boscato, for over 30 years recruitment director of the clothing sector of the Marzotto Group, says: "The veteran patternmakers, those with tailoring experience, still develop the patterns manually, seeing to the most important parts of the shoulder wear, since a jacket can include up to 40 pieces including linings and interiors".

Computer Aided Design – CAD or Computer Aided Manufacturing – CAM are highly advanced applications that transform a designer's drawing into a pattern by simply punching in all the information, which is transferred automatically. This helps speed up the process in the initial stage (creation of the pattern) and in the following adjustments. The applications can also optimize the use of fabric, by preventing scraps or waste in the cutting process. However, computers cannot obviously replace the skill and the eye of a patternmaker, who is quick to spot the flaws and amend them.

In addition to clothing (shirts, knitwear, corsetry, furs, etc.), a patternmaker can also work in the footwear industry. The work process is identical: creation of base patterns, prototypes and the final pattern ready for production. Shapes and materials, hence technical competences obviously change. For instance, the footwear patternmaker has extensive knowledge of hides, their performance

and features (in terms of grip, softness, resistance, etc.).

A patternmaker must have a strong propensity towards teamwork, since he works shoulder to shoulder with a wide range of professionals placed up and down the production process. He interacts with the designer, the product manager, the sample people, the production managers and so forth, so he needs to know how to communicate and collaborate with a wide range of individuals possessing different cultures and backgrounds, and working by different objectives. If, for instance, the designer's chief aim is to maintain his original idea, the production managers are, instead, focused more on earthly issues such as costs or schedules. The patternmaker's task in this case is to mediate between the needs of both sides. In doing so, he must possess a certain degree of creative spark and technical competence and must be on their same wavelength: in the know of trends, but also understand cost analysis, pinpoint the historical or cultural references of a collection and recognize the features of fabrics, yarns and leather. In the words of Roberto Salvan, product and production manager of Ermanno Scervino: "You need a good amount of synergy, and the common goal of selling a lot, delivering on time and giving the proper quality standards".

Staying behind the scenes. A patternmaker's work is so outstanding yet so unknown. At the end of the fashion show, it's the designer on the runway who gets the cheers and the credit. The 20 (or more) patternmakers who have spared no effort in developing the collection (making it wearable by the common folks) remain in the shadows. What surfaces from under the spotlights is just the tip of the iceberg. But most of the times it's the work behind the scenes that makes everything a success, which is probably why the patternmaking career is not so popular among youngsters nowadays.

Another quality is precision. Just as architects need to stick to measures and proportions, patternmakers need to stick to the

centimetre. A slight slip can change the structure of a pair of trousers or produce a faulty outfit. Precision and concentration are, therefore, fundamental. A patternmaker, in fact, may spend whole days in making those small adjustments to find the perfect line for a garment. Carlo Pignatelli, famed designer of men's formal attire, explains: "It's a hugely satisfying job, but you have to do it with passion, without looking at the clock, and bent on a pattern until the work's done".

Patternmakers also need to stay up to date. Carlo Sterpone, technical and systems manager at Miroglio, says: "Fashion is an ever-complex world in constant motion, but its complexity should be seen as an impetus for professional growth. That's why the patternmaker always needs to keep abreast of what's happening".

He must stay current particularly with innovations in raw materials. Constant research in this field leads to the creation of new fabrics. The patternmaker needs to be familiar with them, check their compatibility with other materials or with specific lines of style, in order to use them properly.

Take, for instance, technical fabric used in sport, but now more often also in fashion for shoulder wear (jackets, lumber-jackets, quilted jackets) made or covered with soft waterproof membranes, light and windproof or with breathable fabric that keeps out water or outside humidity.

Patternmakers are usually employed in-house. At the start of their career, the net monthly salary is around € 1,000/1,500. Companies often find it hard to meet their requirements owing to the shortage of skilled professionals. Job opportunities come from the big names, from designer labels and from small and medium-sized businesses. Edgar Vences and Marta Galli, for instance, after completing their education at Istituto Marangoni, were quick to enter the world of employment joining Simint (Giorgio Armani Group) and Marni, respectively.

Career prospects are interesting too: the most talented

patternmakers may quickly rise the ranks and become pattern office managers, coordinating the team of patternmakers. Salaries become handsome of course, with the famous names earning up to € 70,000 gross per year. What's more, companies tend to coddle their talents and are afraid of losing them. Boscato admits: "We stick to some of our well-earning patternmakers. They are in their fifties or more, and have spent their entire career in the company, some as former tailors, and know all the secrets of shoulder wear".

This explains why there are few freelance patternmakers around. Those who intend to open their own tailor workshop team up with a few assistants who follow the execution phase. Freelance patternmakers design hand-crafted and custom-made clothing, especially for the male target, as explained by Luigi Gallo, president of the European Chamber of High Tailoring: "Many clients prefer a tailored suit rather than a designer label. It takes at least 6 or 7 years to learn the trade. It took me 11 to get to the top: in 1976, at the Fashion Festival in Sanremo, I did the runway for the first time with the big shots. Our world is not impregnable. There are few famed tailors around, and there's plenty of room for the young talents. Youngsters fresh out of the best schools today are a cut above us and possess a higher level of basic education which pushes them to success. If they start working under the guidance of a master tailor at the peak of his success, perhaps in 10 years' time this will ensure a generational turnover and will prevent his legacy from being lost". For those wishing to open a workshop, the question is: how do you make ends meet? Gallo says: "Business starts rolling with at least 50 clients and 100 suits a year. It takes at least two workers, besides the owner, to cope with this scale of business. To create a quality suit, a tailor uses up 5 work days. Clients pay from € 1,500 to € 4,500, depending on the quality of the fabric. We stick to classic features: wool, hemp, cotton, yarn-dyed linen. Producers always receive new materials: extra-light fabric weighs only 150 gm/metre. It takes 3 m of

fabric to make a suit. With this kind of fabric, a suit weighs less than 500 g! Our goal is to create a suit that doesn't weigh down a man".



styling by: Beatrice Dall'Asta / photographer: Marco Giberti

How to become PATTERNMAKER

There are few courses and master programs for those seeking a career in patternmaking, and most of them are organized by highly specialized fashion schools.

Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com) organizes a master program in patternmaking and production in Milan. Lessons are held daily for 8 months and focus on subjects such as clothing techniques, design, cutting and drapery. Admittance is reserved to graduates or to those who have attended a fashion school after their diploma. Students wishing to register need to pass an orientation interview.

In Florence, Polimoda (www.polimoda.com) organizes a 3-year course combining theory and practice. Students complete the course creating a prototype men or women's collection. Candidates with a secondary/high school diploma are selected based on their resume, the presentation of a portfolio and a practical test.

A few schools organize evening classes for professionals seeking a career in patternmaking. Istituto Callegari (www.istitucallegari.it), for instance, offers a 200-hour course, with weekly evening classes held in many cities. Istituto Burgo (www.imb.it) organizes a course extending for 450 hours. Lessons are held 4 times a week in Milan.

COLLECTION PRODUCT MANAGER: PROFILE

Role

He supervises the whole production cycle of a collection (men, women, children, sportswear, casual, etc.)

Responsibilities

He is the person who follows every step in the project of a collection, firstly interfacing with the design department and then translating the designer's idea into reality and seeking the right suppliers. He oversees the production and distribution process and finally analyzes sales performance.

Works for

The collection product manager mainly works in-house for fashion companies (clothing, underwear, footwear, etc.), starting from a junior position working his way up to senior, covering increasingly strategic responsibilities in the firm.

Qualities

Creativeness, artistic sensibility, aptitude for management, business oriented. Has good technical skills (materials, work process) and can interface with different people and cultures.

Salary

The annual gross salary for a junior position is on average € 20,000 to € 25,000. Senior professionals with at least 5 years' experience may earn over € 60,000 gross per year.

COLLECTION PRODUCT MANAGER: JUGGLING BUSINESS AND CREATIVENESS

Half creative, half manager, he communicates with the designer and interfaces with production. It's the collection product manager, a figure almost unknown to the general public, but a crucial one indeed for fashion firms.

The collection product manager originates in the Nineties, parallel to the early acquisitions of fashion designer labels. Starting from that period, many of the big names, for a wide variety of reasons (need for fresh capital or difficulty in managing succession), sold all or part of the property of the firm. Fashion companies started to be absorbed by large groups and by the style multinationals (Lvmh or Marzotto for instance). The collection product manager emerges in this very period, acting as a liaison between the various departments of a fashion company. He communicates and discusses (sometimes shouts) with the professionals involved in the process that leads to the marketing of a fashion product. He oversees the whole production cycle of a collection: from the designer's sketch to distribution in stores, keeping a watchful eye on costs. As Emanuela Cavalca Altan explains: "The collection product manager is a transversal figure that scrupulously follows the whole production cycle, up to logistics (...). He is the person who plans a collection: he discusses the process with the designer and lays out the plan, guiding the designer in choosing the fabric, and then interfaces with the production and sales departments".

The collection product manager follows a project from conception to production and creation of the samples. He confers with the style department to analyze the products of a collection, checking consistency with the season's trends in terms of design, colours and

materials. So, for instance, if romantic style is the big fashion trend of the season, he verifies that the collection is aligned to the mood. If not, he suggests the adjustments to make (adding a few romantic nuances, or using a certain kind of fabric). He also checks consistency between the collection's identity and the brand's target user.

A brand of accessories designed for a young and impish female consumer would never propose bags with a classic bent or created with precious materials. So the collection product manager helps define the style and trend of a collection.

At this point, he interfaces with production, which can be either inhouse or outsourced. This is a very crucial step, where the designer's ideas are translated into reality. The collection product manager assesses the feasibility of the ideas conceived by the style department, taking care of the smallest technical detail. The designer, for instance, sketches a jacket decorated with mother-of-pearl buttons, but the material is too expensive and may overshoot the price initially planned, which means marketing a jacket with a price tag that conflicts with the expectations of the target and the image of the brand. In this case, the collection product manager seeks a solution to retain the designer's original idea and also keep tabs on the budget. These problems can be solved in various ways. For instance by choosing a cheaper mother-of-pearl-like material, or by seeking, in concert with the style department, an alternative that satisfies both parts.

The plot thickens, at least in logistic-management terms, when production is outsourced to external providers. In these cases, the collection product manager also takes care of contracts, by setting prices, delivery times and quality product standards of each garment. As Lory Yedid of Value Search, executive recruiting and consulting firm, explains: "Let's take, for instance, a collection product manager working with a footwear and luxury accessory firm. Alongside his

competences in the leather goods market, he has to negotiate with the suppliers, setting schedules and prices and seeing that production complies with the decisions taken by the creative department". Another twist to the story is distance. More often now production is located in far-off countries like China, India or East Europe. As a result, the collection product manager has to interface with people from a different geography and culture, so knowledge of their idiosyncrasies (how to behave with guests or approach the actual dealing) may be critical.

In managing the production process, the collection product manager must keep a watchful eye on the economic variable, determining the best price range upstream and ensuring that it's maintained downstream. If, for instance, a jacket is positioned in a price range just under € 200, costs have to remain within a certain range to ensure a fair profit. If costs increase (owing to the style department or for production/advertising reasons), the product may likely be marketed at a higher price, hurting sales and, consequently, profits.

Once the production process is over and the collection has been placed on the market, he goes on to analyze sales performance, monitoring, almost in real time, the results of each single product distributed across the various sales outlets. This allows him to take quick action if part of a collection doesn't sell as planned (varying the price or increasing advertising) or if it outstrips expectations (by instructing the production department to provide stores ASAP). There are more stories than one can imagine of products whose sales have shot unpredictably to the top. Moncler, for instance. The legendary quilted jacket worn by the fashion frenzy "paninari" was an unexpected hot sell in the Eighties and returned on the fashion scene some time ago, appearing on ski slopes, city streets and evening society events. Lush, the UK natural cosmetics company, saw the sales of its well-known solid shampoo suddenly double, while Pinko, a landmark name

for fashion-conscious youngsters, made vast headway with its Pinko Bag. There is a logical reason behind these stories. The solid shampoo success was mostly due to liquid restrictions on flights, while the spectacular comeback of Moncler was pushed by the series designed by Alessandra Facchinetti, former creative director of Gucci womenswear.

Monitoring sales allows the collection product manager not only to act sharp, but also to tweak the next collections. Knowing that a certain material or particular cut "work well" means they can be used, with slight adjustments, for collections in progress. His flair and instinct at this stage are crucial. A collection product manager must pick up even the faint signals, those not necessarily sustained by double-digit growth or spread evenly across the country. If a large reverse collar blazer sells particularly well in stores located in the trendy areas of big cities, after one or two seasons they may spread out to the rest of the outlets.

A collection product manager must also keep watch over competition. Obviously not by gathering sales figures at first hand, but by observing window displays or dissecting financial reports. What counts is feeling the pulse of the market! Take, for instance, a collection product manager of a brand such as Furla. He knows the collection's sales figures off by heart and keeps track of the competition's every move, whether accessory producers (Coccinelle, Braccialini, Francesco Biasia) or designer labels branching out from contiguous fields to bags and the like (Max Mara, MontBlanc).

A collection product manager is, therefore, a multifaceted figure with a mix of competences. First and foremost, he needs to be well-informed on fashion trends and developments, on what "works", on the trends emerging from the various markets and countries, on the hot and upcoming designers. He must gaze beyond fashion and capture trends from furnishing to technology, and from cosmetics to travel. In the words of Emanuela Cavalca Altan, "He follows current

affairs, entertainment and culture to capture the tastes of the moment (...). Rummaging through flea markets on one of his trips, he may even come across an idea or theme that sparks the next collection".

However, since his job is not quite what you would call cool hunting, he must also have a knack for business, which means being able to prepare a business plan or put together a price list, taking account of all the cost variables and brand positioning. Juggling business and creativeness, topped with technical know-how. In order to follow production, a collection product manager needs to possess in-depth knowledge of materials and the work process. Fabiola Marin, an education at Istituto Marangoni and significant experience with Calzedonia, says: "You have to know the textile process inside out. I have gained hands-on experience. I deal with the weavers, but to deepen my knowledge, I bought myself some books. We sometimes order fabric and have it custom knitted, then garment dyed".

Last but not least: a good dose of leadership. A collection product manager coordinates a widely-differing bunch of individuals: the designer, who obviously lays emphasis on the creative side of the business; the production manager, who has a more markedly industrial approach; and then the suppliers, the patternmaker and the salespeople. Communicating "properly" and using the right tone with each one of them is no easy task. You need to speak their language, and be familiar with their needs and problems.

His role can be considered "borderline", even in geographical terms. Unlike other professionals who mainly work in house, the collection product manager travels a lot, controlling production sites, paying visits to suppliers to negotiate prices and see what's new, shuttling from one outlet to another to feel the pulse of sales, and attending all the main trade fairs. His trips can be restricted to Europe, but more often extend to the Far East (India, Sri Lanka, China), where all or part of production is transferred. Willingness to travel and to go on extended missions is an important aspect,

together with knowledge of foreign languages. If speaking English is a requirement, a smattering of a second language like Spanish or, better still, Chinese, is an important added value.

The collection product manager works mainly for fashion companies. His career develops inside the firm, starting from a junior position – usually covered by youngsters who have attended a master program after completing their university experience – and gradually working his way up holding senior competences and responsibilities.

As a senior, he develops one or more lines autonomously (for instance, menswear, womenswear, childrenswear, sportswear, etc.), or he may continue his career path, eventually coordinating all the lines of a designer label.

As for annual gross salaries, juniors – who have a mainly supporting role – earn from € 20,000 to € 25,000. Seniors with at least five years' experience earn more than € 60,000, a figure which rises further as the amount and strategic value of lines developed increases.



styling by: Olimpia De Leonardis / photographer: Lucrezia Maridily



styling by: Valentina Gherri

How to become COLLECTION PRODUCT MANAGER

The first step for those seeking a career as a collection product manager is a degree course, preferably in an economic subject in order to build the background of skills underpinning the profession. The second is a master program to deepen knowledge of the profession. However, as the collection product manager is a figure less known outside the fashion world, there are still few courses available, mostly organized by schools highly specialized in fashion.

Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com), in partnership with Ermenegildo Zegna, organizes a master program in menswear, with the aim of training professionals specialized in menswear capable of creating the right mix between style and product, between creativeness and marketing. Lessons are held daily at the Milan campus and last for a total of 8 months. Admittance is reserved to graduates or to those who have attended a fashion school after their diploma. Students wishing to register need to pass an orientation interview and present a portfolio of works.

In Milan, the Accademia del Lusso (www.accademiadellusso.com) organizes a course for graduates and diploma holders. The course lasts 60 hours and can be attended also in the evening by professionals. Istituto Callegari (www.istitucallegari.it) organizes, in various cities, a workshop that extends for 60 hours.

In Rimini, the University of Bologna organizes a master program, in association with Fondazione Alma Mater and Assoform, the vocational training consortium of Confindustria Rimini (www.mastermodarimini.it). The program lasts 1,500 hours and is designed for holders of a Bachelor's degree or

Master's degree.

LICENSING MANAGER: PROFILE

Role

He is the manager who prepares the licensing agreements under which a fashion designer label grants a third licensee the use of its trademark for the production and sale of specific products.

Responsibilities

A licensing manager is responsible for the acquisition of licenses (market analysis, identification of partner, negotiations, preparation of the contract) and the ensuing management of licenses (coordination between design and marketing, organization of the launch, etc.)

Works for

Generally speaking, a licensing manager works in house. He also works freelance, providing his skills to companies who intend to acquire or license a trademark.

Qualities

Strong aptitude for negotiations, capable of interfacing with different realities and solving conflicts, and can concurrently manage a range of projects and deal with different markets.

Salary

Gross salaries per year for junior in-house positions range on average from € 25,000 to € 30,000. Seniors with years of experience earn from € 70,000 to € 90,000. As for professional practices, salaries vary depending on level of experience and the

firm's characteristics.

LICENSING MANAGER: KEEPER OF THE BRAND

Eyewear, perfumes, belts, watches, suitcases, sheets, sofas and lamps: the fashion licensing manager works across a growing number of markets. He prepares and manages licensing agreements pursuant to which a designer label grants a third-party licensee the use of its trademark for the production and sale of specific items. The license runs generally for 5 or 10 years and is subject to royalty payment. According to the definition given by Barbara Giannelli and Stefania Saviolo in "Il licensing nel sistema moda", under a licensing agreement "a fashion house, firm, individual (designer) grants another entity (production and/or distribution company) the right to use the trademark, subject to royalty payment and a contribution to the cost of advertising, as a result of the use of intellectual property provided to the licensee by the licensor".

This nature of partnership play an important role in the fashion industry. In terms of image, it allows a company to boost brand exposure, reaching out to other more or less contiguous fields, such as cosmetics or leather goods. Money-wise, it helps increase sales figures, with no investments needed by the licensor, which explains why these agreements are so popular. For instance, Giorgio Armani perfumes and cosmetics (the first Italian designer to enter a license agreement at the end of the Seventies) are under license and produced by L'Oreal. Tom Ford perfumes stem from an agreement with Estée Lauder, and Alberta Ferretti perfumes from the partnership with Elizabeth Arden. Up to 2020, Bulgari sunglasses and spectacles will be designed, produced and distributed worldwide by Luxottica. The agreement between Safilo and Marc Jacobs for the design, production and marketing of frames for spectacles and sunglasses of

Marc Jacobs and Marc by Marc Jacobs runs until 2015. The same goes for watches: Morellato has inked a licensing agreement for timepieces by John Galiano, Cavalli Timewear and Just Cavalli, while Binda (owner of the Breil brand) has an agreement for Moschino Cheapandchic Watches. The flourishing homeware sector sees Blumarine, with a 5-year licensing agreement for its furnishing (sofas, beds, tables, chairs and so on) with Ideadue, and Diesel, whose home collection is produced by Zucchi.

What does a licensing manager actually do? He manages every single aspect related to the granting of the right of use of a trademark, from legal matters to financial issues, negotiating with partners and coordinating activities. As explained by Giuseppe De Vecchi, CEO of La Quinta, strategic consulting firm: "a licensing expert has to be familiar with the market in order to choose the partner best tuned to consumer tastes. To enter a licensing agreement, he must know how to develop a marketing plan and an accurate business plan, but also deal with legal, financial and contractual matters and understand how to file and protect trademarks in the various product sectors and countries".

A licensing manager must, therefore, conduct a market analysis, gathering information on competition, recent agreements, and the health (in terms of finance, production and distribution) of potential partners. At this stage, the licensing manager has a range of potentially interesting companies from which he has to choose the best fit for the operation. Next comes the contacting phase, followed by negotiations. The talks may involve financial matters (such as royalties and payment schedules) or creative issues. Partners should undertake to respect the essence of a brand exploiting it properly in the products they make. This is all the more important today, since licenses are considered from a more strategic, rather than tactical point of view. Rather than focusing on "generating cash", the aim should be to promote and strengthen the identity of the brand.

Barbara Giannelli, licensing consultant and owner of the homonymous firm, confirms: "Over the past ten years, the in-house licensing manager has carved himself an increasingly strategic role consistent with a long-term vision of the brand. He reads the needs of the market taking into account the DNA of the brand, which must also be transferred to the products under license".

After closing the negotiations and formalizing the agreements (duration, commitments), it's time to move on to operations. At this point, the licensing manager acts as a liaison between the parties. He coordinates design and marketing, ensuring that the identity of the brand is reflected in the design; he monitors the planning process and verifies whether it develops in harmony with the distinctiveness of the brand and the image perceived by consumers. He also verifies that the end result is the translation, in creative terms, of the brand. The toughest – and most strategically important – part of his job comes after the signing of the agreement. Licensing activities are not merely restricted to the registration and grant of the right to use a trademark, but also include all the initiatives (such as communication or merchandising) that complement the marketing plan of a brand aiming to expand to new product sectors. For instance, a clothing brand known for its elegant and discreet style that wishes to expand to perfumes must mirror the same key values of the brand in the new product. So the bottle, the message, the material used in stores, the fragrance of the perfume must reflect elegance and discretion. Likewise, a young, impish and witty brand will present a bottle sporting a frisky design and carrying a quick-paced, playful message.

Licensing projects often overlap. A licensing manager may find himself closing a deal for the launch of a line of eyewear and shifting a split second later to conducting a market analysis for the creation of a collection of furnishing items. Fiorucci, for instance, has 29 licensing and partnership agreements underway, spanning from childrenswear to footwear, and from umbrellas to furniture. Calvin Klein, too, ranges

from underwear to leather goods and watches. A great deal of collections is planned during the year for cosmetics in particular (perfumes, creams, makeup). Fragrances come out in various limited editions during the Christmas holidays, on St. Valentine's Day or during the summer season, while makeup follows the timing of clothing collections. This obviously translates into heavier workloads, squeezed in particular periods of the year.

Last but not least, distribution. A licensing manager needs to check that products are sold in spaces consistent with the image of the brand in order not to have his work frustrated by a misjudged distribution policy. He monitors the sales network, taking also account of price positioning and displaying. This applies not only to Italy but also to the foreign countries where the licensing agreement is effective.

In smaller organizations without a legal department, the licensing manager maintains relations with the Patent Office, informing the trademark and patent office on matters regarding filing, oppositions and trademark monitoring. This is an extremely important task, since the greatest asset of a fashion designer label is, ultimately, its trademark.

What qualities should a licensing manager have? First and foremost, a strong bent for mediation, as dialogue is crucial in various steps of the process: from negotiating with potential partners to coordinating the parties during product creation and development. And willingness to connect with individuals having widely-differing backgrounds and culture and working by different objectives, keeping one's target firmly in mind in order to preserve the identity of the brand. In their book, Giannelli and Saviolo state: "a licensing manager needs to convey the distinctive culture of the brand, to understand and anticipate its future, and be open to the issues related to globalization and the future revolutions in technology".

Negotiating skills are all the more important when the licensing

manager finds himself in the middle of a crossfire sparked by the clash of ideas between licensor and licensee. Let's take, for instance, the launch of a line of cosmetics by a fashion designer label recognized for its research and originality. The licensee may insist on producing an item with an easier, more accessible style to increase the pool of potential buyers. The licensor, instead, sticks to its positioning and tries not to corrupt the style. The licensing manager's task, in this case, is to mediate and reach an agreement in order to protect the brand's identity and ensure appropriate sales volumes.

Another distinguishing quality is the propensity towards multitasking, the ability to handle various projects at the same time, juggling legal and financial issues, and staying current with what's happening, for instance, in the eyewear and furnishing segments. In a way, a licensing manager must know how to work horizontally across the market and have an insatiable curiosity for what's going on. He is (almost) always in the know of rumours regarding the inking of new agreements or company appointments, but also of emerging trademarks and names slated for brand extension.

A licensing manager must also be willing to travel, attending the main national and international events (fashion shows in Milan and Paris), meeting current and potential partners, paying visits to places where he can rummage for ideas, inspirations, and trends, shuttling from the sprawling megalopoli of Brazil to the small town of the Marche inland area, or dashing to Florence to get a peek at the Pitti runway.

Licensing managers are now part of the corporate lineup of almost every fashion firm. Another interesting career option are the independent licensing consultants, usually small to medium-sized firms who provide mediation services and assist companies in setting their strategy. These firms are a great opportunity for beginners to come into contact with a wide range of organizations differing by structure, size and line extension.

As for salaries, in-house junior positions earn on average from € 25,000 to € 30,000 gross per year, while seniors range from € 70,000 to €90,000, plus perks (company car, laptop, mobile phone). In professional practices, salaries vary depending on experience gained and characteristics of the firm (size, client portfolio, etc.).



styling by: Rossella Culosi

How to become LICENSING MANAGER

The licensing manager is a relatively new professional figure in the fashion world, which is perhaps why there are few specific educational offers around, mostly post-university master programs for graduates in economics or law. Istituto Marangoni (www.istitutomarangoni.com) organizes an 8-month master in brand management, which includes a course focused on licensing strategies, at the campuses in Milan, London and Paris. Admittance is reserved to graduates or diploma holders who have attended a specialization school in fashion, and subject to the results of an interview with the school staff.

The Bocconi University (www.sdabocconi.it), as part of the Mafed (Master in Fashion, Experience & Design Management), organizes an in-depth course on licensing. Lessons are held in Milan and last 12 months. Excellent knowledge of English is required. The Consortium of the Milan Polytechnic (www.polidesign.net/licensing) recently organized the first edition of the course in "Licensing & Upgrading", split up into 6 modules to cover the range of themes related to the activities of the licensing manager. The course is open to graduates and diploma holders coming from schools and faculties of design, engineering and architecture, economics and business, marketing and communication. The lessons last a total of 160 hours and are held in Milan on Mondays and Tuesdays.

There is a wider choice abroad, especially in the United States, although not necessarily focused on fashion licensing. Specialization courses and master programs are organized, for instance, by Harvard (www.hbs.edu), Stanford (www.stanford.edu) and Princeton Universities (www.princeton.edu).

TIPS ON HOW TO FIND A JOB AFTER SCHOOL

A degree, a master, then at last, it's time to plunge into the job market. But the road may often be bumpy: you don't know where to start from, what to look for or how to offer yourself. Here are a few tips to avoid getting disoriented in the maze of ads, interviews and resumes.

First of all, the place to go is the job placement office at school. Almost all universities and specialization schools have a dedicated department that acts as a link with the industrial world. The job placement office collects recruitment requests from businesses and quickly notifies the potential candidates. It may be an internship, a collaboration or a recruitment. Companies usually rely on this channel because it allows them to connect directly with professional figures possessing specific training. For instance, if a firm needs to recruit a young buyer as an assistant to a senior, it picks from those who have just completed a master in fashion buying techniques because it's confident it has made the right choice without wasting any time. In most cases, especially for masters, the job placement office contacts companies and organizes interviews for students who are about to complete their educational path. This is a great way to make yourself known and start building your own network of connections.

There are also lots of interesting opportunities available on job recruitment websites. You can start from the websites of the main newspapers. Almost all have a specific section dedicated to the job market, usually indicated on the homepage. The main include: <http://job24.ilsole24ore.com/>, <http://lavoro.corriere.it> and <http://miojob.repubblica.it/>. Lots of websites deal exclusively with

classified ads, like www.monster.it. Career opportunities can be consulted based on a range of options (geographical area, industry, profession). You can also post your resume and be directly contacted by companies who consult the database on the lookout for staff. These web sites also include sections offering advice, suggestions and tips on various points (how to prepare a resume, how to present yourself at interviews and so forth).

The gradual development of fashion professions has led to the creation of dedicated fashion websites. Namely:

- 1) <http://it.fashionjobs.com> has a huge number of job offers mainly regarding our country, coming from luxury, fashion and cosmetic companies,
- 2) www.fashion.net/jobs offers positions throughout the world, especially in Europe and the United States,
- 3) www.stylecareers.com has a huge database of offers mainly in the United States.

All of these websites have basically the same steps to follow: registration is necessary to consult the offers (split up by position, contract, and industry) and to add your resume. Perfect knowledge of English is a must, given the international scope of these websites.

Another important presence are the headhunters, recruiters of personnel especially at the executive level, but also on the lookout for junior profiles at their first work experience.

The main headhunting agencies include Micheal Page (www.michaelpage.it/), Eric Salmon & Partners (www.ericosalmon.com/), Egon Zehnder International (www.egonzehnder.com/), A.T. Kearney (www.atkearney.it) and Korn Ferry International (www.kornferry.com).

These agencies work for companies across a wide range of markets and seek different profiles (marketing, finance, logistics, production, etc.). So the search must focus on the positions regarding the fashion industry.

A few headhunters are specialized in the fashion and luxury industry. They include Mattioli e Associati (www.mattioli.com), Floriane de SaintPierre et Associés (www.fspsa.com) or Pambianco (www.pambianco.com).

To find the right job you need to stay current on what's happening across the corporate world as this gives you the opportunity to move sharp, submitting your application at the right time. Take, for instance, a designer label that's expanding its network of sales outlets. It may be seeking people skilled in visual merchandising or in store management. Or a new important licensing agreement. This could be a great chance for people with a licensing background.

There is a good deal of sources around to stay up to date. First of all, specialist publications are available in print and/or electronic version. They include Mffashion, supplement of daily Mf (www.mffashion.it), and Fashion (www.fashionmagazine.it). Secondly, the many websites dedicated to the clothing and luxury industry. Il Sole 24 Ore presents Luxury24 (www.luxury24.ilsole24ore.com/), which ranges from fashion to design, while Pambianco, a fashion consulting firm, proposes Pambianco News (www.pambianconews.com). FashionBlog (www.fashionblog.it) mainly features the latest news (collections, launches, advertising campaigns, products, etc.), as ModaOnLine (www.modaonline.it) and FashionVictim (www.fashionvictim.it/). Thirdly, the institutional websites related to trade associations, which include the website of the National Chamber of Italian Fashion (www.cameramoda.it) and of the Sistema Moda Italia federation (www.sistemamodaitalia.com). Add to all these, the website of each professional group, such as the Italian Chamber of Fashion Buyers, which gathers the owners of top-of-the-range Italian multi-brand stores (www.camerabuyer.it).

Last but not least, you need to directly contact the companies that you believe are the most thriving and dynamic in your field of interest. If, for instance, there's an emerging brand that sports a distinctive

displaying style or a particular pattern cut, you can send your resume highlighting your schooling and previous work experience in the industry. And make phone calls, try setting up a meeting, offering your collaboration even at a low fee. In other words, you need willpower, wits and humility, topped with a touch of luck.



styling by: Morgane Bataillard