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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF FASHION & TEXTILES

"THE CREATION OF AN IMAGE, BROWN THOMAS, THE DEPARTMENT STORE"

BY

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN

AND COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES FOR THE DEGREE OF

"B DES FASHION DESIGN" 1994

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO :

BROWN THOMAS,

PAUL COSTELLOE

AND PARTICULARLY, CATHERINE CONDELL.

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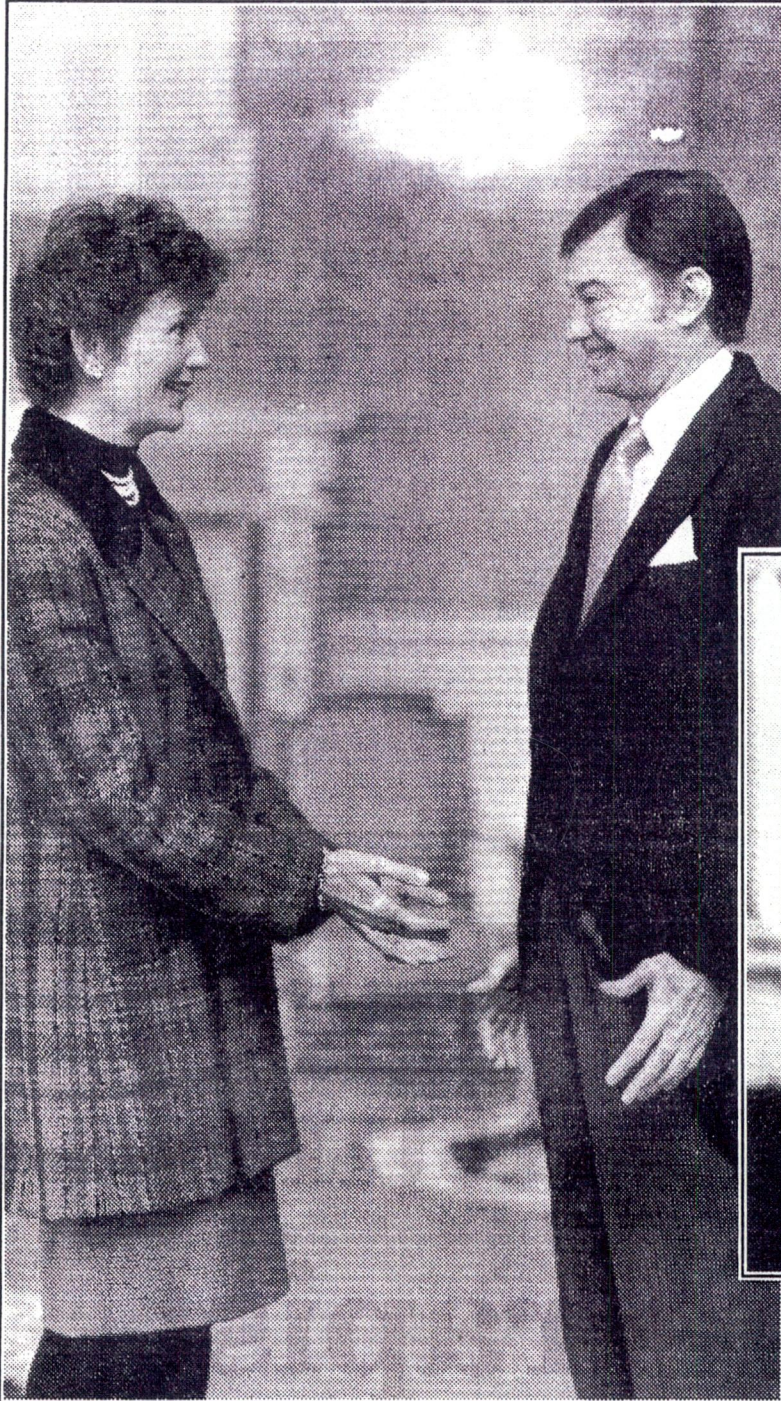
INTRODUCTION

"It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible". - Oscar Wilde.

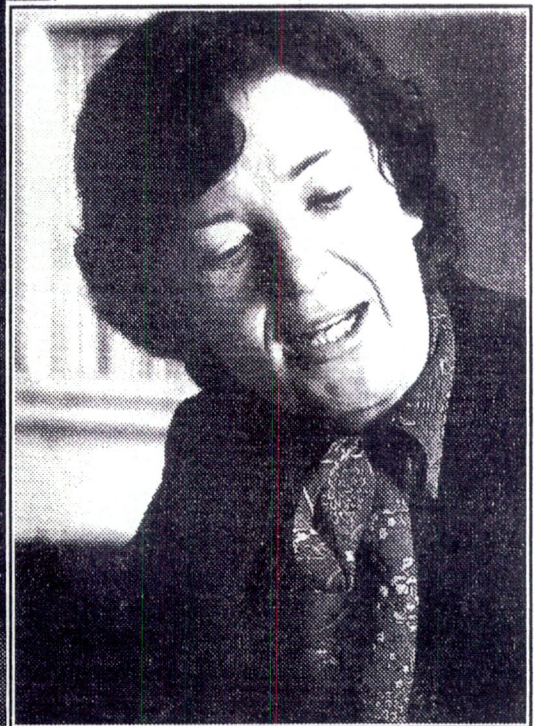
How fashion is presented is the work of various creative people. The term "image-maker" in the context of this thesis is used to describe the work of fashion stylists, window dressers, fashion buyers, fashion forecasters, make-up artists, fashion photographers and public relations persons. A very interegral part of the fashion world, they work together as a team and generally they go un-named. Yet it is their work which promotes the designer and indeed the retail outlet. Also in the case of Ireland's President. See fig.1.

This thesis aims to analyse and discuss the role of image-makers in the fashion world today and in particular their role in the promotion and creation of an image for department stores, using Brown Thomas of Grafton Street, Dublin, Ireland's most prestigious fashion department store as the focus for discussion. Paul Costelloe, one of Ireland's most acclaimed fashion designers who sells exclusively in Ireland through Brown Thomas is selected for his appreciation of the team of image-makers who help him with his collection each season before revealing his work to the fashion Paparrazzi.

The transformation of Mary Robinson



Elegant President bows to her image makers



● President Mary Robinson pictured yesterday with the new Argentine Ambassador, Alberto Eduardo Ham at Aras an Uachtarain and above when she was a Senator, before being elected President.

THE image-makers who changed the appearance of Mary Robinson in her campaign for the presidency have been acknowledged by her in a magazine interview.

The transformation from a bookish, quietly-dressed person to a woman of style and magnetism involved a new wardrobe, change of hairstyle, and sophisticated use of make-up.

Harpers and Queens magazine said her 'revamp' — a route followed

By ALAN O'KEEFFE

President Robinson said: "I took very good advice during the campaign. I can see that did make a difference."

In an interview published in next month's issue, she said she discovered that how she looked did make a difference to people.

She said: "It's also a psychological part of why women are so pleased to have a female president. They want to have a president with confidence, a woman who is making the best of what nature has given her. I do think

was very under-recognised by the male Establishment.

The magazine tells of her human rights work as the country's pre-eminent constitutional lawyer and refers to the effect she has on Irish society, although her role is outside of politics.

It says: "The wonderful irony is that she has, of course, dished out nothing but politics; terrifically elevating, life-changing politics. But because this is dismissed as 'women's business,' it is the sort that the male

How the President has image-makers, Irish Independent, 12\02\94.

(Fig : 1)

Brown Thomas is part of the of the character and history of Dublin. When shopping there you experience the old world charm, tradition and one hundred and forty years of exceptional service. Brown Thomas carry only the best of Irish and International designer labels, many of which are exclusive to the store. For these reasons I have selected Brown Thomas as the role model within the Irish fashion scene. The team of image-makers within Brown Thomas consists of a stylist, various buyers for the different fashion departments, a team of window-dressers who are also responsible for in-store displays and a public relations person. Fashion photographers, make-up artists, hairdressers and models are called in from outside whenever necessary.

This team of image-makers in Brown Thomas are given very narrow confines in which to create an image of style and quality for the store. This they do by promoting the store through window displays, brochures, in-store displays and advertisements in daily newspapers. Image-makers as their role in Ireland is perceived, forecast to a certain extent the looks which are forthcoming for the next season.

The promotion of fashion in the context of retail marketing and selling will be the ~~the~~ area analysed in chapter one. This chapter will focus on Brown Thomas as a department store, the creation of it's image, it's advertising and it's exclusivity, it's success at creating an image and looking also at who Brown Thomas is aiming at.

The role of the stylist and the display team are discussed in chapter two. This is examined through the work of the display artists in the windows of the store and also the display of goods throughout the store. The other modes of presentation in Brown Thomas are the fashion shows staged in-house and the fashion shoots which are later used for advertising and public relations purposes. The work and role of the stylist is examined through the two. Paul Costelloe is selected as the focus for discussion in this chapter as he utilizes within the Brown Thomas context, the stylist who by careful accessorising and co-ordination portrays the seasons look for him in both his shows in London, Dublin and his retail section in Brown Thomas which is presented as a more consumer orientated form for the Brown Thomas consumer.

Chapter three will discuss the importance of the buyer within the context of image making. The travel undertaken to exclusive shows all over the world during the designer fashion weeks and the selection of garments and accessories which are then translated within Brown Thomas as the seasons "look". The role of the buyer can also be very influential in forecasting the trends. Discussing then also the buyers role as a forecaster.

Finally in the conclusion I will be discussing the amalgamation of Brown Thomas and Switzers which is part of the Brown Thomas group and how then the image will be reflected to replace both stores with one new one.

CHAPTER 1

"THE CREATION OF BROWN THOMAS'S IMAGE IN FASHION & RETAILING"

Brown Thomas as a vehicle for discussion presents many of the areas of image-making which are important in the presentation of fashion in the retail sector. This chapter aims to analyse the role of the image-maker in the retailing sector. The presentation of products within a store is reflective of the type of establishment it is. This chapter also takes a look at the type of customer who shops in Brown Thomas.

A department store according to Rita Perna is :

"A full time operation. Quality apparel, home furnishings, appliances and electronics carried in "breath and depth" at a healthy mark-up. Convenient location, service and credit are part of the service. With the increasing growth of discount stores, the traditional department store has been forced to remain competitive."

(PERNA, 1987, PAGE 61)

Brown Thomas, Ireland's most prestigious department store is situated on Dublin's Grafton Street.

"Push open the plate glass doors of Brown Thomas and feel the whoosh of warm perfumed air and step across the threshold into a world of luxury, a place where you can still buy pure cotton stockings for men, bottles of vintage champagne, Christmas crackers stuffed with sterling silver trinkets, Egyptian cotton sheets with Italian lace trimmings, diamond studded faberge eggs and velvet dressing gowns".

(IRISH TIMES WEEKEND, 03\10\93)

Brown Thomas carry only the very best of Irish and International designer labels, many of which are exclusive to the store. Top Irish designers John Rocha and Paul Costelloe. Others include, Dolce & Gabbana, Rifat Ozbek, Donna Karan, Calvin Klein, Gianni Versace, Jean Muir and Sonia Rykiel. Within the store there are exclusive Ralph Lauren and Gucci shops, all in traditional and contemporary styling. Every conceivable accessory under one roof: lingerie, hoisieri, millinery, jewellery, shoes and leathers.

"Stepping back in time where you can experience the old world charm and tradition of a unique department store from the moment you walk through the door".

(BROWN THOMAS FACTSHEET, 1993)

With the store carrying such a wide range of differing products, there is a need to show to the public some form of presentation of the goods in a cohesive way and one which reflects the image of the store through the chosen format of products. The role of the image-makers such as the window display team here are very important to show the maximum potential of the goods available within the store. A stylist is necessary to co-ordinate the clothes for press and advertising, buyers to decide and dictate to an extent the image of the customer.

The way fashion items appear in glossy magazines or on poster advertisements is the work of the stylist or fashion editor. The designer has created the dress but the stylist has chose to put it with knee-high black patent boots, to give it a completely different image, which subsequently the reader is absorbing. Brown Thomas as a department store encapsulates all the elements of retailing and styling under it's roof which includes : the designer collections and the mainstream collections for a variety of age-groups. Fashion shows and photo-shoots for publicity and advertising ^{which} reflect the nature and depth of the collections, are an important element in the promotion of Brown Thomas. The quality of this promotion is reflected in the reputation of Brown Thomas in its superior position to its competitors. Today customers are more aware of what is available to them through a variety of media forms. Quality and value are of top priority. Brown Thomas currently has a display team consisting of five people whose job it is to create the windows displays. The brief for the display team is that the windows reflect the produce available at Brown Thomas, its exclusivity and its capacity to create style.

(REDMOND, BROWN THOMAS, 07\02\94)

The store created it's reputation for windows of a high calibre through planning and designing.

"To a greater or lesser extent, all fashion products tend to be aspirational : The product is positioned substantially or slightly above consumer reality, toward the type of person the target group would like to be. And yet there are also products that are potentially positioned emphatically : The product is depicted as consonant with the kind of person the target group thinks he or she is actually at".

(SOLOMON, 1985, PAGE 102)

It is currently impossible to avoid being influenced by the editorial and visual ploys of today's media. This explains the growing popularity with window displays. One is always told not to judge a book by its cover, people are judging shops by their windows and their advertising campaigns. Not only are the windows an initial attraction but they are an outward expression of the merchandise available in the store. The styling also aids the consumer in her approach to co-ordinating garments.

Brown Thomas was opened in 1848 by Messrs. Brown and Thomas as a haberdashery store. Over the years Grafton Street has witnessed strolling pedestrians give way to horse drawn carriages, and in their turn to allow motor cars through its length - until finally the cycle came full circle and the street is once more the domain of "those on foot". Brown and Thomas were always aware of the value of Irish handwork. They also appreciated the latest styles and fashions available on the continent and frequently sent their buyers to France and Germany. In America, Australia and the Colonies their "splendid reputation" preceded them. The name Brown and Thomas was even then synonymous with quality around the world. By the turn of the century the store was passed on to Gordon Selfridge, the famous English retail entrepreneur. It changed hands again in the 1930's and Senator John McGuire and his son Edward set about making major constructional improvements. Corinthian columns appeared on the ground floor, which also acquired a marble staircase leading to the basement. When it was unheard of in Dublin, Edward McGuire brought in Nora McGuinness to dress the windows. The fruit of her labours literally "stopped traffic".

In 1960 the honour of the "coupe d'or bon gout francais" - (gold cup of good taste) was bestowed on Brown Thomas for being a beautiful store. Another "coup" was won in 1961 when Princess Grace and Prince Rainier visited the store. The doors were closed to allow the royal couple to purchase the best Ireland had to offer in private. Canadian businessman Galen Weston became the present owner of the Brown Thomas group in 1970. Under his ownership, adjoining properties were purchased and much skill and money were invested in restoring the facade to its mint nineteenth century condition.

The Switzer Group which is a group of long established retail department stores is owned by the Brown Thomas Group. The company bought out the shares held by the House of Frazer in April of 1991.

(DELANEY BROWN THOMAS 08\12\93)

Switzers can also be found on Dublin's Grafton Street. It does not however market itself to be as exclusive as Brown Thomas. "The idea of Brown Thomas is embedded deeply in the Dublin psyche".

(IRISH TIMES, 30\10\93, FOR BROWN THOMAS)

To retain its exclusiveness as a department store it must remain sensitive to its customer. This it does by employing a team of image-makers who act as a public relations team for the company by being accutely aware of current trends and by displaying these current fashions to their customers all year round.

"To talk intelligently of the present fashion direction, requires that we keep up with this exhilarating pace to be sure we know to whom we are talking, otherwise we are lost in the fashion forecast forest"
(PERNA, 1987, PAGE 89)

A store must decide what group of customers it wants to reach, (its target market), and what fashion image it wants to project. According to Stephens-Frings "the largest part of the sales promotion in a retail outlet is normally allocated to advertising"

(GINI STEPHENS-FRINGS, 1982, PAGE 228)

Brown Thomas introduced a Brown Thomas mastercard offering select customers discount on card purchases and invitations to private late night shopping on the eve of each seasonal sale. Boasting it as more than just a store card, it can be used as an international credit card, with no annual fee and particularly the lowest A.P.R. (Annual Percentage Rate) around. See fig. 2..

Brown Thomas are mainly aiming at the upper end of the consumer market. This is because the product range is more unique than other department stores and therefore the product is more expensive. However a lot of beauty products are exclusive to Brown Thomas and thus they attract people who only ever go to Brown Thomas to purchase cosmetics.

The array of gift ideas each year in the Christmas windows also entice people who wouldn't normally shop in Brown Thomas except on this occasion when they want something special.

"Ladies wore hats and gloves when shopping in Brown Thomas in my day" was an answer received by Irish Times journalist Orna Mulcahy when talking about Brown Thomas.

(IRISH TIMES, 30\10\93)

W · H · A · T · S

HOT



*As your needs change, so do we evolve,
updating and augmenting our departments
to bring you greater diversity and choice.*

THE BROWN THOMAS MASTERCARD

CARD is more than just a store card, it is an international credit card. Which means you can use it for all your everyday needs without the inconvenience of a chequebook or carrying cash. It's versatile – you can use it to buy petrol, your weekly shopping

family. It's the only card you'll ever need.

What are the benefits? With our Mastercard there is no annual fee and the A.P.R. is one of the lowest you'll find, because it is a storecard and credit card combined, you will be the first to be advised of our in-store programmes and events. For a great new way to stay ahead and make shopping easy and relaxed pick up a Brown Thomas

The Brown Thomas mastercard.

(Fig : 2)

Brown Thomas carry a clothing range to suit all ages. Their baby wear all carry a French or Italian designer kidswear label and so suffers heavy competition from chainstore outlets. The same also can be said of the department named "wardrobe", which caters for the young adult who perhaps is a student or just started working and can't afford to indulge very often.

The public are not mislead. When a magazine features Brown Thomas clothing the image portrayed is always one of exclusivity and wealth, which exudes the belief that Brown Thomas has established itself as Ireland's most exclusive department store. See fig. 3 .



Cropped Aran sweater, £49.95 by John Rocha
at A Wear, 26 Grafton Street, Dublin 2 and branches.
Patchwork velvet dress by John Rocha, to order; macrame
tights by Hue, £5.50; suede and fish-skin shoes by Red or
Dead, £89.95; Celtic symbol, £9.95; all at Brown Thomas.

Make-up look: Lucidity Light Diffusing Makeup in
Tender Beige and Lucidity Translucent Loose Pow-
der in Transparent gives even cover under a touch of
Signature Powder Blush in Apricot Glimmer. On
eyes, Signature Eyeshadow Duotone in Butterfly/

How Brown Thomas clothes appear in magazines, Image, December
1993.

(Fig : 3)

CHAPTER 2

"MODES OF PRESENTATION"

The role of the stylist in two areas of the presentation of a fashion image is discussed in this chapter. These areas are fashion photographic shoots and in-store fashion shows, both within the context of Brown Thomas. The creation of an image and the format in which it takes is the responsibility of the stylist. The stylist in this context selects the garments, the accessories, shoes, the model and the general overall feel or atmosphere which she hopes to create. This chapter also looks at the role of the stylist in direct collaboration with one of Brown Thomas's most prestigious designers, Paul Costelloe, who regards his stylist as having the "essential touch" before revealing his collections to the press in Dublin and London. See fig. 4.

(COSTELLOE, DUBLIN, 09\02\94)

Also in this chapter the liaising between the stylist and the display team will be discussed. How the window displays reflect the garments featured in newspapers and maazines.

An image could be defined as creating order out of chaos. A way of sorting dress components into categories and achieving a certain image. This freedom of choice does not mean that there are no rules as some fashion journalists seem to suggest. You cannot really wear anything and still be "a la mode". You can adopt a look and still be stylish, providing that you get your proportions right, in line with current idioms, incorporating some new or revived style as you go.



Behind the scenes at Paul Costelloe's show in London, October 1993.

(Fig : 4)

While most couturiers and designers hold their own fashion shows, they present a very individualistic look to the public which of course is reflected through the various publicity people which cover the show such as fashion journalists and photographers. However a different element is present in the shows organised by stores such as Brown Thomas. In the case of Brown Thomas, their fashion shows exhibit a wide range of the fashions stocked, mainstream and designer labels. This creates a different form of fashion show where a juxtaposition of images have to be established to entice their varied customer. Age, size and affordability must be taken into careful consideration to appeal to their customers at each end of the category scale. This difficult task is given to the stylist whose job it is to co-ordinate the models, photographers, display artists, lighting and sound crews and foremost the clothes and accessories.

There are many different types of stylists. Those who work as "in-house" stylists for top designer names. Stylists who work with model agencies and who are mainly involved with fashion advertising. Stylists who work for magazines and are involved in co-ordinating the fashion pages, and finally there are those who work for large department stores such as Brown Thomas. The mark of a stylist within a department store is one who not only has a very developed sense of her own style and gives a personal imprint to the creation of a look. See fig. 5 . The stylist in the department store must also however have a strong established sense of the image they must create for the store.




Combining Costelloe's garments to achieve a certain look.

(Fig : 5)

When Catherine Condell, the stylist in Brown Thomas is co-ordinating garments for a fashion photograph that will be used for public relation purposes for the department store or for the "in-house" brochure, her confines are limited. The onus is on her to co-ordinate the image required. A beautiful girl will be employed to model the clothes, a hairdresser and a make-up artist will be on the scene to continually retouch hair and make-up. The photographer then has the job of inspiring not frustrating, by creating photographic illusions achieved by studio lighting, soft focus lenses, retouched negatives and many other tricks of the fashion photography trade. If something fails it is a technical slip up. If the image is not reflective of the store, a lot is at stake. See fig. 7 & fig 6.

Condell, when asked how she manages to constantly come up with the right look, she talks about the experience and familiarity with her client. The client in this case is Brown Thomas, the department store. Through years of experience and a background of window display, Condell knows where Brown Thomas is at. Her brief is always to exude an image of quality and prestige. Condell says you have to always be true to the store. Never let the image drop even if current fashion trends are reverting to grunge and de-constructed looks. If grunge is in, Condell will be the first to show it, but in a more up-dated and sophisticated way. This she has to do in order for Brown Thomas to retain its exclusivity. So when photo-shoots occur photographs will go to the public relations person who will send them to various newspapers who will then be used in fashion columns or for advertising purposes.



Navy georgette empire line coat £255, navy viscose shift dress £95 both by Ghost at Wardrobe and brown suede boots £89.95 by Red or Dead at Wardrobe crucifix £99.95 by Wright & Teague at Bijoux.

A photo-shoot in Brown Thomas, September 1993.

(Fig : 7)

great expectations

Sculpted wool & velvet jacket
£1,275, co-ordinating pants
£265, silk long-tail shirt with
velvet buttons £750.00 all by
Claude Montana at the
International Designer Room
- High boots £110 from the
Shoe Department.



A photo-shoot for the Brown Thomas magazine, October '93.

(Fig : 6)

The role of the fashion stylist within the department store, Brown Thomas, changes dramatically for a fashion show. What she does when putting a look together for a photo-shoot is repeated but on a much bigger level. A fashion shoot is a minimum of ten outfits and possibly two models. In a fashion show situation it can be sixty outfits and upwards, with around fourteen models.

In a show situation the stylist must ensure that each girl walking down the ramp in a given sector co-ordinates in clothing. Again as in fashion shoots, Condell the stylist has to aim the look at a very varied audience. See fig. 8 .

The links between styling and display are very close and are often confused, for example the mannequins throughout the store have been dressed and styled by the display team not the stylist, as one would think. The stylist has no input on what fashions go into the stores windows. The stylist does however collaborate with the window dresser and his display team mainly to get the others opinion on what each is planning as to a next shoot or the next window presentation.

The ability to be versatile in your ideas when either styling or display is a must, and a constant awareness of whats happening outside - music, films and in other countries.



A man of the cloth: Paul Costelloe backstage before the show with the models who wore his new range

Condell in action before a Costelloe show, September 1992.

(Fig : 8

In the summer of 1989 the windows of Brown Thomas featured a seaside postcard style portrayal of a "fat lady" on a pier under the slogan "see all the sights at the Brown Thomas summer sale". This was "conceived, visualised and illustrated by a woman who considers herself enlightened and fully aware of issues concerning every aspect of feminism". The ASAI (The Advertising Standards for Ireland) has been told.

(IRISH TIMES, 24\08\89)

Two people objected to the advertisement on the grounds that it was sexist, offensive and degrading to women. The authority which ensures that all advertisements are "legal, decent, honest and truthful," said that it has been told that the aim of the advertisement was to portray the humour and style of the era when seaside postcards were current and in view of the press publicity already generated by the matter concluded that no further action on its part was needed.

(IRISH TIMES, 24\08\89)

This again re-iterates how both the stylist and the window dresser put forward an image for the store whether accepted positively or negatively the above article shows that they are the most noticed windows in Dublin.

There are no strict budgets for the windows, mainly because the head of the display team is quite minimalistic and doesn't go for expensive props which take away from the fashion on display. John Redmond, the chief of the display in Brown Thomas rather the use of paint and colour and rolls of paper hanging as a backdrop. Very much a man for less is more.

But the contrary happens each Christmas. The Christmas of 1993 in particular, where every conceivable item in stock in Brown Thomas could be found somewhere in the windows. This, he claims is because of the feast of Christmas as well as giving passers-by gift ideas. These windows were planned from up to three months in advance.

(REDMOND, BROWN THOMAS, 15\01\94)

Each item was positioned perfectly and what could have appeared extremely cluttered was at closer look, a shoppers dream. The windows depicted as all Redmond's windows do, wealth and luxury but in a different way to the usually understated and extremely elegant windows. He never tries to sketch his plans as he maintains he "can't draw very well", instead he hoardes bits and pieces which develop into colour or mood stories. See fig. 9 .

(REDMOND, BROWN THOMAS, 15\01\94)

A department store carries such a large variety of goods that it is impossible to represent each department at once. Redmond gives each section of the shop fair representation. One window will feature the international designer rooms, another Ralph Lauren and another, Paul Costelloe. These windows change fortnightly. The backround however may only change slightly each fortnight. Then the backround will be re-designed monthly or on occasions like Easter or Valentines day.

The window dressers have to be constantly informed and aware of new merchandise in stock, new silhouettes each season and what the current trends for accessorizing are.



An autumn window in Brown Thomas.

(Fig : 9)

This can be done by exchanging thoughts and ideas with the stylist or by reading current magazines and constantly observing street fashion.

This appears to be a general form of research for ideas as depicted in "The Fashion Conspiracy",

"We don't say to our trainees, you stay in Knights-bridge, and don't go to Margaret Street without a passport, we point them towards certain restaurants, certain hotel lobbies, certain magazines, you've got to be able to walk along the street and notice whats going on without making a big deal of it"

(COLERIDGE, 1988, PAGE 267)

This is where the stylist has to be constantly aware of current fads even more so than the designer who has spent the last four months in the studio designing and has become oblivious of whats happening now.

Paul Costelloe, Ireland's most famous man of the cloth loves "sarcasm", "good cynics" and "people who are rude in a very jovial manner". He admonishes Irish politician's dress as "dreadful", he would put them in "maybe some nice baggy tweed suits" instead.

(COSTELLOE, LONDON, 17\10\03)

Come across Mr. Costelloe in the Chelsea Arts Club and he will probably have a sketchbook in his hand, doodling landscapes, with his mind on something philosophical. A private man, he isn't big on noise, fuss or brashness. Neither his clothes nor the man himself are never much inclined towards shouting. Like Italian designer Romeo Gigli, he is not at home with the public side of his business. He seems almost embarrassed when he does the traditional victory parade down the catwalk after his shows.

For starters, he is not the monstrous poseur Jean-Paul Gaultier or Thierry Mugler is. In fact Paul Costelloe blends into the crowd almost blandly: jeans, denim shirt and a pair of runners. He doesn't dress like a designer nor does he act like one. Torrential outpourings of superficiality are what we expect from the mouths of male fashion designers. Paul Costelloe, it transpires would rather talk about anything other than "fashion". When in Milan he doesn't "hang out" because as he puts it himself, "they don't know me, I'm just a flogger". From pig factory worker to "flogger". The secret of Costelloe's success is certainly not his brute confidence. He's actually quite shy. Primarily he maintains that people don't realise that he is not as committed to fashion. He says he could probably drop fashion in the morning if he could make a living some other way. Maybe one day he'll say he had enough because he thinks it's a superficial business. He is tied in with a label "Dressage" for Brown Thomas and he has to deliver whether he likes it or not. How his image is created and presented in Brown Thomas is again the work of Catherine Condell, the stylist in Brown Thomas. Condell works on his shows each season in Brown Thomas and also when his latest collection is revealed to the press and buyers in London during ^{the} London fashion week. When he shows in London, Condell travels over, a week before the show to look over the collection completely and selectively co-ordinates a show. Returning then to Brown Thomas to get the accessories and back again for the show. See fig. 10 .



What the stylist can do to an outfit, Costelloe's show in London, 1993.

(Fig : 10)

Because Paul Costelloe is part of Brown Thomas, Condell has co-ordinated with him for many years and she fully understands how he wants his collection to look and who his target woman is. The way she talks about being true to Brown Thomas, she says the same of Paul Costelloe from a styling point of view. She would never accessorise his collection in a style that wasn't Paul Costelloe. When he holds his press shows in Brown Thomas, he is totally confident with how Condell has co-ordinated the collection that he remains out in front for the duration of the show with the confidence and knowledge that as each girl appears in his outfits they will look better than even he thought they could.

In London the show would last between twenty and thirty minutes, during which time over eighty garments will be seen. Here, Paul Costelloe watches from backstage, peering through a hole in the backdrop.

He maintains that "the fashion press in London are much more critical". (PAUL COSTELLOE, DUNGANNON, 10\02\94)

His stylist has to be that little bit more outrageous.

The press being more critical are also less appreciative. You have to strike a higher note to get publicity and also to contend with his British counterparts. However he stresses that it is still his name over the collection and if the stylist goes over the top in any way, it is his name and his sales turnover that suffers.

Once Paul Costelloe is finished designing the collection, he hands it over to the stylist who has not been working on it for the previous months, and therefore approaches it with a fresh look and can often come up with something which goes beyond Paul Costelloe's original idea. Giving it a "fresh, young touch" as Costelloe himself puts it.

(COSTELLOE, DUNGANNON, 10\02\94)

So when considering the task of the stylist for a particular designer her job is always subjective to the designer's opinion, therefore there is a risk-taking element involved. The designer's reputation is at stake. The same can also be said for her position in the department store.

The figures can boost or fall as to how the public react to their advertisements and brochures. The window dresser is in the same predicament as regards his promotion of the department store through the windows.

It goes to say that the image-makers dealt with in this chapter must always be "au fait" with current trends in fashion in order to exude an aura of quality, prosperity and what is happening now. See fig. 11 . More and more retail outlets are now aware of the necessity to have a team of image-makers within the retailing establishment to compete with other stores in advertising and sales promotion.

This assessment comes about from my involvement in the store as an assistant stylist for Brown Thomas and was fortunate enough to work on a number of fashion shoots and shows including Paul Costelloe's Spring\Summer Show in London in October '93.

New VELVET



From top, left to right: Black velvet sleeveless mandarin jacket (£79.99) and matching wrap skirt (£69.95), both by Morgan at Airwaves, Grafton Street, Dublin 2 and Street Culture, Balfe Street., Dublin 2. Wine velvet jacket with shawl collar (£36.00) at A Star is Born, Clarendon Street, Dublin 2.

The number of people involved in a shoot.

(Fig : 11)

Photographs by: **Bobbie Kingsley**
 Styled by: **Sally O'Sullivan**
 Make-up and Hair by: **Mary Bruton of Reds**

Assisted by: **Eamonn McLaughlan**
 Assisted by: **Suzie Coen**
 Model: **Rebecca Skinner**

CHAPTER 3

"THE BUYER AS AN IMAGE-MAKER & FORECASTER"

"Right around the block from where the editors sit, way across the metaphorical Berlin wall in the commercial zone of the fashion audience, sit the store buyers, easily distinguished from the fashion editors".

(COLERIDGE, 1988, PAGE 258)

It is the buyers job to choose from over two hundred thousand outfits paraded before them each season. This requires experience. Once an order has been signed, it is non-retractable. The buyer must balance his or enthusiasm for a particular designer's collection that season with the designer's track record and therefore, commercial potential over preceeding seasons. At the same time the buyer must not run out of capatial by committing her entire spendings before the end of the collections.

Nicholas Coleridge tells of the junior buyer for Neiman-Marcus in New York who describes the task of a buyer as similiar to that as the fairy-tale about the soldier who chanches upon a Hollow tree, in the roots of which is a catacomb filled with chests of money. In his excitement he fills his pockets with brass and silver coins, leaving no space for the gold ones in the final chamber. The buyer must ensure that the collections in Milan and London do not shine so brightly that the prelude Paris and New York

(COLERIDGE, 1988, PAGE 259)

Fashion today is coming up with so many different looks, that the job of the buyer now becomes much more difficult. Themes and directions clash so strongly between each designer that it is virtually impossible to co-ordinate designer labels within the confines of the designer section within a retail outlet. This could have been seen in Brown Thomas in the Winter of 1993, where Dolce and Gabanna consisted entirely of rich velvets and tapestry fabrics in pinks, purples and maroons. In another corner the Calvin Klein collections showed all grey black and white, pinstripes and waistcoats. A real "baker boy" look. Then in the third corner Donna Karan's DKNY label showed floral skirts with quilted waistcoats, a lot of knitwear and grandfather shirts. Just to confuse the consumer completely as to what the seasons directions were. It is a matter of combining different designers who are using similiar colours or similiar fabrics to give the store a definite image each season. Also making the customers decision-making easier.

Buyers travel not only to the shows, but also to the designers showrooms each season where they closely observe and handle the latest collections. Each buyer is looking for different things. According to John Galliano the Japanese are the most thorough and bring their own models to try everything on. Also everything is turned inside out to examine the finish.

According to Nicholas Coleridge, there are thirty-six buyers in the world who are regarded as important, either because their "open to spend" is on a scale massive enough to ensure respect or because their taste is so exacting that, by the act of buying a new line, the designers career is boosted into a higher division. Half the buyers represent department stores, the other half boutiques or speciality shops.

(COLERIDGE, 1988, PAGE 259)

The schedule operates from season to season, starting in January with the top couture shows. These shows are very selective and it is only the top end of the market which participates and the members of press who will ensure top coverage in all major fashion magazines such as Vogue and Elle. Clients who attend are of the very few. Those who have thousands of pounds to spend on a mere jacket, celebrities such as Ivana Trump and Joan Collins fit into this category. Finally, the only other people who gain entry are store buyers from the world's top stores. These couture shows are more directional shows to point the press and buyers which way the season is going. The ready to wear fashion shows or "pret a porter" as the French call it, are shown in March and September. In September, October and November buyers are buying for the coming spring\summer. Likewise in February, March and April, autumn\winter is being ordered.

Milan, Paris and New York are the hosts of the shows and it is here that most of the buying occurs, London and Germany following in order, with the Germany shows particularly noted for their middle market shows. London is considered for its more innovative work and interests a different type of buyer.

Ellis Saltzman who buys for Saks, Fifth Avenue in New York, says that "if something sells well, the designer takes the credit, if it doesn't the buyer carries the can".

(COLERIDGE, 1988, PAGE 261)

Saltzman who worked for ten years on glamour magazines, thinks her grounding in fashion journalism firmed up her ability to make choices between one garment and another, but she says that store buyers have for the last number of years wielded far more influence than the fashion press.

(Coleridge, 1988, page 261)

The store buyer has to be aware of fashion trends because these are the directions in which fashion styling is moving. Because the buyers want the garments, they purchase each season to fit in with the current fashions "en vogue" and because they work so far ahead of the selling season, they must learn to be fashion\trend forecasters. They must learn also the ability to identify and analyse signs indicating change. They can only learn through experience and by being aware of trend setting designers.

"It would seem a simple matter to make or sell what people want to buy. However the textile sector of the industry must plan up to five years ahead of a products arrival in the store, because the development and production process from fibre to completed garment takes that long. Good research and planning are needed for producers and retailers to make buy and sell what consumers will want. Otherwise merchandise ends up on the sale racks causing losses for all.

(Stephens Frings, 1987, page 56)

At each stage of the fashion process, the forecaster is distanced from the consumer by the very nature of the operations. It is in fact an evolutionary process, resulting from the contributions of an entire network of fashion forecasters and their associates in the decision-making process. The forecaster at the retail level is the ultimate catalyst in the chain in bringing future trends to fruition. For many years the Parisians dictated the fashion scene to the world with an iron fist. When a designer commanded hemlines to rise they rose. When he said fall, they fell.

"One might say that the entire fashion industry - fabric producers, fabric mills, fashion designers, the apparel makers, the retailers both class and mass stores and the media drinks from the same creative waters. They travel in herds on a prescribed circuit, attend the same trade shows and walk the same professional track"

(PERNA, 1987, PAGE 19)

Cecily Mc Menamin the buyer for "Private Lives" in Brown Thomas, explained to me, her criteria when buying. She buys for 'Private Lives' which differs from the "International Designer Rooms" as they sell labels such as Rifat Ozbek, Gianni Versace, Claude Montana and other big fashion names. Mc Menamin's department stocks Jean Muir, Sonia Rykiel, Giorgio Armani's diffusion label "Bagutta" and Michelina Stacpoole among others.

Mc Menamin sells some of these labels exclusively in Ireland, whereas some other Irish retail outlets sell the French and Italian designer wear that is available in the "International Designer Rooms" in Brown Thomas.

When asked if her clientele is older than that of the "International Rooms", she explained, "no more intellectual". Mc Menamin says of Jean Muir and Sonia Rykiel that "they design, they don't copy and they are known for their excellent fabrics and wonderful cut". See fig. 12 .

(Mc Menamin, Dublin, 28\01\94)

The Brown Thomas customer knows and recognises this and likes an understated look. She is more demure, not the kind of rich-trend setter who buys Gianni Versace. Mc Menamin describes her customer "as liking to look sexy, wears cashmere, topaz, hermes scarves and Italian shoes".

(Mc Menamin, Dublin, 28\01\94)

This is something she keeps in mind when buying.

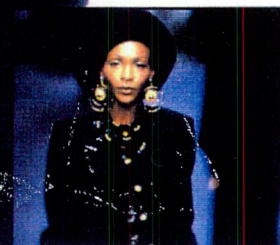
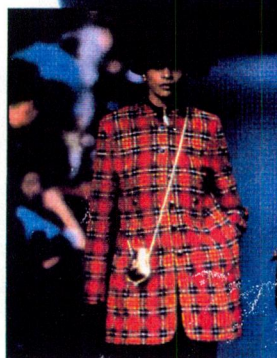
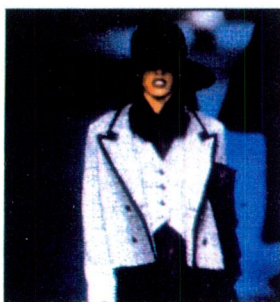
Brown Thomas buyers operate on a similar level to many other department stores and their day to day business is reflective of the buying industry. The schedule operates from season to season. While Mc Menamin's budget is not an annual budget, it is more like a six-monthly budget. Her minimum orders with Sonia Rykiel and Jean Muir are still quite substantial. This is mainly due to her exclusiveness of these labels.

Private Lives

For the discerning woman who values style and quality and expects long life from her clothes, Private Lives, on the First Floor Brown Thomas, offers a sanctuary of superior tailoring and classical unwavering elegance. Here you will find such major international names as Jean Muir, Sonia Rykiel, Giorgio Armani, Michelina Stacpoole and new this season to Private Lives, the lovely cashmere of TSE. All are outstanding designers who have a great understanding of women and dress, producing exceptional fashion pieces which flatter the female form. Cecily McMenamin of Private Lives, explains it's distinctive appeal – "Whether you are nineteen or ninety, Private Lives offers clothes which are very wearable, very flattering and very sexy. The lady who shops at Private Lives is never stylised. She is a woman who knows about fashion, who knows her own figure and knows the style she wants to exude".

TSE New to Brown Thomas and exclusive to Private Lives, is the beautiful TSE cashmere collection. Combining cashmere with fine gauge silks and wool, layers are created, both fitted and loose. A natural story inspired by the wrap blankets and throws used by ethnic peoples of India, Africa and South America. "Country comes to the city" – fine cashmere shirts and vests worn under long cardigans and full trousers. The suit is a strong feature and is very directional, worn with flat tie shoes and berets, it evokes memories of the clothes that Chanel created and De Beauvoir wore in such a carefree way. TSE – everyday classics renewed with a sense of chic.

Sonia Rykiel for Autumn / Winter '93 is a collection of striking contrasts, featuring a combination of close fitting tailoring and fluid lines, in shades of black, red and grey. Skirts are long and can be worn full or pleated. Jackets, either asymmetrical or loose can be worn with or without a belt. Her witty, reversible quilted jackets are particularly striking in sharp contrasting colours. Patterns are rich and varied, with lots of stripes in black and gold lurex, tartan checks and polka dots and the decorative details of braid, lace and embroidery add a softly feminine dimension. A truly exquisite collection from Sonia Rykiel.



"Private lives" in Brown Thomas.

(Fig : 12)

Colour is an important factor in every collection and each buyer must be in tune with the colours selected by the colour experts; The International Colour Association. The colours for each season create the main focus of interest. However every season each garment in a collection comes in each of the six basic colours which are constant each year. The basic colours are black white, navy, red, brown and caramel.

Mc Menamin told me that she always sticks to the basic shades and maybe only selecting one or two of the seasons shades.

(Mc Menamin, Dublin, 28\01\94)

This has come from her liasing with her clientele and knowing what her customer wants.

In the ready to wear section of the market, it is the fashion buyer who has the power to interpret the taste of her customer. Mc Menamin's customers wants garments that are luxurious, different and special.

Cecily Mc Menamin is in the category of image-makers in Brown Thomas because she creates an image within her department. One of the understated elegance. This comes about from her knowledge of her customer and her customers tastes in colour. The labels Mc Menamin buys for "Private Lives", be they exclusive to her or not again create part of this image. The image portrayed in "Private Lives" is demure and very strong with old time charm and up-dated style.

The International Designer rooms which change drastically from one season to the next, carry much more fashionable labels like Gianni Versace, Byblos, Genny, DKNY, and Calvin Klein.

Collette O'Leary the buyer for the "International Designer Rooms" says that her customer is more of a "one off purchaser, a younger saves for weeks on end for a particular piece of designer clothing".

(O'Leary, Dublin, 12\02\94)

The clothes available in this department as opposed to the fashion available in "Private Lives", are by no means classic or understated. Quite the opposite. They will date in a very short space of time. Therefore the purchaser must be sure that she wants a particular garment. Designers like Gianni Versace change so dramatically from one season to the next that if the buyer spots a person wearing Versace, she can tell the season and the year.

Other people who purchase in the "International Designer Rooms", but on a regular basis include Irelands celebrities who will use the clothes for television or concert appearances. But O'Leary says that her customer is usually between the twenty to the thirty five age group. The cloths sold in the department are for a younger trendier poseur.

Because Dublin is a relatively small fashion capital, our buyers also play the role of forcaster to a certain extent unlike the bigger fashion capitals like Paris and Milan where buyers have in-house forecasters to direct them towards new trends.

So in Brown Thomas the department store, the buyers are the image-makers because through the act of buying they are also forecasting the seasons look.

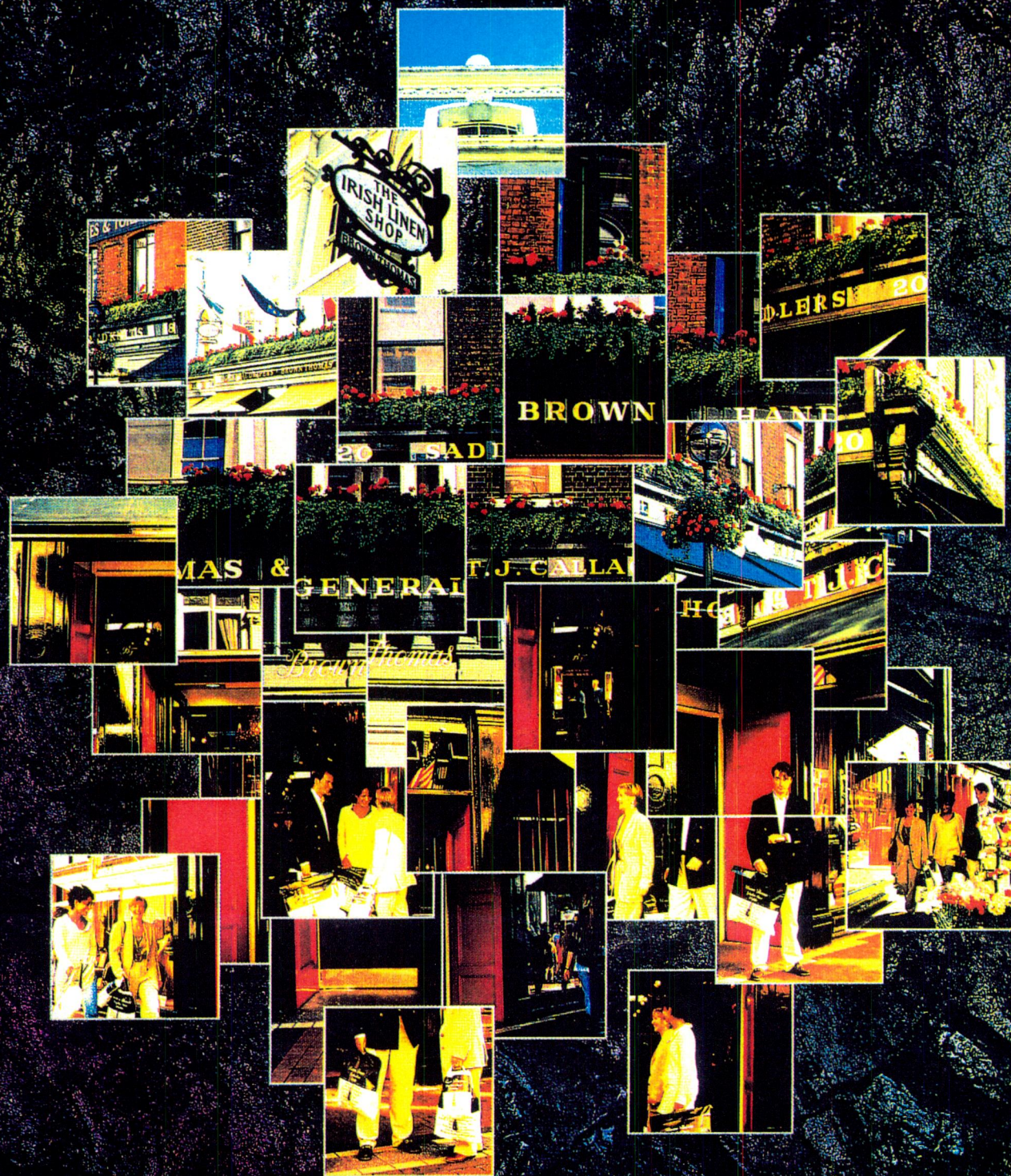
CONCLUSION

The fact that Brown Thomas and Switzers have now decided to amalgamate because the sale of Brown Thomas to the English retail chain; Marks and Spencers, the general public are in uproar.

Switzers, like Brown Thomas are a department store directly facing Brown Thomas's on Dublin's Grafton Street. Switzer's is renowned not for its high - class designer lables but its high - class selection of crystal and china. It was taken over by Brown Thomas under Galen Weston in 1991 and up until which was owned by The house of Frezer from 1985. Switzers was founded in 1832 by John Wright Switzer. A number of adjoining shops were taken over as sales grew and in 1880 the firm was floated as a public company. By 1930 the store became fully departmentalised.

Switzer's had neither the exclusive stock nor the reputation that Brown Thomas has. It has its own team of image-makers who do not try to promote Switzers as being on a par with Brown Thomas. Even its marble facade can't compare with the rich black wooden front on Brown Thomas.

There are no marble staircases or Corinthian columns, instead a mass of chrome, flourcent lights and a white tiled floor. Escalators and lifts replace the plush staircases in Brown Thomas.



Brown Thomas

The look of Brown Thomas.

(Fig : 13)

Since Brown Thomas has sold their building to Marks and Spencers, Brown Thomas will be housed along with Switzers in the Switzers building.

"For many shoppers, the loss of Brown Thomas, with its creaking floorboards and highly respectable staff, represents Grafton Street's final slide down to the tacky, mass market level. Fast food outlets, slick British multiple names, busking in doorways, stalls selling cheap tat jewellery and discount shops are what the street is all about"

(Ref : IRISH TIMES, 30\10\93)

The plans , scheduled for completion in January 1995, include Marks and Spencers moving into the Brown Thomas building and the extra cash generated by the shop will be used to revamp the Switzers building creating an extra 30,000 square feet of sales space.

While many look on this as the decline of the department store, my expectations remain very high. Brown Thomas will retain its splendid reputation and the image-makers are now being faced with a great challenge. They must promote a combined Switzers and Brown Thomas without losing the high reputation that Brown Thomas has already established for itself.

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