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AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FASHION

CASE STUDY: CYNTHIA STEFFE

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INTRODUCTION

Although women are well represented in fashion design it is certainly men who have laid claim to its top positions. Top names include Christian Dior, Jacques Fath, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Giorgio Armani, Valentino, John Galliano and Alexander Mc Queen.

It is a situation which is not altogether different from that of other professions but what makes it a particularly surprising inequality is the fact that women are the backbone of the fashion industry. In an overwhelming majority of cases it is women who sew the garments, model clothes, sell clothes, and last but certainly not least women are the end consumers. It is also interesting to note that the fashion magazines which advertise clothes are compiled chiefly by women. In the January issue of English **Vogue** 1998, I noted that eighty one employees are female and only fourteen male.

As a female fashion student whose ambition is to have my own label, I have always had an interest in female designers. There are many female fashion designers but so few hold top positions. In a recent issue of **The Evening Standard** one hundred people were asked who was the most important British fashion designer. Only two of the seven designers named were women.

The two were Vivienne Westwood and Karen Millen, with thirty one votes and two votes respectively.

It was while working for the New York designers Cynthia Steffe and Mark Montano in the Summer of 1997 that I decided the subject for my thesis would be Cynthia Steffe and women's role in the fashion industry, particularly now but also in the context of the garment industries history.

I am of the opinion that neither sex is better than the other as regards designing. But throughout this essay I will show that while men have been pivotal in the shaping of the fashion business and in the creation of wonderfully inspiring yet unrealistic clothes, women have instead focused on the garments themselves and how they relate to women's life and the experience of dressing.

In chapter one I will examine the role of men and women designers in history in order to show that while men have laid the foundations and structures of the fashion industry, women have also been of great importance.

In chapter two I will examine why it is, that in an industry that centres around women, men are the dominate achievers.

In chapter three I will look at the role of current women designers and how their garments relate to themselves and their own experiences of dressing.

This will be done in order to see Cynthia Steffe's designs and her design philosophy in the context of other female designers.

Finally, in chapter four I will look at Cynthia Steffe, the entrepreneur, the woman and finally the designer and how they relate to each other.

CHAPTER ONE

In order to get some grasp of the role of women in fashion I read many books written on the subject. Those which I found particularly helpful in the writing of this chapter were:

1. "Through The Looking Glass" - Lou Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson. (1989)
2. "Women Of Fashion Twentieth Century Designers" - Valerie Steele. (1991)
3. "The History Of Haute Couture" - Diane De Marly. (1986)

As mentioned in my introduction, while men are to the forefront of the fashion business, women design for their own needs. In this chapter we will see how men have built the fashion business, and how designing for oneself is not a new design technique, but a method which has been used throughout the twentieth century, revolutionising women's fashion and lifestyles.

PRE - TWENTIETH CENTURY

Through this examination of the role of women in the clothing industry I have noted that weaving and sewing have been women's work throughout most of the world's history.

Anthropologists claim that just as weapons symbolise the role of men in society so textiles symbolise women's role. Among the Iban Of Borneo, for example, the laying out of warp threads for the loom is called "The Warpath Of Women" (Steele, 1991, p.19). In the west we use terms such as "spinster" and the "distaff side" which associate femininity with the clothing industry. However, according to Steele, historically it is men who have dominated the clothing industry. When the production of clothing became a profession the men took control (Steele, 1991, p.19). Legally only men could belong to the guild of tailors and due to the rise of capitalism in the medieval cities of Europe the professions of the clothing industry successfully excluded women.

It was not until 1675 in Paris that it was recognised by the court of Louis XIX that for many women dressmaking was the only means of earning an honest living. It was believed that a women should only be dressed by a women on moral grounds. As a result, in 1675 a law was passed.

This law stated that after successful completion of a three year apprenticeship in cutting and dressmaking women would be recognised as Couturieres.

There were four categories of dressmaking.

1. The Couturiere En Habit - who made women's clothes.

2. The Couturiere En Corps D'enfant - who made children's wear.

3. The Couturiere En Linge - who made linen wear.

4. And the Couturiere En Garniture - who made trimmings.

Although the tailors continued to make garments for women such as riding habits and corsets there was a dramatic increase in women Couturieres until it became practically a female monopoly, with 1,700 official couturieres in Paris by 1773.

The first woman who gained entry into the world of design, in the early 1770's was Rose Bertin (fig.1). She was the the "Marchandes De Modes" to Queen Marie Antoinette and the Court Of Versailles. Rose Bertin was of great importance during her period as the "Modiste" (milliner) to Marie Antoinette as fashions were launched at the Court. It was therefore vital that Bertin was meticulous in her designs, as one simple impropriety would be scandalous.

Modistes such as Bertin with an international clientele were largely responsible for the acceleration of fashion change at the very top of society. It is however interesting to note that Couturieres, whose work the likes of Bertin was supposed to supplement, were of less importance. This was due to the fact that the styles of dress remained consistent and consequently decoration, which in the eighteenth century consisted of ribbons, lace, flowers, and flounces, were of vital importance.

fig.1

Rose Bertin

Throughout history there have been intermittent women who have addressed the comfort, health and practicality of dress. Notably, the American, Amelia Bloomer. Mrs. Bloomer favoured the dress of Turkish women, as they wore short skirts, wide ankle length trousers, therefore allowing easy mobility and comfort. As a result of this practical and comfortable clothing, Mrs. Bloomer designed the Pantaloons or Bloomers (fig.2). Requests for patterns came rushing in, the "Bloomerism" movement had caught the public imagination and Mrs. Bloomer was hailed as a prophet of a new concept of clothing and consequently a new way of life for women.

However, many simplistically feared that Mrs. Bloomer and her followers were trying to take over the role of men by wearing masculine influenced clothes.
By the 1850's Mrs. Bloomer had enough of the bad publicity which the "Bloomerism" movement generated. But it was not all in vain, she had layed the seeds of practical and even revolutionary dress in the thoughts of many dress reformers and designer's minds.

An example of male domination in the fashion business is that of the English man Charles Frederick Worth (1825 - 95). He must be credited with changing the status of his profession, a Couturier would never again be looked upon as a simple trader but as someone with great knowledge and skill worthy of much respect and admiration.

fig.2

Pantaloons

Until Worth's arrival in dressmaking in the mid - nineteenth century women had dominated the profession from 1675 well into the nineteenth century. Fifty thousand women in Paris were employed in the needle trade from seamstresses to Couturieres. Worth was an exception as Charles Dickens noted:

> Would you believe that in the later half of the nineteenth century there are bearded milliners authentic men ....who with their solid finger's take the exact dimensions of the highest titled women in Paris - robe them unrobe them, and make them turn backwards and forward before them (Steele, 1991, p.24).

Worth transformed his craft into a big business redefining dressmaking as a "high art". He was therefore simultaneously seen as an industrialist and artist. A role which had not been previously played by a woman. He presented himself as a fashion dictator this contrasted with the traditional role of the female dressmaker.

Unlike the female dressmakers of before whose perceived status was that of someone who went in search of their customer and made what they wanted. Worth capitalised on a situation which was probably more common than acknowledged and made it clear that he designed and made garments that he wanted to make. He would then invite his clients (among those being Empress Eugenie) to view his latest collection at a presentation in his studio. Initially the invitations were refused. Many of his clients felt it was disrespectful of him to suggest that they visit him with other clients. But Worth was full of his own importance and believed if women wanted him to work his genius on them they must come to him, and so they did.

Worth became a household name among the bourgeois. He established the fashion show and the foundations of the fashion business in the twentieth century.

TWENTIETH CENTURY DESIGNERS

Paul Poiret has been a major force in the development of the fashion business in the twentieth century. He believed that a designer should not only influence the way in which customers dress but other areas of their lives, for example the way in which they decorate their house. As a result Poiret opened a shop in Paris in 1912, in which the "Poiret Image" was sold in the form of wallpaper, curtains and embroideries. This clever marketing of an image has proved to be an excellent means of finance for many designers, recent examples being Laura Ashley, Paul Costello and John Rocha.

Perhaps Poiret's greatest role in the fashion business was that of the catalyst for the ready to wear industry. By simplifying his ideas and then selling the right to reproduce the design, garments could be bought by the mass market consumer. Poiret therefore started an industry which today dominates the fashion world.

Not only was Poiret an excellent business man he is also one of the most exciting and influential designers of the twentieth century. He was influenced by the dress reform movements, namely the Rational Dress Society and the Pre - Raphaelites.

fig.3

Poiret's Hobble Skirt.

He translated what had been previously been looked upon as bad taste into fashionable dress. He believed that fabric should flow from the shoulders, therefore setting the upper body free. However with the launch of the Hobble skirt in 1908 (fig.3) Poiret "Shackled the legs" (Kennett, 1983, p.27). This reinforces my theory that while male designer s have exciting and influential ideas, few show consideration to women's wants and needs in dress.

Coco Chanel with the financial support and guidance of her lover's Etienne Balsan and Arthur Capel was the first designer to truly liberate women's bodies. Her style was heavily influenced by the practicality of male dress and also by the aristocratic independence and masculine power which she craved. Speaking of herself in third person, Chanel told her friend Salvador Dali:

> She took the English masculine and made it feminine. All her life, all she did was change men's clothing into women's jackets, hair, neckties, wrists. Coco Chanel always dressed like the strong independent male she had dreamed of being. She set women free because she had suffered too long from not being free herself (Steele,1991, p.41).

Chanel was the first to use and make fashionable, comfortable, practical, and cheap fabrics such as jersey, (a fabric traditionally used in men's underwear) and tweed. She believed that by using expensive ornate fabrics designers were putting little thought into changing or liberating women's fashions. Chanel , was not afraid of going against conventional ideas , designing garments which she herself wanted to wear (fig.4).

fig.4

Chanel wearing one of her classic jersey designs

"Jersey is something else, by inventing jersey I liberated the body"

(Steele, 1991, p.42).

Soon enough those Americans who had once scorned at her creations from inexpensive fabrics :

" Imagine having spent so much money without showing" (Steele, 1991, p.42).

were now declaring in American Vogue in 1916 that :

" Chanel is master of her art and her art resides in jersey and jersey and chic are synonymous" (Steele, 1991, p.42).

Chanel, not only liberated the female form through her use of fabrics, but equally important through garment shape. It was during the early twenties that Chanel was part of the progress that shortened the hemline, revealing the leg for the first time. In fig. 4 we see the designer herself wearing an example of such a design. Chanel is also largely responsible for the acceptance of traditionally male garments such as trousers and sweaters in society, (fig.5) and the now classic little black dress (fig.6).

However, it is important for me to mention here that Chanel was not the only designer in the twenties shortening hemlines and designing little black dresses .But unlike her male counterparts, Coco Chanel designed with her own needs in mind, wearing the final product, personifying the Chanel look, a look which epitomised an era. This was the secret of her success.

fig.5

Chanel wearing one of her own trouser designs.

fig.6

Chanel's little black dres

> First of all, I am a woman. Quite secondarily, I am a designer....most of my ideas come from trying to solve my own problems - problems just like yours. I like to be able to zip my own zippers- I need a dress that can cook a dinner and then come out and meet the guests (Steele, 1991, p.113).

These are the words of Claire Mc Cardell in Time Magazine in 1955. Mc Cardell is generally accepted as being the one who founded todays thriving American ready to wear industry. Her name is synonymous with "The American Look". A look which has dominated fashion for the past fifty years and paved the way for designers such as Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Donna Karen and Cynthia Steffe.

Mc Cardell's success was greatly due to the fact that she was a woman and could therefore identify with her customer as is clear in the above quote and here: "Sometimes I am a hostess, sometimes I am a guest. I have a job to go to. I have a market list to plan. I love clothes "(Steele, 1991, p.112).

She would solve her own life and dress problems within a design. Examples of such designs are The Popover Dress, The Leotard and the interchangeable wardrobe.

The denim "Popover "of 1943 (fig.7) according to Colin Mc Dowell is the most successful dress in the history of American ready to wear. It wrapped around the body, had wide sleeves, huge patch pockets and was sold with matching oven gloves! It was designed for ladies whose husbands had gone off to war and as a result women had to do both the housework and the traditionally male jobs. The Popover was ideal as it was unstructured, comfortable, durable and could simply be popped over something less practical underneath.

Although it started out as protector for women by the summer of 1951 it played its role as dress, beach wrap, coat or hostess dress and has inspired many of todays designers (fig8).

In 1943 Mc Cardell launched the leotard look. The leotard was a close fitting feminine garment but unlike many of her male counterparts she used stretch fabrics such as jersey. Understanding that a women needs comfort and freedom. However, the leotard was ahead of its time and did not catch on for McCardell, but it is today one of Donna Karan's best selling designs (fig.9).

fig.7

Mc Cardell's Popover Dress of 1943.

fig.8

Shirt dress from Debenham's Summer 1996 collection

Inspired by Claire McCardell's Popover Dress.

fig.9

One of Donna Karan's Leotard designs.

A great example of Mc cardell solving her own dress problems within a design is in the case of travelling wardrobe. This consisted of a pair of trousers, shorts, a jacket, blouse, skirt and a halter neck top. Mc Cardell was a business women who travelled frequently due to work commitments and therefore required clothes which were hassle free but still feminine and smart.

Mc Cardell was different to many male designers of the time, and also Chanel, in that she believed that her clothes should be accessible to many types of women, from housewives to career girls and college students. If the clothes were inexpensive to make they should be therefore inexpensive to sell. Her designs were: " Right, ready and revolutionary for every girl in America" (Elle, Nov.'97 p.338).

If one thinks of the influential women designers of the twentieth century Mary Quant is clearly a name that comes quickly to mind. Mary Quant is a designer who changed the face of fashion of the late fifties and early sixties, and is still a major influence in the work of many designers today (fig.10).

Like Chanel and Mc Cardell, Quant's success was largely attributed to the fact that she designed with herself in mind.

fig.10

Quant still influencing designers of today.

Katharine Hamnett Summer 1997 collection.

She too would wear her own designs, personifying the Quant look, as seen in fig.11 , wearing not only one her own designs but the "Bob" hairstyle which she created with Vidal Sassoon to launch her collection in 1963. By designing and advertising in this manner women worldwide could identify with Quant.

Mary Quant , a young daughter of working class parents, designed clothes, which she herself wanted to wear. She rejected the luxury, formality and constraint of the fifties, a decade in which the youth looked like carbon copies of their parents, believing that she, like many young ladies of the late fifties and early sixties needed clothing which would embrace their independence and personality:

> "To me adult appearance was very unattractive, alarming and terrifying, stilted, confined, and ugly. It was something I knew I didn't want to grow into" (Steele, 1991, p.134.)

As a result Quant opened the boutique Bazaar in Kings Road Chelsea in 1955, note with her husband partner Alexander Plunket Greene. She designed new and innovative clothing forms such as (fig.12-13) the mini, hot pants, the pinafore, sleeveless dresses, and most importantly of all the disappearance of the waist in favour of a simple shift garment. These garments caused outrage among the older generations , who felt that such designs were sexually provocative, turning women into nymphet sex objects. However to Quant her clothes were fun:

> "I had always wanted the young to have a fashion of their own... I wanted to makeclothes....that would be fun to wear" (Steele, 1991, p.134).

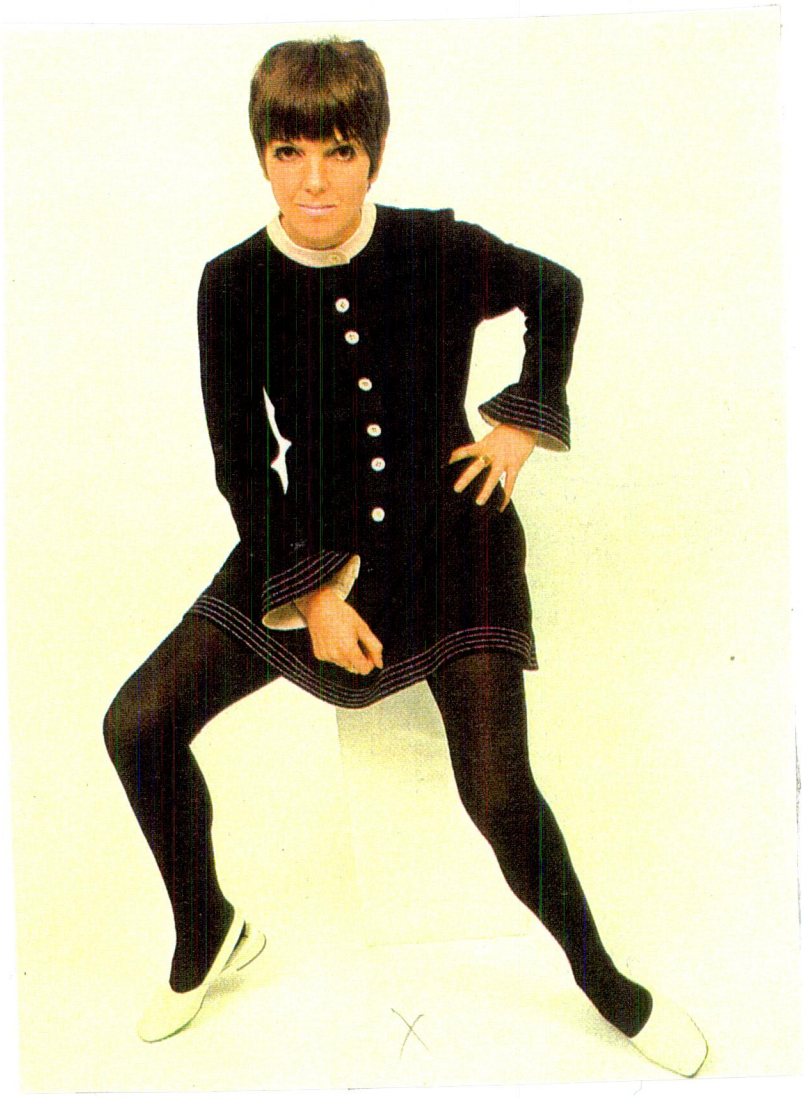


fig.11

Mary Quant in her own "schoolgirl" look in 1967.

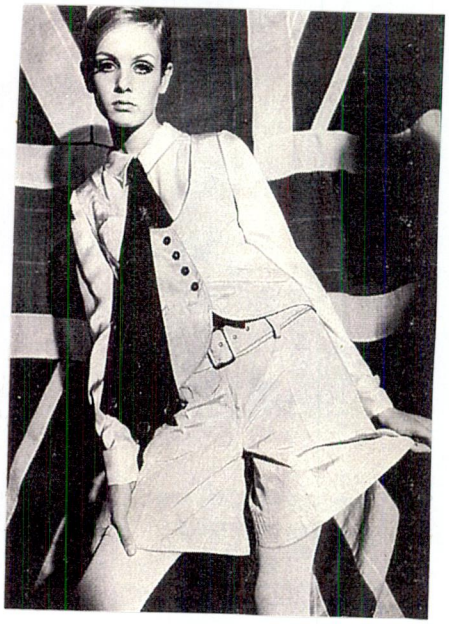


fig.12

Hot Pants.

fig.13

Mary Quant's Ginger Group Collection.

fig.14

Mary Quants sleeveless Shift Dress.

She displayed a total disregard for time consuming making processes, delicate embroideries and expensive jewels and used less expensive fabrics. These fabrics included p.v.c, lycra polyester, nylon and rayon. The fabrics were ideal as they promised easy care, durability, and easy fashion styling during a period when much of the youth were independent of their parents, living on their own , (like Quant) and earning their own wage due to the economic boom.

Quant also used cheap, easy care fabrics within her simple shaped garments as they were inexpensive to produce and consequently to sell. Therefore making these garments affordable to the working class. She believed that fashions should be something which should be affordable to all young women, regardless of social background. For the first time all social classes could group together in their interests and the real divide was now between the generations.

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter is based on my reading of the following books;

1. As Long As Its Pink - Penny Sparke. (1992)

2. A View From The Interior - J. Attfield and P.Kirkham. (1989)

3. Women Of Fashion; Twentieth Century Designers - Valerie Steele. (1991).

4. Sociology - Anthony Giddens. (1993)

I also interviewed the head of the N.C.A.D Fashion Department, Francis Mc Donagh on November 19th 1997, and relied on my own experiences as a fashion student and in the work force working with both a male and female designer.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, some of the most successful designers in history have been women who focused on the garments themselves and how they relate to women's lifestyle. However, we have also seen how men have been pivotal in the development of the fashion business, and today dominate women's fashions, with 65% of famous twentieth century fashion designers being male and only 35% female (Steele, 1991, p.9). In this chapter I will discuss why it is that women have been less successful than their male counterparts.

Men do hold the top positions in fashion, however this is a surprising inequality

not only because the end product is for women themselves but because there are a higher percentage of women within the fashion industry. Indeed within the fashion department, for example of N.C.A.D there are in total thirty female students and only six male students.

Many designers have put forward suggestions as to why women have been less successful than their male counterparts, Oscar De La Renta's suggestion being that:

> "The trouble with women designers is that they are not objective. Women designers have a tendency to dress themselves" (Steele, 1991, p.196).

Yes, many women designers design with their own needs in mind, however from my research into women designers, this aspect of their design approach has only enhanced their designs particularly from a marketing point of view. De La Renta's comments are also debatable on another point, as many men certainly claim to have a particular muse when designing. A perfect example is the work of the late Gianni Versace. He designed with his sister Donatella specifically in mind, consequently aiming at one particular type of woman.

Women's artistic achievements have always been and indeed still are belittled by the theory that it is natural for a woman to display good taste, to be interested in her home and appearance. As a result many believe that women are designers due to their natural obsession with aesthetically pleasing objects and also self

vanity. On numerous occasions I have been offended by peoples' perception of a fashion designer:

" Oh you study fashion, that's lovely, reading magazines and drawing pretty dresses"

Another excellent example of the under minding of women in fashion design is that of Stella Mc Carthy. Is it possible that it is not just because of being Paul Mc Cartney's daughter that she is getting such criticism, but more importantly the fact that she is a twenty five year old woman heading the House Of Chloe in Paris? Certainly she is young and she is certainly not as wonderfully creative a designer as for example John Galliano. However I feel that it is her gender that is negatively reflected in the fashion world and media. Her debut collection (fig.15) in October 1997 was patronisingly described by the Sunday Times on the 27th of October 1997 as:

Pretty in an eighteenth century milkmaidy way. Wisely she avoided the complex cutting characteristic of Galliano and gave us standard shapes with decorative additions. Lots of ruffles, lace, and faggoting made for a blameless, if slightly banal show in the Chloe tradition of dreamy romanticism. But there was little energy on the runway.

They then go on to say that the setting for her Debut collection was far too large for a talent:

"Tender, even fragile"

This is in stark contrast to how the very similar collection of the thirty seven year

old John Galliano is described.

Here we see a collection also rich in ruffles, lace, and faggoting (fig.16) but described as :

" Simply divine" and a collection showing "vision and maturity, we now expect Galliano to do things nobody else attempts and to succeed triumphantly. He did not disappoint" (Sunday Times, 1997. p16).

This is also a perfect example of how objects which are created by a male or simply masculine characteristics are equated with being active and assertive. Meanwhile objects created by a female or are associated with feminine characteristics, indicate passivity and subservience. Resulting in female designers and their work being taken often less seriously than that of their male contemporaries.

However, from my own experience and from my interview with Francis Mc Donagh, head of fashion N.C.A.D, it may be suggested that male students have a strong tendency to be more successful due to their focused ambitions. Ms Mc Donagh suggested that men have apparently tended to be more focused than women due to the fact that relationships apparently play a more important role in the life of a woman. Unlike many males, many women define themselves in terms of their personal relationships and their ability to care for others.

fig.15

A design from Stella Mc Cartney's Debut Collection October 1997.

fig.16

A design from John Galliano's collection for Dior October 1997

This concern with relationships is often seen as a weakness rather than a strength. Unlike men, women are regarded as being at the mercy of their biological constitution. This belief is evident here in the comments of a top male manager:

> Males tend to dominate the higher levels because simply the women drop out to get married and have babies. I don't think that it is necessarily selective promotion but just the facts of life. They come back and have a gap in experience or training and when you come down to it and you are selecting candidates it is not the sex of the candidate but what they can contribute to their job. You've got the candidate who is perhaps a woman who has been three years out of a job for family reasons and a man who has been on the job. It is fairly evident given that the rest is equal between the candidates that he is likely to get the job (Giddens, 1993, p.95).

The conflicts and compromises of being a working mother have been recognised by many women. In a survey of women managers carried out in 1992, virtually all two hundred women interviewed named problems of child care as the most difficult issue facing women who sought to make a success of a business career. This problem is reiterated by probably the most famous contemporary woman designer, Donna Karan:

"Until the day I die I will be a guilty mother" she told Women 's Wear Daily (Steele, 1991, p.195) Admitting that she spoilt her daughter Gaby as she was so rarely at home with her, and felt guilt ridden. She also admits in Women's Wear Daily that before launching DKNY in 1989 Karan wanted another baby but knew she could not do both, she chose the DKNY label.

It is important to also note that male fashion design students are often more focused than their female contemporaries. I feel they have to be focused because a

young male who chooses a career in fashion design is instantly opening himself to sexual innuendo, regardless of whether he is homosexual or not. Therefore it is a critical move in his life, requiring much determination and dedication. Francis Mc Donagh has also observed that this determination and dedication has resulted in many male students being far more demanding "often to the point of obnoxiousness ". It has also been noted by Ms. Mc Donagh that the male fashion student tends to keep his distance, quietly observing what his fellow students produce, striving constantly to do better. Meanwhile the girls tend to bond with each other, resulting often in lack of willingness to compete and competition is often regarded as vital in the success of a fashion designer!

The characteristics of the male fashion designer as described above is the driving force that pushes them to the top position in their careers. Meanwhile many women fashion designers are content with doing a good job and rarely strive for the top job. This is possibly one of the main reasons why women are in the majority in mass-produced fashion, while men dominate the glorious positions in Haute Couture. Women tend simply to prefer a more routine job. They are more adaptable, amenable, less resentful of their duties. They can do the work but still have time to think about husbands or boyfriends and children.

Women are arguably also much more practical than men as regards fashion as they themselves wear the clothes and know what women want from a garment. They see themselves wearing good reasonably priced garments and appreciate them. This does not mean that women do not appreciate Haute Couture, on the contrary. We all appreciate that without the stimulus of the great couturier's imagination how can fashion be developed and renewed? But women tend to question the practicality of such designs. A male designer tends to design for his ideal woman as opposed to what is ideal for a woman. Take for example fig. 17. Here we see the creative uniqueness of John Galliano at full strength, but there are very few women who could wear such a design, it is pure fantasy!

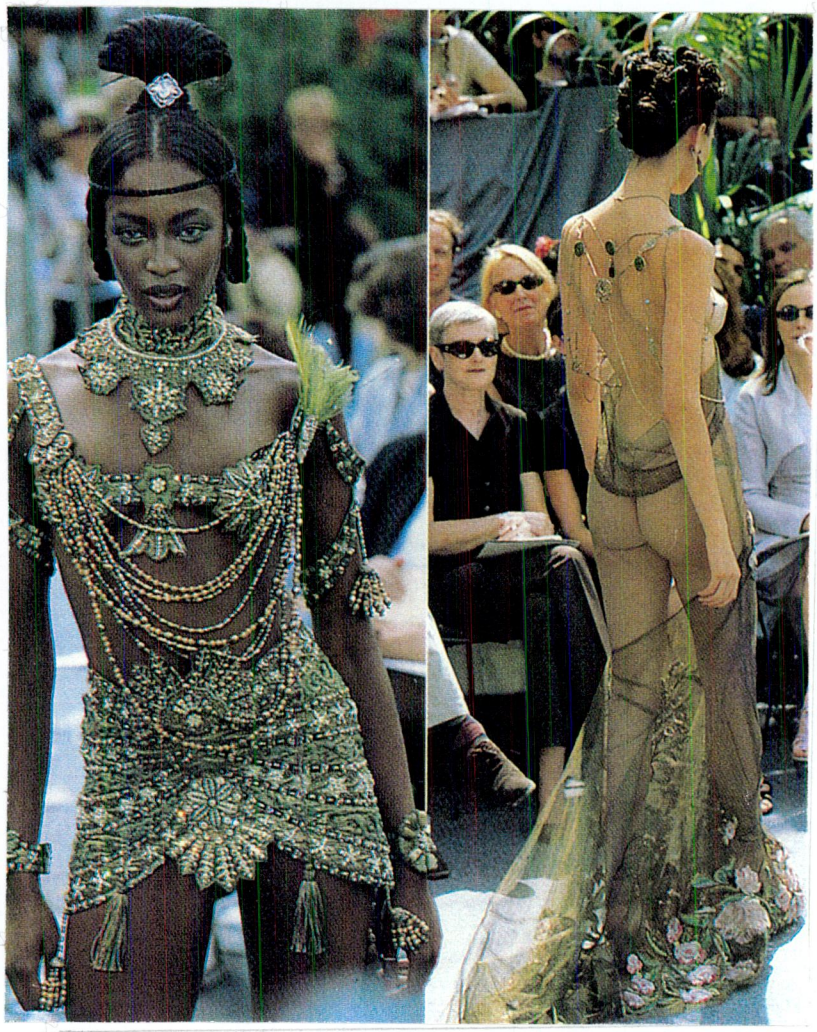


fig.17

Examples of designs from John Galliano for Dior's

Autumn 1997 collection. Pure Fantasy!

We must also remember that the women buying Haute Couture are more often than not middle aged women who are either very wealthy themselves or more frequently are the wives of wealthy men. Many of these women dress to please their husbands therefore they prefer to be dressed by a man whose fashion sense may be closer to a man's vision of beauty and allure than that of a woman's. This also may contribute to men being the overwhelming majority in the top positions in Haute Couture.

However it has been observed by Francis Mc Donagh that women fashion designers have a strong tendency to be much better at detail, and more consistent in the quality of their work. The male designer tends to spend much time however, trying to improve his public image as a fashion designer through publicity. A fine example of such a designer is the late Gianni Versace. Through using super models and stars such as Lisa Marie Presley, Madonna and Elton John (fig.18) in advertising campaigns and constantly being seen socialising, with the famous superstars he created an image of himself as the superstars designer (fig.19). This resulted in he himself and his designs being as marketable as the superstars he used in his advertising campaigns. This is an area in which it seems many women designers are weak. For this reason many business entrepreneurs prefer to back male designers as opposed to women. Nevertheless women designer s are becoming stronger at increasing and improving their public image.

fig.18
Versace advertising campaign for Spring / Summer 1995 & 1996 collection.
Elton John with two super models.

fig.19

Gianni Versace socialising with the superstars.

CHAPTER THREE

Over the past few years there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women establishing or leading fashion's most important companies. These women include Donna Karan, Nicole Fahri and Donatella Versace. In this chapter I will examine the role of these women designers and how they reflect themselves and their design philosophies in their designs, and in the case of Donna Karan in her advertising campaigns. I will also discuss how they are now using their gender to advantage, as a marketing ploy, in an age in which the success of a product is measured on how well the consumer can relate the image to his / her life.

DONNA KARAN

Perhaps the most successful and famous woman designer of the late twentieth century is the American Donna Karan. In 1985 after working for Anne Klein since 1967 she launched her own label with, it is important to note with her husband Stephan Weiss, who looks after the financial side of business. Donna Karan claimed from the beginning that she designs clothes which would be ideal for in her own words:

"Myself and a few friends" (Steele,1991,p.194).

Being a woman has contributed greatly to the $700 million turnover of her fashion empire, as it gives her insight into a woman's needs in her life and wardrobe:

"I am a woman, I am a female designer, I understand women, I'm a very busy working woman and mother the last thing I have time to do is worry about my clothes" (Steele,1991,p.192).

In fact in many ways Donna Karan is like a contemporary American Coco Chanel. Like Chanel she claims to analyse women's needs with a question to herself: "What do I need? How can I make life easier? How can dressing be simplified so that I can get on with my own life?" (Martin, 1995, p.270).

This is perhaps exactly what she asks herself, but whether it is or not it is a good marketing ploy with which to address women who take themselves seriously. Certainly Donna Karan manages to translate this attitude of function and ease into at least some of her designs.

Like Chanel she always bases her designs on a neutral colour palette, believing that in doing so she is helping solve not only her own co - ordinating problems but those of many women worldwide. She also believes strongly in the practicality and easiness of men's clothes. This is often reflected in the fabrics she uses, such as wool, linen and the "traditional men's underwear fabric" jersey.

In fig.20 we see how in Donna Karan's Autumn / winter collection 1997 the traditional wool jumper is adapted to produce very easy to wear, practical yet, exciting womanly, garments. Karan also used the classic colour black, which is a favourite of not only herself but of women worldwide. Black is a colour which is figure flattering and can easily be worn alone or with another. It is also a colour which is adaptable to all seasons, and all times of day.

Other examples of how Karan has solved her own and many women's problems in a design by using traditional male fabrics and basing designs on a neutral colour palette can be seen in fig. 21 - 23. Here in the Spring/ Summer 1997 collection we see how Karan has used black jersey, wool, nylon and lycra. These fabrics are season less, timeless , fabrics which are ideal from a comfort, easy-care and styling point of view.

The design shapes are examples of "easy styles" therefore enabling them to be worn casually and also as occasion wear. These "easy styles" are often interchangeable and also promise durability from a fashionable point of view as they are classic, relaxed shapes.

One main reason behind Donna Karan's success is that she claims to have made it fashionable to be voluptuous:

fig.20

Donna Karan Autumn / Winter collection 1997.

The traditional wool jumper adapted to create easy to wear, practical, yet exciting womanly garments.

fig.21

fig.22

fig.23

Donna Karan Spring / Summer 1997 collection.

Season less, timeless designs ideal from a comfort, easycare and styling point of view.

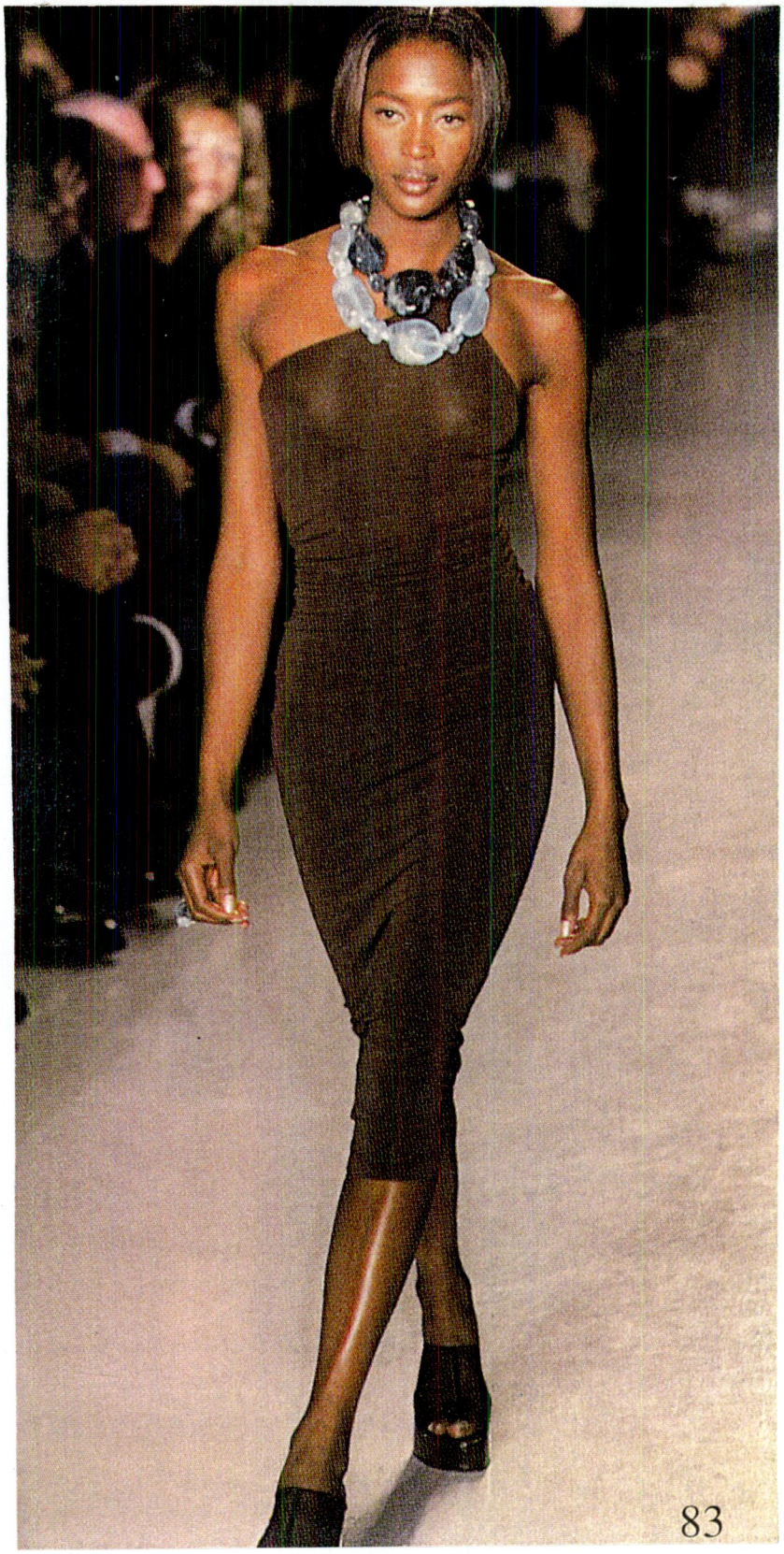


fig.24

Donna Karan Spring / Summer 1997 collection.

A design not suitable to every woman's size.

"My own shape is rounded. I don't have a perfect body.....show me a woman who does" (Vogue, Feb.95, p.76).

Unlike many of her male and indeed female contemporaries Donna Karan says she deals with

"The fallibility of a woman's body"

She believes that clothes should be designed to hug a woman but still hide the bodies imperfections. She claims that by designing naked in front of a mirror and wearing her own designs she has learned how to accentuate the positive and delete the negative of not only her own body, but of millions of bodies worldwide. Donna Karan has also stated that she refuses to design clothes that can't be worn by a size 14 or 16, as she herself is a size 16 (Vogue, Feb.' 95, P.76).

However I believe that while many of her designs are suitable for these sizes (fig.21 - 23) certainly not all are (fig.24). But the fact is that through clever marketing of Donna Karan the woman, her design philosophies and consistent production of wearable, problem solving garments, she is able to design garments that are unsuitable for larger women and still be known as the designer for all sizes.

Donna Karan's openness and sense of identification with her customer is an excellent example of market know how, which is reinforced through Donna Karan's advertising campaigns. As previously stated Karan is a mother, wife and

working woman and she has used this situation to her advantage through advertisement campaigns. In 1988 when her advertisements showed a successful business woman in a cluttered bedroom with a baby scribbling on her Filofax millions of working women felt an immediate sense of identification (fig.25).

Her experience of being a mother, wife and working woman was once again displayed in her advertising campaign of 1996 (fig.26). Here we saw the famous husband and wife team of actors Bruce Willis and Demi Moore with their youngest child.

This particular campaign was brilliantly executed. It showed Bruce Willis and Demi Moore as not just the exceptionally successful people that they are, but as two people in a loving relationship within a family unit. A situation with which men and women worldwide can at least aspirationally identify.

It is important to note that although Donna Karan's much advertised ability to understand her own needs and the needs of many women worldwide is one of the main reasons for her success, it is not the only reason. Since she launched her first collection in 1985, the company has grown at an incredible rate. In 1989 Donna Karan launched the hugely successful young hip label DK N Y, inspired by her daughter Gaby. After this her menswear label, then came children's wear, accessories, beauty products, perfumes and home furnishing.

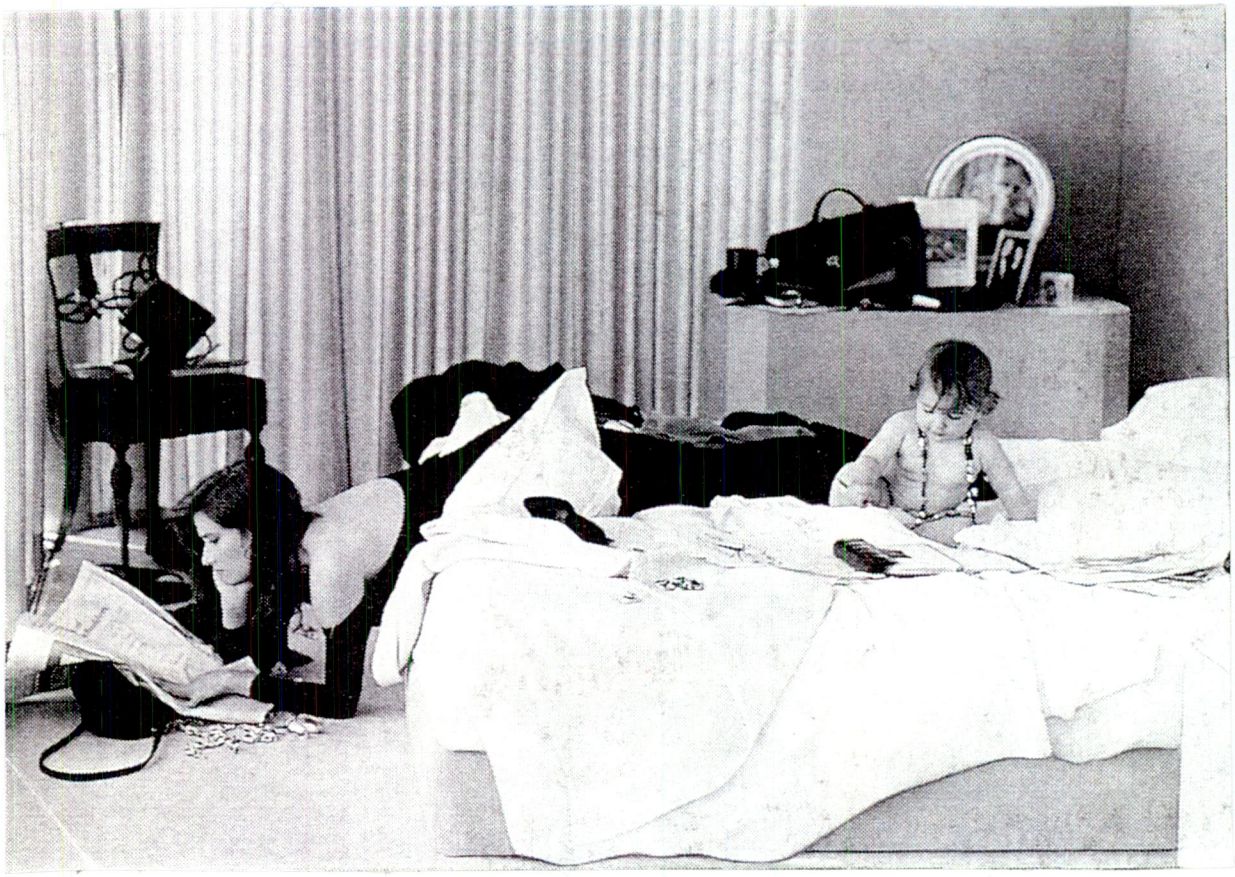
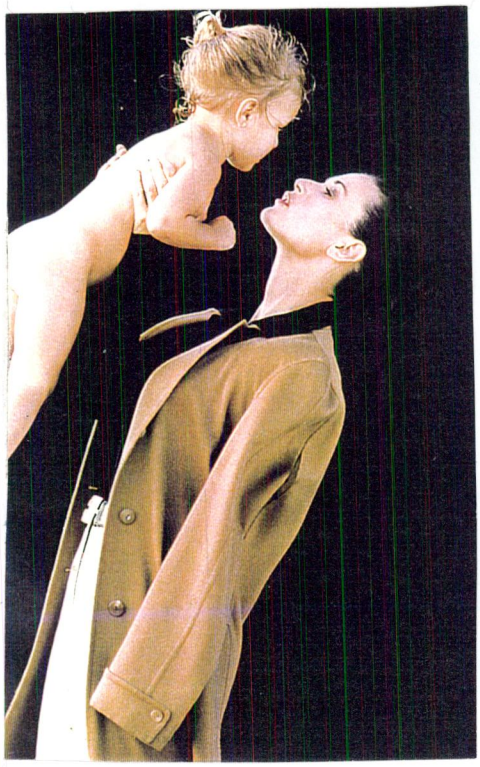
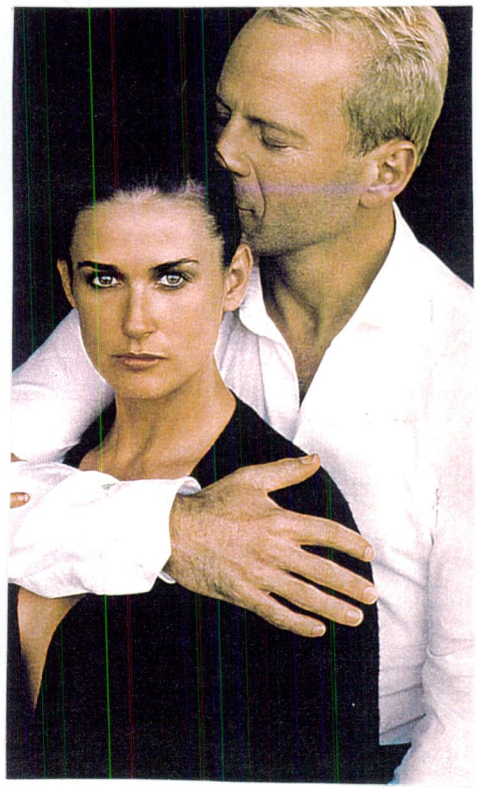


fig.25

Donna Karan 1988 advertising campaign.





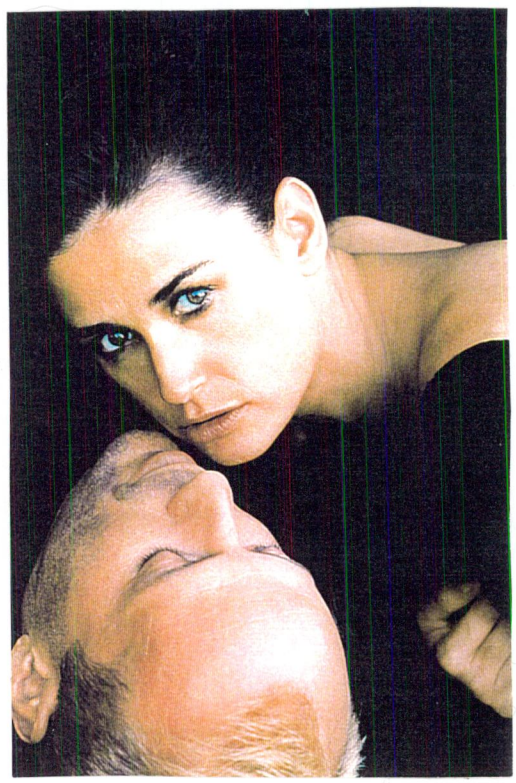


fig.26

Donna Karan advertising campaign 1996 with Bruce Willis & Demi Moore.

NICOLE FARHI

"I can't work in a vacuum. There's no reason to design clothes for the sake of it"

I prefer to sculpt" (Marie Claire, Feb. '97, p.120).

Like so many other female designers, the financial side of Nicole Farhi's business is taken care of by her ex-partner, father other daughter, and founder of the clothing chain French Connection, Stephen Marks. However, what interests Nicole Farhi is designing clothes which will fit and relate to a woman's lifestyle:

" There has to be a balance between form and function, If I design a skirt women have to be able to walk and drive in it"

(Marie Claire, Feb.97, p. 121).

Farhi will never allow herself to be constricted by clothes and will not allow her customer to be either. She ensures this by trying on the clothes herself, if the garment is in any way restricting the design will be re-thought.

An example of a design which shows consideration to a woman's lifestyle is fig.27. These are very feminine and stylish garments yet due to the use of jersey they are every practical and wearable. Jersey ensures that the close fitting skirts are, for example suitable to walk and drive in. Another example of such a design is fig.28. which shows a suit, balancing form and function. This is a direct result of the fabric used, linen, and the "easy styling".

fig.27

Design from Nicole Farhi Spring / Summer collection 1997.

Like Donna Karan, Farhi's use of linen and the simple shape means that the suit is comfortable to wear and interchangeable therefore enabling it to be worn as casual day or elegant evening wear. The suit's shape and the use of linen also results in it being suitable to be worn at all times of the year.

Farhi's use of the wedge shaped shoe in her Summer '97 collection also shows a balance between form and function. Farhi herself finds high heels far too uncomfortable to walk in and believes:

"Wedges are the perfect answer for people who want to walk easily and gain some height" (Marie Claire, Feb. '97, p.121).

In this collection I also noted that Farhi's designs are very much influenced by other designers on the London scene, resulting in them being exciting, modern, fashionable and yet practical enough for her stylish, subtle customer. In fig 29. we see frilled chiffon wrap dresses, jersey shirts, camisole tops, chequer board knitted cardigans and tube skirts bold and bright.

But what made these designs different from what Antonio Berardi designed (fig.30) was that she delivered the fantasy too, but with practicality. The feminine frilled chiffon wrap dresses were double layered to avoid embarrassing transparency, her fluid jersey shirts and camisole her fluid jersey shirts and camisole tops - subtly sexy without being silly.

It is a collection like this that has resulted in Nicole Farhi becoming the label that the average working woman like herself can rely on.

Farhi's design success is not simply due to the fact that she is a woman but a French woman living in London. French women are renowned for their effortless and practical chic. It is to some extent this together with the creative spirit which London nourishes which has resulted in a truly original yet marketable design success.

fig.28

Design from Nicole Fahri Spring / Summer 1998.

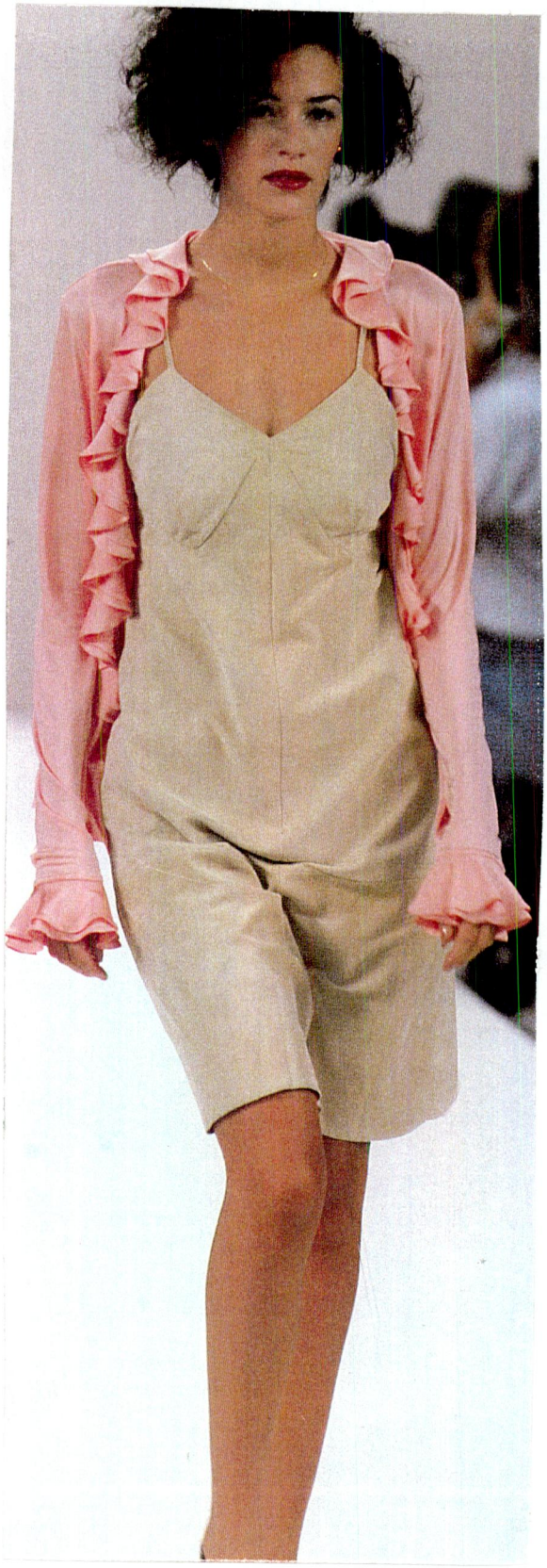


fig.29

Nicole Fahri - fantasy with practicality.

Spring / Summer 1997.

fig.30

A design from Antonio Berardi Spring / Summer 1997.

DONATELLA VERSACE

Since the death of Gianni Versace in July 1997, his sister Donatella Versace has emerged as the creative leader of the $500 million company, with Santo their brother remaining as the president of this fashion empire.

Donatella Versace becoming the creative leader is hardly surprising since she was her brother's sounding board, muse and collaborator since he began designing. In her own words:

> "I'm a Versace girl. I grew up with Gianni. I'm not going to have another philosophy" (W, Nov.'97, p.129).

Like Gianni Versace, Donatella Versace believes the only way to stay current is to saturate oneself in pop culture:

> "I'm listening to the newest music from London, the newest groups, you can not live in an ivory tower and make fashion or anything artistic, no you cant. You're to live in the real world "(W, Nov.'97, p.130).

She also believes that the philosophy of the label is to embrace and :

> "Break the rules , do not be afraid of your sexuality. Show the attitude and personality which all women have. Say something, play hard and soft, discipline or revolt" (W, Nov.'97, p.129).

This philosophy was strongly projected in Ms. Versace's debut collection for spring/summer 1998. Here we saw a truly sexy, glamourous collection with an edge. This was because in one sense she broke the traditionally perceived idea of glamour by breaking the traditional idea of what is correct. An example of such a design is fig.31. This dress is nicely fitted on one side but on the other it is left loose and gaping with twisted and uneven straps. Donatella Versace believes the new glamour is;

"Not too perfect , something has to be off" (W, Nov.'97, p.129).

She has also portrayed this design philosophy successfully through the unique combination of different fabrics such as leather with transparent chiffon net, latex with fluffy Angora lots of beading some etheral and some industrial (fig.32).

"Women yearn to be sexy" (W, Nov.'97, p.129).

Donatella Versace believes that her designs are successful as she is playing to a primal desire, sexiness but also because her designs are grounded by reality, unlike many of her male contemporaries:

> Yes, I think sometimes men designers will forget, and design too much for an ideal woman. A real woman on the street, that's my ideal woman. Even the inspiration comes from reality, it cant come from dreams as dreams don't work with reality (W, Nov.'97,p.129).

fig.31

"Not too perfect something has to be off"

Design from Donatella Versace's debut collection for Versace for Spring / Summer 1998.

I don't believe that Ms. Versace's sexy, revealing designs are suitable for the real woman on the street, but they show a woman's practicality and sensitivity when contrasted with the overtly sexy, and occasionally crude designs of her late brother (fig.33). Whereas Gianni Versace primarily focused on sex and sexiness in his designs, Ms. Versace appears to be focusing on femininity (fig. 34) and how it itself is sexy!

Fig .32

"Not too perfect, something has to be off".

Design from Donatella Versace's debut collection at Versace for Spring / Summer 1998.

Fig.33

Gianni Versace design 1992.

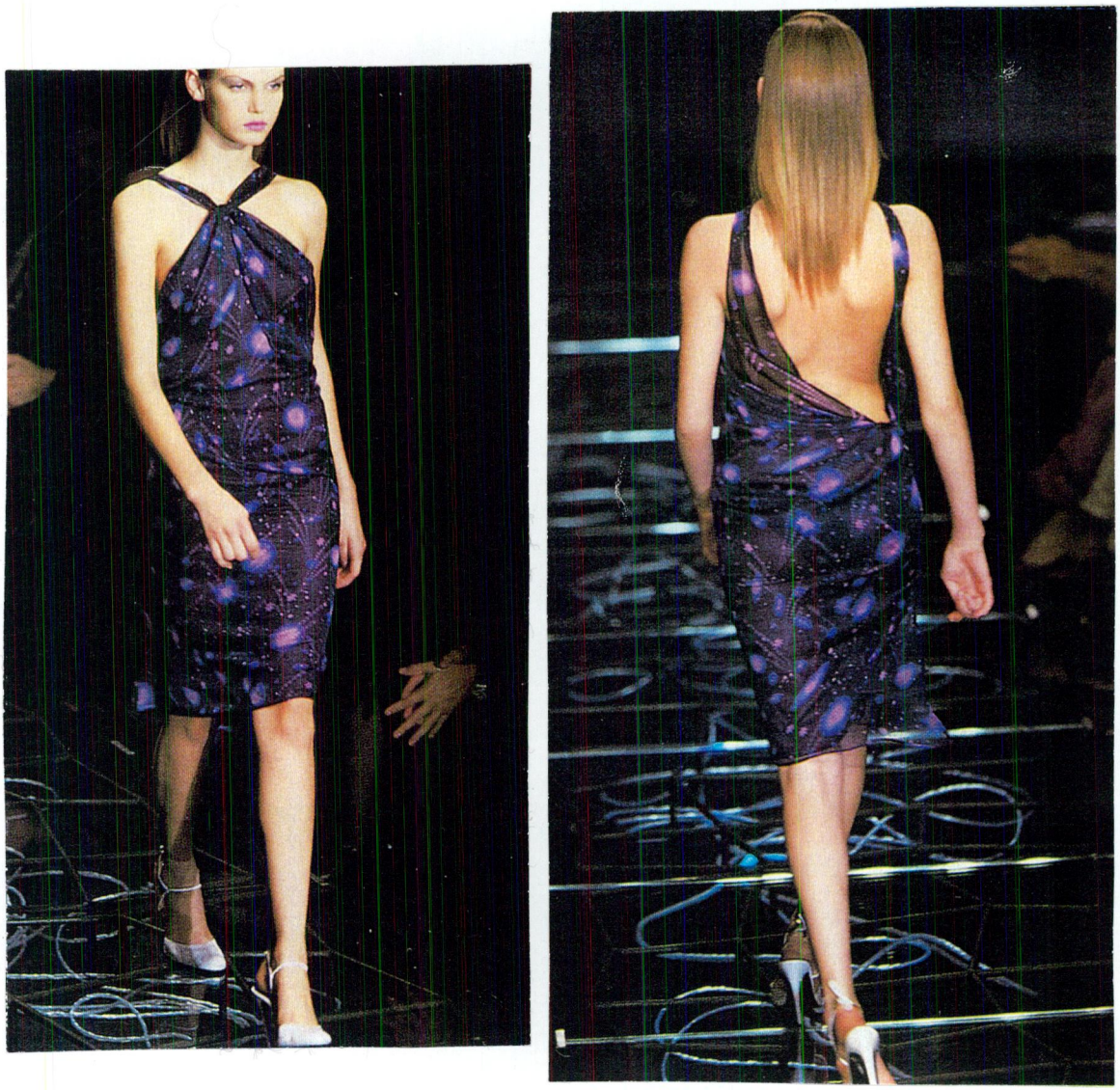


fig. 34

Design from Donatella Versace's Debut collection for Versace Spring / Summer 1998.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY: CYNTHIA STEFFE

During the summer of 1997 I worked with two New York designers Cynthia Steffe and Mark Montano on their respective spring / summer 1998 collection's. It was while working for them that I became increasingly aware that women designers play a different role then that of their male counterparts. They face different problems and have a different design approach.

While men design wonderful inspiring garments they tend to lack consideration of the modern woman's lifestyle. Women focus on the garments themselves and how they relate to their lives and the experience of dressing. In order to support my beliefs I will look at Cynthia Steffe the entrepreneur, the woman and the designer and how they relate to one another.

I would like to apologise for the poor quality of illustration which occurs frequently throughout this chapter, it is a situation over which I had no control.

"There's really no reason for me to be if I don't design clothes for real people and real women" (Style, April 27, 1997).

The success story of this leading New York fashion designer is very much like the fable of the tortoise and the hare. While her contemporaries have raced fast and furiously for fame and recognition Steffe has been satisfied to build her company slowly and steadily focusing on quality, image and service.

THE EARLY YEARS

Born Cynthia Steffe in Molville, Iowa on the 30th of June 1957, Steffe knew from an early age that she wanted to enter the fashion industry. So in 1978 She moved to New York to study at the prestigious Parsons College Of Design. She won many awards during her time there including

* The Claire Mc Cardell scholarship in her sophormore year.
* An award for the most original children's wear design 1980.
* The Willismith Silver Thimble Award during her junior year.
* The Donna Karan Gold Thimble Award 1982.
* Parsons designer of the year 1982.

In 1982 while still at Parsons she began working as a design assistant at Anne

Klein and Co. working for Donna Karan and Louis Dell 'olio. Here she observed how Donna Karan, like Anne Klein before her , focused on the garments themselves and how they relate to a woman's lifestyle. A design approach which she herself adopted.

News spread of this up and coming designer and Steffe was offered the position of chief designer for Spitalnick under the label of "Cynthia Steffe for Spitalnick and Co." Soon after she met Richard Roberts a fellow fashion veteran who previously worked for Calvin Klein. They married and in 1988 after six years with Spitalnick and Co., Steffe decided that it was time to start her own line in 1989. Steffe and Roberts joined forces and launched the Cynthia Steffe collection, with Steffe as the chief designer and Roberts as the company's president.

Before leaving Spitalnick and Co. she spent several months preparing a realistic business plan, enlisting the help of family, friends and outside investors in order to raise $500,000 to start the business:

> "The key at the beginning was to put together a realistic business plan with some commentary as well as some numbers. If you want someone else's money you have to show them why" (Entrepreneurial Edge,Oct.'96,p.58).

Steffe also feels that others were willing to invest as both she and Roberts were investing their money:

> "When entrepreneurs don't want to put their own money in, investors are a little skeptical. I'd be a lot more inclined to invest in another company if people who were going to be running it were going to put their own money into it" (Entrepreneurial Edge, Oct.'96,p.58).

Furthermore Steffe feels that finding financial backing would have been significantly more difficult if her husband Richard Roberts was not the company's president. Roberts had built respect among many in the clothing industry during his time with Calvin Klein and Co. and People trusted his business sense, however Steffe also believes that in these times of supposed equality, business investors like to know there is a man looking after the financial end.

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING MARKETS

After Steffe and Roberts raised the capital needed they hit another problem, the changing retail market :

> Right out of school when I worked for Anne Klein, you could buy a cashmere blazer beautifully made for $350 at retail. Now the raw materials have increased so much that you'll pay well over $1,000 to $2,000 for a jacket of the same quality. Two hundred percent more than they did in the eighties (Entrepreneurial Edge, Oct.'97,p.59).

This was due to inflation at the time in America and people's willingness to buy quality clothes that will last.

During Steffe's first year in business many of her major accounts were buckling due to the fact that retailers trained the consumer to wait for the markdown. As a result competition became fierce, and the top names won over the smaller labels such as Cynthia Steffe. Steffe knew that to survive she would have to raise the price of her design line "Cynthia Steffe" and begin a bridge line. This is a more

moderately priced collection which would jump start the cash flow. This label was called "Francess And Rita" or "FNR" after Steffe's two sisters. Cynthia at first felt a little apprehensive of the "FNR" label. She had been working on her reputation as a designer who designs clothes with a superior craftsmanship and did not want to compromise this reputation by producing a lower priced Cynthia Steffe line:

"The image in our business comes from the name of the designer. We gave the bridge line a different name at the time because we felt that it was just too early to diffuse the Cynthia Steffe line. It would have put me in a less prestigious market. If I am setting the tone of what my product is I want it to be what I love and what I wear on my back"(Steffe,Nov.23,'97).

Despite Steffe's reluctance to launch a bridge line collection in 1992 "FNR" was launched and is currently responsible for 60% of sales.

In Spring 1997 Steffe launched yet another line, "Cynthia". This is the signature secondary line, which now sells in her in-store boutiques for "Cynthia" at Bloomingdales in Manhattan, New York and at Roosevelt Field, in Garden City, New York. Many of the large American designers such as Donna Karan and Ralph Lauren had launched younger, lower priced lines to great success and Steffe felt that she had a high enough profile to launch "Cynthia". This line would also increase her profile among women who would perhaps not have purchased from the more exclusive and expensive "Cynthia Steffe" line.

"Cynthia" is an item - driven collection (fig.35) in Steffe's own words :

"It's about the great fitting pants, the wonderful glossy shirt" (Steffe,July 23,'97). This new collection is about sophisticated separates which can be worn alone or to , update a woman's existing wardrobe. High-tech fabrics are the mainstay. Devore velvets, stretch satin, suede, stretch twill and microfiber are some of the main fabrics used in the Autumn '97 collection. The prices of garments in the "Cynthia" collection range from $35.00 to $150 therefore very affordable to the young working woman.

fig.35

A design from "Cynthia" for Autumn / Winter 1997.

HURDLING THE OBSTACLES

Steffe believes that women designers find it harder to stay ahead of the competition as the press prefer to give support to men. Cynthia Steffe was mentioned three times in America's daily fashion newspaper "Women's Wear Daily" in 1997, Mark Montano was also mentioned three times however his sales in 1996 reached $140,000 where as Steffe's sales reached $23 million. I found it also interesting to note that in these articles Mark Montano's garments are positively reviewed "Mark Montano presented stunning bustled shirt dresses that stretched to the floor" (W.W.D, April 15, '97, p.8) whereas W.W.D speak more factually about Steffe (fig.36).

She believes the reasons behind the preference is because the fashion magazines and newspapers like "Women's Wear Daily" are overwhelmingly controlled by women, and women love men. Fashion also thrives on novelty, there is a mystique about a male designer. The press often herald male designers as the salvific creators among the women designers who are often motivated by their practical needs.

However in the last year Steffe has employed three women to solely work on increasing her public profile. This has resulted in Steffe holding her first runway

show in April 1997 for Autumn / Winter 1997 (fig.37). The New York Times called it "A Triumph" and The Wall Street Journal declared that Cynthia Steffe is "Poised for Stardom."

Public figures such as Witney Houston, Broke Shields, Laura Dern (fig.38), and Marla Marples wearing Steffe's garments have also increased Cynthia Steffe's public profile. She also created three outfits for Mariah Carey's music video of her single "Honey"in Summer 1997.

Wear Daily • The Retailers' Daily Newspaper • July 30, 1997 Vo 174 $1.50

WWD WEDNESDAY

Sportswear

NEWS REEL

• STEFFE'S QUICK STEPS: Cynthia Steffe is getting some higher visibility these days. The designer created three outfits for Mariah Carey for the music video of her single "Honey," slated to start running on VH-1 today. The video also includes boxer Oscar de la Hoya and actor Danny Aiello.

Steffe also installed two in-store shops this month for her secondary line, Cynthia, both in Bloomingdale's. One is on the third floor at the 59th Street flagship in New York, the other on the second floor at Roosevelt Field in Garden City, N.Y. Each is 400 square feet. There are plans to roll out to more Bloomingdale's units and other retailers around the country by yearend.

Steffe is also close to signing a lease for store space in SoHo.

fig.36

"factually speaking"

Women's Wear Daily , July 30, 1997.

fig.37

Cynthia Steffe's first runway show in April 1997.

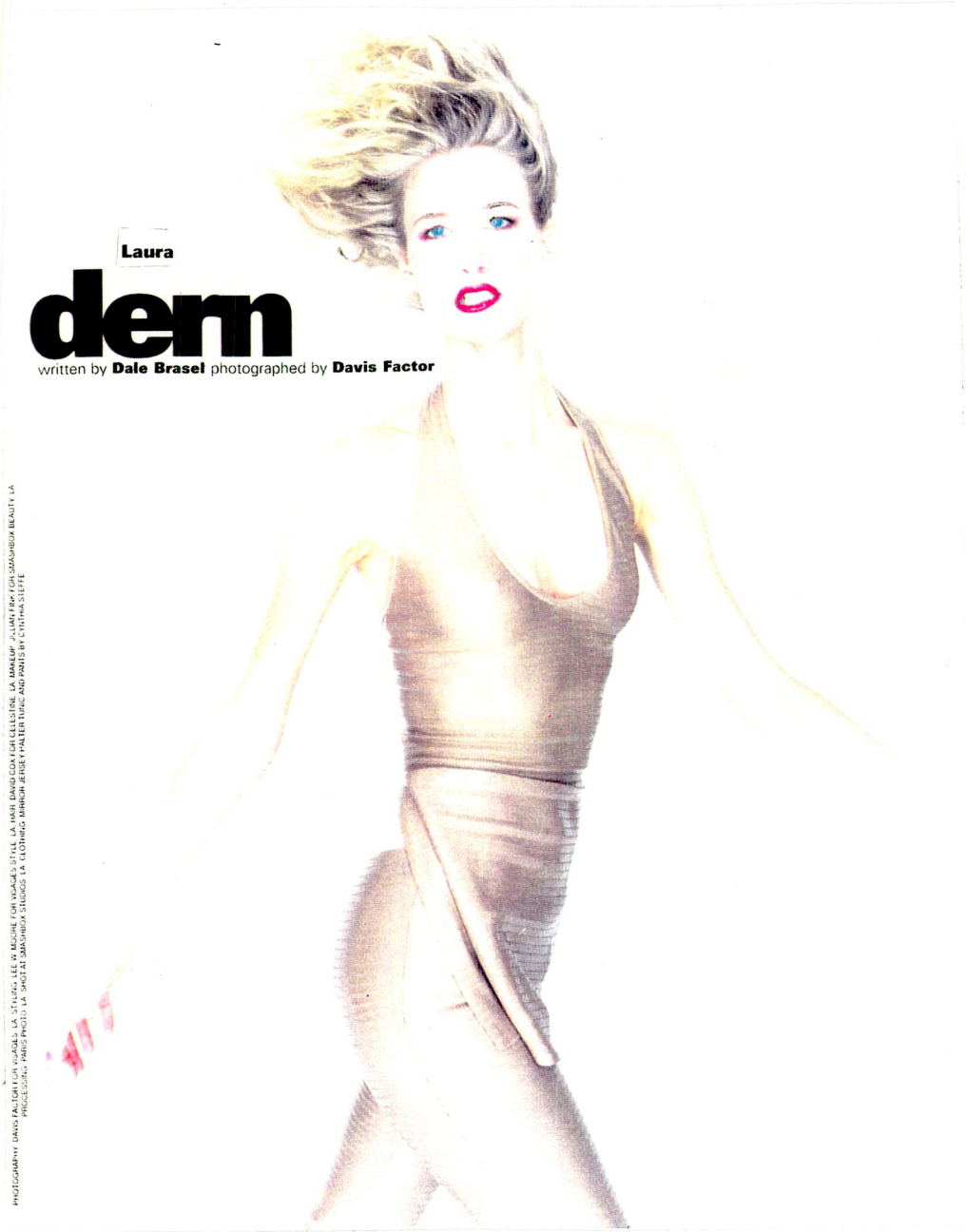


fig.38

Laura Dern in Cynthia Steffe's mirror - jersey halter tunic & trousers.

Staying a step ahead of the competition is difficult in any business but particularly in the fashion industry:

"The most difficult part about this business is that the work is the same whether you are a $50,000 volume company or $50 million volume company" says Steffe (Entrepreneurial Edge, Oct.'96, p.58).

"In our business, you have to design the clothes, the patterns have to be made and samples have to be put in the showroom And, unlike many other businesses, the product changes every season. How many industries do you know where you have to come out with a new product line five times a year?" (Entrepreneurial Edge, Oct.'96, p.58)

Steffe also pointed out to me when I interviewed her on November 23rd. that even though you might create a winner once, that's not enough to keep you on on top in the fashion industry:

It's not as though you have a great recipe for Coca - Cola or asprins and you just keep improving and advertising and that's all you have to worry about. Our product is always changing. It always has to be cutting - edge and there always has to be a good reason to buy it. If it had success at retail, your customers will buy more the next time you come in. If it doesn't sell so well, they'll buy less or they may cut you out completely (Steffe,Nov.23,'97).

Every day Steffe is informed on what is and what is not selling in her boutiques in the department stores. This information will be a major influence on future collections. She also keeps a close eye on what is a seller for her competitors and asks herself the reasons why. Is it due to the garment itself or clever selling techniques?

"You should study your competitors and be very focused on the market, see who's doing well and find out why. The more homework that you do, the better the grade you're going to get. You are always competing with yourself more than anyone" (Steffe, 23 Nov.'97).

CYNYHIA STEFFE

A WOMAN'S DESIGNER

Every morning at eight o clock, Monday to Friday Cynthia Steffe arrives at her design studio and showroom on the twenty first floor of the famous 550 building on Fashion Avenue, New York. By this stage the samples made up by her workroom staff the previous day are hanging on the rail in her design studio which she shares with her all female design team. These samples will have to be examined by Steffe and her team on the House model and fabric buyer Lauren Carver (fig.39).

Carver is what Steffe considers the typical customer. She is in her late twenties, a modern professional and knowledgeable woman who likes a polished yet relaxed look for both her public and private life. She knows what Steffe demands from every single garment and if she feels less than one hundred percent satisfied with the design she will say so.

Steffe and her design team have similar design sensibilities. This is perhaps due to the fact that like her, the design team are female Parson's graduates. Steffe is also a member of Parsons board of assessors. She therefore works closely with fourth year students on a project which she sets and often offers a design position to a student which she feels has new and exciting ideas but yet shares similar design sensibilities, the same way in which she began working for Donna Karan at Anne Klein:

fig.39

Cynthia Steffe examining a sample garment on Lauren Carver with senior design assistant Yoon Chang.

> Every time a garment comes out of the workroom, I see if the armhole feels good, how it fits around the back, how the fabrics feel. We female designers live the lives of many women. I get on planes, I have to pack and find clothes that are season less and that you could take from one state to another (Style, April27,'97, p.5).

This perhaps explains why Steffe's design staff consists of only women. When I questioned Steffe on this matter she said that from her experience women designers have an advantage over their male contemporaries as they have first hand experience in dressing. They feel and see the garments on their bodies. However if there was a man who Steffe felt was suitable for a position then she would absolutely hire him.

What I found striking about Steffe as a designer is her ability to design with her own dressing needs in mind for example how does the fabric feel against the skin, is the armhole comfortable, is the neckline flattering but yet still design for women worldwide. Steffe feels that this is a vital factor when designing.

She is forty years of age and a size 14 in clothing but this does not mean she designs only for women of this size and age. She is very conscious that although she will never wear trousers or sleeveless tops, she must design for those who do. Within each collection there must be items which will cater for the full size range of 6 - 18 and age range of early twenties to late forties. Steffe designs for women within this age range as it allows her to be experimental with fabric and shape in designing classy but youthful garments. Many of Steffe's garments are

unsuitable for women over or under this age group due to the youthful yet sophisticated and often very sexy nature of her designs (fig.40).

To insure that within each collection there are garments which are suitable for the range of age and sizes Steffe will wear her own samples and often ask members of her staff to do the same. She can then see how the garment looks on others and asks them how they feel wearing the design. An example of such a design is fig.41 from the Spring / Summer '97 collection. The stretch micro fiber allows this design to fit a range of sizes comfortably. While it's lycra content gives a sensual fit it also gives support to those who need it. The long, loose fitting yet flattering jacket is also suitable for the wide range of sizes.

fig.40

Cynthia Steffe Autumn / Winter 1997.

fig.41

Cynthia Steffe Spring / Summer 1997

My philosophy in design is to give newness in fabrication, definite interest and uniqueness in cut and tailoring and exciting clothes that are new and wonderful this season. But a jacket that is from Cynthia Steffe 1995 should be great in the year 2,000, the clothing may be worn differently from year to year, but the quality must be there and it must last (Entrepreneurial Edge,Oct.'97,p.60).

This is very true of a Cynthia Steffe design, while she is experimental with fabric and offers newness in shape, her designs last from a quality of craftsmanship and style point of view (fig.42). For Steffe's premiere runway fashion show in April 1997 she featured a provocative mix of the earthy and industrial fabrics such as laser cut velvet, stretch panne velvet, perforated camel tweeds, crochet style fabric layered over a wet look polyester (fig.43). She also used jersey that is heat processed to give a sheen and perforated stretch synthetic suede which is a blend of acetate, nylon and elastic (fig.44) This was a favourite of Steffe's as :

"You get the look of suede and the comfort of a knit jersey" (W.W.D,May 20, '97)

Steffe also used cheetah flocked velvet in this outfit resulting in a sexy garment due to the use of an animal print, but also a comfortable garment due to the velvet fabric and easy fit.

Steffe uses such fabrics as they are new, exciting, elegant and also comfortable, offering easy care. She will rarely use a fabric which will crease, stain easily or restrict as like her, the Cynthia Steffe customer demands relaxed luxury.

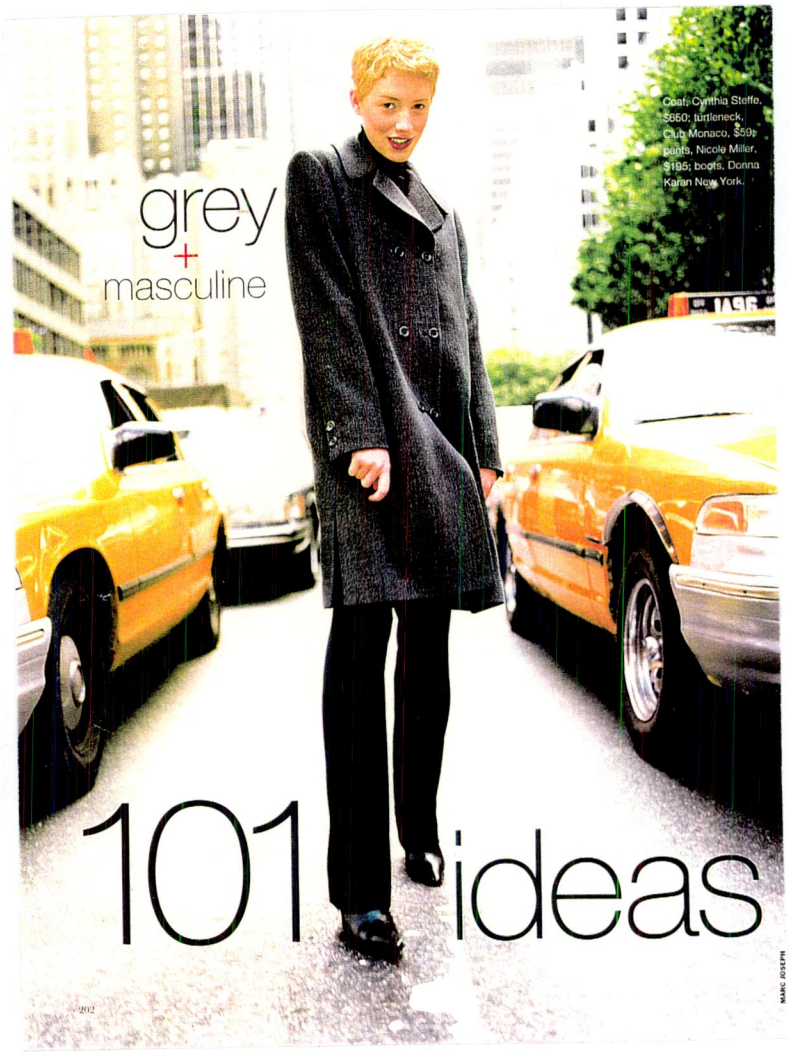


fig.42

Cynthia Steffe Winter 1997.

fig.43

Cynthia Steffe design from Autumn / Winter 1997 collection.

fig.44

Cynthia Steffe design from Autumn / Winter 1997 collection .

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Steffe is currently close to signing a lease for a flag ship store in Soho, New York, this is a major step in her career as it is like placing a national advertisement. The store will retain the character of the neighbourhood which is raw, industrial and hip and chic. This tone also reflects the attitude of Steffe's clothes, and will therefore be appealing to her customer.

When I interviewed Steffe on the 23rd of November 1997 she said in the long term she aims to make " Cynthia Steffe " a major American design house. She aspires to design all kinds of products, not only clothes because Steffe believes that fashion is not just about clothes, but like many female designers fashion is about style and style is about lifestyle. Therefore she is interested in designing for the home, designing shoes and starting a range of cosmetics, including a signature perfume. But perhaps more importantly to Cynthia Steffe is her aim to be taken seriously and recognised like her male counterparts.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this examination I have shown that while men have been pivotal in the development of the fashion industry, they have not been the lone contributors. Yes , women designers tend not to hold the top positions in Haute Couture . Nonetheless, they have been and indeed are central to the fashion industries growth, particularly in the ready to wear industry.

While men have designed wonderfully creative yet often impractical clothes women have designed garments which are experimental and innovative, yet relate to a woman's life and the experience of dressing, using their instinctive feeling for comfort and fit - something which the Gallianos and Mc Queens of this world can only appreciate second - hand !

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