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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

Faculty of Design, Department of Fashion and Textiles

The Design Centre

POWERSCOURT TOWNHOUSE CENTRE

The role The Design Centre played in Irish fashion history and how it assisted fashion designers in Ireland

^{by} Órfhlaith Ní Mhórdha

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art and Design and Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Design in Fashion 1997-1998

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Introduction UCTION

Hailed as a great fashion success in the 1980s, *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* was created in the nation's capital and has been a seeding ground for many of Ireland's young top fashion designers, and has acted as a shop front for their talents. *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* housed twenty-five of Ireland's newest and youngest fashion designers in separate units, all of which were run by a centrally controlled management team. Originally housed in *The Galleria* on Stephen's Green, The *Irish Fashion Design Centre* later moved to the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre* where it changed its name to *The Design Centre*, (within the body of the thesis, the *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* - the original outlet, is referred to as *The I.F.D.C on occasion*, and *The Design Centre* in the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre* remains *The Design Centre*).

My relationship with *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* stems from my youth, embarking on an adventure which was to be a turning point in my life. As I was so impressed with the collection in *The Irish Fashion Design Centre*, it confirmed my wish to do fashion design. I was on the committee of the *Oatlands College* All Ireland "Buy Irish Campaign". This was aimed specifically at school children to create an awareness within themselves and consequently their parents, to buy more Irish produce. We put on an all-Irish fashion show to help this cause. This new shop, *The Irish Fashion Design Centre*, was situated in *The Galleria* Shopping Centre and was the latest all-Irish fashion store. We collectively felt this retail outlet was the ideal place to get our clothes for our fashion show from. I had the privilege of rooting through *The*

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Fulfilling a niche in the market, *The Irish Fashion Design Centre*, opened to much acclaim from the press and public alike. Many of Ireland's acclaimed designers have since been through its doors, some with much success and others with varying results. Going from strength to strength, *The Design Centre* reached its peak in the late 1980s. After capitalising on this prosperity, *The Design Centre* seemed then to have reached a plateau. In 1998, it does not hold the same remarkable position in the marketplace that it did in the latter part of the 1980s.

The aim of my study is to give a biographical account of **The Irish Fashion Design Centre** set in the context of 1980s Dublin. I intend investigating the position of **The Design Centre** in terms of how it helped shape and launch Irish fashion since its inauguration in 1984.

I will document *The Irish Fashion Design Centre's* history from its initial dwelling in *The Galleria* Shopping Centre, in St Stephen's Green, moving two years later to its present address in the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. I intend to look at how *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* has been promoted throughout its lifespan, and in turn, how *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* has promoted the work of young aspiring Irish designers. The role it has played in their careers is examined in a profile of a select number of designers who have previously shown in *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* or who show there at present.

In researching *The Irish Fashion Design Centre*, I have found very little has been written on the history of 20th century, or any other century fashion in Ireland,



let alone *The Irish Fashion Design Centre*. All my information has come from interviews by person, telephone and fax or from newspaper and magazine articles.

The problems I have encountered through these primary sources are that firstly, the interviewee's responses sometimes contradict each other. Each person's memories, being unique to him or her, vary considerably with another person's recollections of the same event. Secondly, as most of the actual articles on *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* came from my own personal file, specific dates were not intact. This file was a result of my own keen interest in Irish fashion, but I never thought I would be using these articles for a thesis when I collected them over a period of thirteen years.

In relation to the contradictions which I experienced in compiling my research for this thesis I have this example, relating to the date *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* was established. *"The Design Centre* was founded in June 1985 and has been situated in the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre* since June 1987." (See *The Design Centre* catalogue in The Appendix). This is the opening line in one of the three *Design Centre's* catalogues. Winnie Cunningham, a one-time manageress also cites these dates as do magazine, paper and television reviews. Barbara McMahon, a presenter of *"Head to Toe"* on the 4th December 1990 said, *"The Irish Design Centre* was set up three years ago", (that was in 1987). Winnie Cunningham's predecessors Nikki Creedon and Shelly Corkery, along with Michelle Kavanagh, the founder of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* all agree on the end of May 1984. So, from three sources, all close to the subject, I have received three different dates for the establishment of



The Irish Fashion Design Centre. I believe however that the correct date is the 29th of May 1984. I have found Michelle Kavanagh, Nikki Creedon, Shelly Corkery, Robert O'Byrne, Helen Cody, Helen Penney, Mike Bunn, Eddie Shanahan and Lynn Elliott to be both interesting and particularly helpful, for without their assistance I could not have completed this study.

To the best of my ability I have correlated all this information and hope that this record of a very important venture in 20th century Irish fashion will contribute to some later examination of this significant period.



Chapter 1: How it all began

A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE IRISH FASHION DESIGN CENTRE

The Background in Ireland before the start up in The Galleria

Success is a wonderful thing for an individual, a group, and not least, a country. Our literary luminaries, namely Brendan Behan, James Joyce, Patrick Kavanagh, Oscar Wilde and William Butler Yeats, have always been a positive boost to the Irish psyche. Roddy Doyle, our most recent literary talent, won the Booker Prize in 1994. Our musical achievements include U2, Sinead O'Connor and even Boyzone, not to mention Riverdance. Winning the Eurovision six times in the past decade put us on the musical world stage. In athletics Sonia O'Sullivan's running achievements and Michelle Smith's swimming medals of three golds and a bronze in the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games were great successes. Ken Doherty in the spring of 1997 won the World Snooker Championship preventing Stephen Hendrey from winning six consecutive world titles. The Irish Youth Soccer Team managed to finish in third place in the 1997 World Cup Finals. These are all relatively recent achievements, all of which happened during this decade.

"The 1980s was the decade when Irish fashion once more became a feature rather than a curiosity on the international fashion scene. Sadly critical success was seldom synonymous with commercial success for the designers. They endured continuing recession in Ireland as well as the Universal difficulties of fashion designers lacking strong financial backing, either private or governmental. The fact that most survived the decade alone is worthy of note." (*McCrum*, 1996, page 54)

Chapter 1: How it all began

A BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE INISH FASHION DESIGN CENTRE

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Design Culture in Dublin

At the time of the start-up of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre*, people were not supporting Irish products. There was little evidence of pride in Irish culture and there was not the same design awareness around Ireland as there is today, thirteen years later. "We did have a designer culture back in the 1970s and the early 1980s", according to Eddie Shanahan.

"It was centred on the fact that we had Ib Jorgenson, Thomas Wolfangle, Paul Costello, Michael Mortell, John Rocha, Richard Lewis, Michelina Stackpoole and later Robert Jacob, all of who were involved in the Irish Designers Association."

However, it must be noted that only the rich and social elite could afford these Irish designers' clothing.

"Design, a human activity centred on the conception of everyday objects, is doubtless one of the world's oldest occupations. But it was only with the advent of industrial production and, later, the Modernist movement that the profession began to structure itself and develop in an autonomous way. The fifties saw the appearance of its first international institutions...The I.F.I. for interior design and ICOGRADA in 1963 for graphic design."

(De Noblets, Anne-Marie Boutin, 1993, page 418)



Fig 1: The old Galleria building which houses Habitat now.

The use of the word "designer" as an adjective was both coined and made synonymous with the 1980s, worldwide. The whole concept of most objects having been through a design process became more familiar to one and all in the 1980s. It was not until the late 1970s that art colleges became Colleges of Art and Design. People studying design became a common practice and with it people's awareness of "design" was becoming more mainstream. "Design" was generally now an expected, rather than an exclusive, elusive aspect of an object.

The Galleria Start-Up

It was in this design-aware climate that *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* was established in the May of 1984 in a small two-storey shopping centre at the top of Grafton Street, Dublin, called *The Galleria*. (Fig 1). *Richard Allen*, ten metres from the top of Grafton Street was the last clothes-shopping stop in that centre of Dublin's fashionable shopping street (Fig 2). The younger more adventurous spirit might venture the extra six metres around the corner to *Mirror Mirror*. But apart from *Mirror Mirror*, there was nothing else to look at except for the ducks in St Stephen's Green, a public park across the road. It was another five metres from *Mirror Mirror*, currently trading as *Oasis* (Fig 3), to *The Galleria* which was housed in what is now *Habitat* (Fig 4). During this time, there were very few shopping centres in Dublin city centre. The concept of urban shopping centres under one roof was relatively unknown to the Irish public at that time.

As an enterprise, **The Irish Fashion Design Centre** was a unique and significant venture in Irish fashion history. It was the brainchild of Michelle Kavanagh, a twenty-five year old woman with an exceptional insight into what the Irish public wanted



Fig 2: Photograph taken from the top of Grafton Street, Dublin, showing: (1) *Richard Allen* on Grafton Street (2) The top corner of Grafton Street



Fig 3: Photograph taken of St.Stephen's Green showing:

- (2) The top corner of Grafton Street
- (3) Oasis, the spot where Mirror Mirror was located in May 1984
- (4) Habitat. where The Galleria was situated in 1984



Fig 4: Photograph of the facade of *Habitat*, where *The Galleria* shopping centre was housed in 1984. The red dots indicate the width of the entrance to *The Galleria*, as it was then.



Fig 5: Louise Raymond's spring/summer collection. She was the first member, along with Sharon Hoey, to go into the Irish Fashion Design Centre, in The Galleria. She also moved to the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre with The Deisgn Centre. (Sunday Independent, February 1986).

in a city knee-deep in recession. Michelle Kavanagh's principle involvement was the fact that she worked for the property company, Power Corporation. It was her husband Robin Power who headed this company. The initial concept of The Irish Fashion Design Centre evolved when Lawrence Foley took over the management of The Galleria shopping centre and wanted to turn it into a financially viable concern. The new concept would have to greatly increase business, so that they could then put the shopping centre on the market and sell The Galleria as a going concern, as a lucrative shopping centre. Power Corporation owned a number of shopping centres around Dublin, the most notable being the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre which opened its doors in 1981 and the William Elliot Centre on 16 Wicklow Street, which was established around the same time. The latter is now Tower Records. Michelle Kavanagh and Power Corporation racked their brains to come up with a clever viable business that would be suitable to work in The Galleria. It would have to be good enough to act as an anchor in order to draw other tenants in, who would be able to feed off the business.

It was around this time that Ms Kavanagh was approached by two young fashion design graduates who had recently left college. They were Sharon Hoey and Louise Raymond (Fig 5) and they told Ms Kavanagh that they were supplying their designs to a Dublin retail outlet on a sale or return basis. They were having problems getting paid and getting their stock out so they felt it was not really working. They asked Michelle Kavanagh if she might have a unit available that they could both share. Ms Kavanagh had a small vacant unit in the *William Elliot Centre*. It was on the first floor and measured about eighty square feet. She agreed to let the two of them lease that space for three months at fifty



Fig 6: Photograph of Gallery 1, in *The Design Centre*. This is the enclosed glass cabinet where *Vivian Walsh* sells her jewellry. *Vivian Walsh* also sells her jewellery from her own shop in the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*, literally besideThe Deisgn Centre.

pounds a week. If it worked, they could transfer on to a longer-term lease. The two of them opened up their own business from this small unit.

A while later Sharon Hoey and Louise Raymond contacted Ms Kavanagh and asked her to look at *The Late Late Fashion Show* awards as they were taking part in this annual event. On watching the show, it suddenly dawned on Ms Kavanagh that there were obviously many more young designers in Ireland who had talent but had no outlet to sell from. And thus the concept developed. Could they create a space that would give these young designers fresh from college with no business background or experience, a small unit from which to sell their creations?

She developed a plan that involved dividing a large open plan space into small units to house the individual designers and felt that such a venture would be suitable as an anchor tenant to draw the public into *The Galleria* Shopping Centre, Michelle Kavanagh and Marie Donnelly were the main force behind the decision to investigate the number of young designers recently emerging from fashion colleges around the country. (Marie Donnelly is well known in Irish circles as a woman of great personal style). They had to work out how many designers they could comfortably fit into the basement in *The Galleria*. They then had to analyse the possibility of enticing other retail operators into *The Galleria* upstairs. This they did and the individual units which were rented out in *The Galleria* included the plant store at the front entrance and *Kamouflage*, which specialised in designer ladies clothes and jewellery, owned by Vivian Walsh. *Kamouflage* eventually moved to Dawson Street to another small shopping centre, The *Royal Hibernian Way*. Later again, when *The Design Centre* moved, *Kamouflage* also changed venue to the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre* occupying a tiny area in *The Design Centre* (Fig 6). It no longer used the name *Kamouflage*,
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and from this point on, traded under the name of *Vivian Walsh.* There was also a café in *The Galleria* with seats around the stairway to the basement. This basement is where *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* started and remained for two years.

On leaving college in the early 1980s, graduates got whatever jobs they could. Some current designers, for example Glynis Robins, had to work as a doctor's receptionist. Mariead Whisker taught fashion design in the *National College of Art and Design* from 1979 to 1983. Other designers like Louise Kennedy were lucky enough to have a family who had a fashion related business and she started from there.

In general women did not become career orientated until the late 1970s and early 1980s in Ireland and fashion designers leaving college were no exception. In many public sector jobs, for instance, once a woman married she had to give up her job, and it was not until the 1980s that it became the norm for any or all women to have a full-time career. Coupled with the fact that we had no design culture and an aversion to buying Irish, work was seriously limited for Irish fashion graduates on leaving college.

Michelle Kavanagh had *Hyper Hyper* in mind when she and Marie Donnelly boarded a plane to see what that retail outlet was doing. *Hyper Hyper* was the English prototype of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* at 20-40 Kensington High Street, London. Back in the early 1980s *Hyper Hyper* was

"the only fashion centre in London where you can see one hundred designers collections under one roof. If you want to buy something out of the ordinary, *Hyper Hyper* is the place to go. Each unit on the three floors is run by the individual designers and their assistant." (*Just Seventeen Magazine, 17th March 1986*).



Fig 7: Hyper Hyper, 20-40 Kensington High Street, London. Picture of the store in 1986. (Just Seventeen Magazine, 17th March 1986).



Fig 8: Interior shot of *Hyper Hyper* in 1986. (*Just Seventeen* Magazine, 17th March 1986).

Just Seventeen also advised their readers that "for high fashion at fairly realistic prices, *Hyper Hyper* was the centre to shop at." At that time they stocked such names as *Pam Hogg, Boy, Bazooka* and *Office Shoes* (Fig 7 and Fig 8).

On their visit to London, *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* contingent felt that although the *Hyper Hyper* concept was very interesting, they thought it lacked a central organisational body. Some of the units were closed and other designers were eating their lunch or snacking in their units. At this point Michelle Kavanagh and her colleagues decided to refine what they had originally intended to do back in Dublin. They concluded that the fashion designers were very talented, but not commercial, so they came up with the concept that would take the retailing away from the designers. Consequently Michelle Kavanagh said that they decided to place the individual designers into "a space letting them concentrate on the designing and manufacturing of their creations leaving everything else to the company." Ms Kavanagh and her team would "handle all the sales, all the promotions, fashion shows and marketing." In effect "it offered the designers the opportunity but not the hassle of running a city centre retail outlet at a very low start-up cost."

When the initial idea was formed, there were smaller details to consider like what designers they would take, what space each would occupy and what sort of clothes they wanted to sell. It was decided that the units would range in size from sixty to eighty square feet, the biggest being 140 square feet. This would display about sixty garments. Each unit would be stocked with a whole collection in a size 12 with sizes from 8 to 16 also. If all their designers were housed under the one roof, they could properly expose themselves to the market.

Michelle Kavanagh and Marie Donnelly, under the auspices of Power Corporation



approached **Adelaide CTT** for assistance. C.T.T. proved to be extremely helpful and agreed to come in and offer advice and sit in on regular meetings with the designers. They also assisted in giving back-up advice on manufacturing. It was at this stage that they engaged John Rocha as a consultant. Most of these new designers were just out of college and were faced with the usual dilemma of having to work abroad to gain experience, or simply surviving at the bottom rung of the fashion ladder on their home turf.

Michelle Kavanagh and Marie Donnelly, with the aid of John Rocha as consultant, and with the assistance of *Adelaide CTT*, were the driving force behind the start-up of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre*, as it was named initially. Helen Penny was employed as their sole PR person. Eddie Shanahan was hired to do the fashion shows and Mike Bunn to do their first fashion shoots. These were all the best in the business in Dublin in 1984. Their idea was that if they wanted something to be ultra professional, one must employ the best to achieve the best possible results.

The Buy Irish Campaign

"We got brilliant support from the press because of course the concept supported young Irish designers as an all Irish product and therefore supported jobs in Ireland" said Michelle Kavanagh. This buy Irish attitude was extremely prevalent in Ireland, peaking in around 1982. Two hundred jobs directly and indirectly were created in the first year of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* 's operation. This was between the designers working, the staff in *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* and all the out-workers consequently employed.

A huge Buy-Irish campaign had started in the early 1980s. Most Irish people tended to buy foreign goods prior to this campaign because they were cheaper. On occasion it was



said (rumoured) that "made in England" labels sold better on suits, so this label apparently sometimes appeared on clothes, although they were actually made on Irish soil. A concentrated effort was launched by the government to change the Irish public's perception of Irish products as being inferior to their European counterparts. In the Government White Paper of 1984, the aim of the industrial policy was to create and maintain the maximum number of sustainable jobs in manufacturing and international service firms. It also aimed to maximise the value added by these sectors and to capture the wealth thus created for further investment and employment creation in the Irish economy.

Our high unemployment figures placed us second from the bottom in an EU survey in 1984. The Irish economy was at a low ebb. It was therefore essential for the government to create an awareness of the importance of buying Irish as this would help to support Irish jobs.

As a member of the Young Ireland Committee, a school-based buy Irish campaign, I remember the impact *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* had on people back in 1984. It was not "hip" to buy Irish at the time. What *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* did, though not necessarily on purpose, was to address the prejudice head-on. It forced Irish people to reconsider their deep-rooted negative Irish attitudes. It was in this "buy anything but Irish" atmosphere that *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* started. It just managed to break even in its short two-year stint in *The Galleria*. All the other businesses upstairs, reported Ms Kavanagh, "the hairdressers, restaurant, fashion and accessory shops all managed to sustain a living. So *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* succeeded in giving new life to *The Galleria*.



Chapter 2: From The Underground on The Green To The Powerscourt Scene

THE DESIGN CENTRE REINVENTS ITSELF

The Move to the Powerscourt Townhouse centre

"Young designers have potential outlets such as The Design Centre in the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre in Dublin which provides units for twenty designers. It sells work by established designers and also by new young designers just out of college, in the innovative Designer Forum section. Most contemporary Irish designers have passed through The Design Centre at one stage of their career. Work of established Irish designers is also sold in specialist fashion shops such as Havana of Donnybrook, run by Nikki Creedon, ex-manager of The Design Centre, Diffusion of Clontarf and Khan of Blackrock."

(McCrum, 1996, page 89)

Greeted as a great success, *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* moved from its St Stephen's Green location in June of 1986. The move brought them to a salubrious shopping centre also owned, by *Power Corporation*. The *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*, which opened in 1981, is located on South William Street. *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* literally closed its doors on a Saturday evening and opened up on the following Monday afternoon, in its new home more centrally located in the fashionable shopping district of Dublin's south city centre. The move took place just two years after it first opened.

"There was a brilliant buzz", in the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre according to



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Shopping	de Change
Powerscoul	RT
TOWNHOUSE CEN Dublin	

Fig 9: Brochure for The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre. (January 1998).

Ms Kavanagh. Management, she said, from "Hyper Hyper" in London came over to The Irish Fashion Design Centre, and were impressed with the whole set up. The Irish Fashion Design Centre now occupied what was once Ciara, the wedding specialist's area. The latter, who had moved their collection to another unit on the same floor, occupied a shop in the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre from the beginning as well as a unit in The Irish Fashion Design Centre from time to time. The new space of 3,500 square feet fitted their needs perfectly and they were able to utilise all the niches and corners quite well.

Management of The Irish Fashion Design Centre

The Irish Fashion Design Centre had a centralised management team in Nikki Creedon and Shelly Corkery with Michelle Kavanagh overseeing the venture. The extended team included five sales assistants who staffed the floor. All the employees including, Nikki and Shelly were paid by **Power Corporation**. This freed up the designers to do what they instinctively did best, design. Thus leaving all the hassle of the day to day running of the operation to **The Design Centre** management team.

The Changes the move to the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre provoked

Nikki and Shelly, both of whom managed **The Galleria** and then the *Powerscourt* outlet, believed that people's perception of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* changed with the move. "It's psychological, I think. We've moved from a basement up to the first floor here and it's just right for us, it's great", Shelly told Arminta Wallace of *The Irish Times*, 25th June 1987. (Fig 9).



Fig 10: Photograph of the interior of *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. Red dot indicates the entrance to the hall, where *The Design Centre* is situated. (9th February 1998)



Fig 11: Photograph of the interior of *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*'s main area. Ariel view of the three floors of *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. (9th February 1998)

The changes which this move involved stemmed mainly from the new, more upmarket location. The *Powerscourt* already had a more affluent clientelle buying throughout their shopping centre. (Fig 10 and Fig 11). It had an art gallery, handcraft studios, vendors of Irish-made chocolates and jewellery shops, many antique outlets, a beautician and many speciality stores. There was also a restaurant, a café and healthfood bar.

Moving from a darkened basement with virtually no natural light, to an open-planned, well lit area, draws another contrast between *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* of old and of new. The new premises were designed in an economic version of the fashionable "Japanese minimalist" style, especially popular in designer stores in the 1980s. In terms of the interior design, Arminta Wallace of *The Irish Times* described how the space was divided using

"Canvas partitions...they're joyfully skew-ways, clear and clean and somehow bright even though it's just plain sheets of canvas faced simply to a black metal frame (Fig 12). The Young Irish Designers have moved to the first floor of the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre and they're loving it."

One of the foundations of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* 's interior was its steel and wood concept. Another change which happened in *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* over the years, was the placement of individual designers wooden name plaques over their units. (Fig 13). Yet another change was that the name *"Irish Fashion"* was dropped from the title to leave a more streamlined, European styled upmarket name, which read simply *"The Design Centre"*.

The development of technology allowed another important change to take place in the **Powerscourt Centre.** A computer was installed which enabled **The Design Centre** to provide a readout, weekly and monthly, to the individual designers. This gave an account of



Fig 12: Mary Gregory, Robert Jacob, Lainey Keogh, and Paul Wentworth. Picture of the interior of *The Design Centre* when they first moved to *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. Shows the canvas and metal sign. (*The Irish Times*, 23rd June 1987)

DESMOND GANNON



Lynn-Mar

Fig 13: Photograph of wooden name plaques of some of the current designers, in *The Design Centre*. These wooden plaques depict the 1990's eco/environmental look of earthly timber. They are a shapely contrast to the canvas and metal signs used first in *The Design Centre in 1986*.



what and how much was sold, the overall net sales figure and profit, minus the rent. This was given to each designer. Designers could find out each evening after 6pm what their take for the day was, if they so wanted.

The Irish Fashion Design Centre, when housed in The Galleria, was aimed mainly at students. Those who considered themselves "trendy, cool and hip" were the main clients. The designers, management and staff in The Design Centre were two years older at this stage and they saw their customers getting older with them. This also had an influence on the type of clothes that were sold in The Design Centre. Their initial clientele had presumably qualified at this stage and armed with their newly-acquired credit cards targeted The Design Centre as their ideal hunting ground for their business wardrobes.

"As the designers became more professional and their finishing got better, the customer with whom they started with at The Galleria changed. The Design Centre developed into a much older customer base. At the beginning, the stuff we had would have been a lot funkier. Now it's slicker and more conservative probably and more geared towards what the professional market is looking for at the moment"

recalls Ms Michelle Kavanagh.

"The group which used to be known as *The Young Irish Designers* until several of the designers came of age last year with collections universally acknowledged to be as mature as you'd find" Arminta Wallace said in *The Irish Times*, 25th June 1987.

The retail market in the last ten years, from 1988 to 1998 has changed dramatically in Dublin. "It has become much more competitive. There is far more money in circulation now. People tend not to be as conscious about how much money they are spending on their clothes", Michelle Kavanagh believes. There is a huge growth in young



Fig 14: Photograph of the *Brown Thomas* car park, situated beside *The Design Centre*. (9th February 1998) female professionals demanding good suitable clothes for work and they have the money to acquire them.

One development which has taken place in *The Design Centre* is the *Brown Thomas* car park which was recently built. This leads you directly into *Brown Thomas's* department store. As this shop sells to the same clientele as the *Powerscourt*, a door was built giving the car park direct access to the *Powerscourt Centre*. Although *The Design Centre* lost 300 sq ft because of this car park, the door is positioned directly beside *The Design Centre* entrance (Fig 14) and easy access to the store should encourage new customers. *The Design Centre* anticipates an increase in traffic through their shop on account of this car park, as the *Brown Thomas* clientele would be in the market to purchase *The Design Centre's* stock..

The Layout of The Design Centre

There are basically two galleries in *The Design Centre*. Gallery 1 has fully established designers. This includes three-quarters of the total space. Most designers in this section occupy a full unit. There are approximately twelve full units and three half-units, (for example *Deirdre Fitzgerald* and *Sheena* both occupy a half-unit each in Gallery 1).

Most of the current designers in the full units have occupied them since they moved to the **Powerscourt Townhouse Centre**. Louise Kennedy occupies the main front section (Fig 15, Fig 16 and Fig 17) and has always done so. Being very professional, and highly organised, she remains in this unit. **Mary Gregory** holds the opposite front stall and has also always done so. Although no-one has ever been moved around, if a designer does not keep their unit sufficiently well-stocked, they can be shifted to another unit.



Fig 15: Photograph depicts the exterior of *The Design Centre* in *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. Front corner section displays *Louise Kennedy's* unit.



Fig 16: Photograph depicts the exterior of *The Design Centre* in *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. Front entrance display beside Mary Gregory's unit.

Fig 17: Photograph depicts the exterior of *The Design Centre* in *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre* showing the shop window adjacent to the *Brown Thomas* car park behind which we can see Gallery 2.



Fig 18: Photograph of Louise Kennedy's sale unit in Gallery Two in The Design Centre.

Gallery 2 houses "the Innovative Section", the "Louise Kennedy Sale" unit (Fig 18) and "The Designer Sale unit "(Fig 19). It also has ten full and half-units occupied by some less-established designers.

The Similarities between The Irish Fashion Design Centre and The Design Centre

"There are still the same small open plan units, still the same higgledypiggledy feel about the place, still the sense of something new and a bit different"

records Ms Wallace in The Irish Times. Very little by way of either the designers or the management team changed in the transfer of business to the Powerscourt Centre. The designers still had the requirement in their contracts to be at their units for four hours a week; a stipulation which is no longer in their contracts. This was in order to get a feel for their customer and more specifically so they could get feedback from them. This also enabled the designers to see for themselves the profile of the customer coming into the centre, and therefore see what they were looking for. This Ms Kavanagh believed "was very important to the success of it. Also in the beginning our monthly meetings were very important". The individual designers were brought in separately into these meetings. Nikki Creeden, Shelly Corkery, Michelle Kavanagh, John Usher of C.T.T. and, in the first year in The Galleria, John Rocha attended these meetings in a consultancy capacity. In the second year Michael Mortell acted as consultant, and in its third year of existence, and first year in the *Powerscourt*, Paul Costello took over as consultant. All of these consultants were successful designers with their own fashion business. "It was great for solving problems, giving tips", discussing "stocking their units, what was moving", and





Fig 19: Photograph of *The Designer sale unit* in *The Design Centre* directly opposite *Louise Kennedy's Sale Unit* in Gallery 2.



what the designers needed themselves. "Very useful", these meetings were, according to Michelle Kavanagh.

One of the main recurring problems in *The Design Centre* was the bad quality of finish on the garments. This has improved over the years and it was the most negative feedback received from the customers and press alike. This was one of the main reasons why the monthly meetings were held according to Ms Kavanagh.

The Innovative Section

The innovative section originally was started in 1992/93. The intention was to bring in a younger customer. This would enable the customer purchasing for herself to now include her daughter in her shopping. *This innovative section* was also set up with a view to encouraging new young designers into *The Design Centre*. It initially was for final year fashion students interested in selling their collection. *Miriam Mone* was one example of a designer who was attracted to *The Design Centre* because of this *innovative section*.

After qualifying from *Preston Polytechnic* and subsequently graduating from the *Limerick College of Art and Design* in 1987, Miriam Mone then worked for two different designers. After successfully completing the *Fás* "Start your own Business" course she went into partnership with a fellow design classmate. After this did not work out, *Miriam Mone* went into *The Design Centre* in November of 1990. She went from strength to strength in there, starting off initially in *the innovative section* and finally moving to a full unit where she resides to date. Winning the "Coat" section of *The Late Late Fashion* awards in 1993 and 1995, she then collected the "Overall Winners" award in 1995 also.



Fig 20: President Mary McAleese wears a Miriam Mone camel cashmere coat with a fur asymetrical collar for her inauguration. (Photograph from David Sleator and Joe St. Leger, The Irish Times, 12th November 1997).

In 1997, she won the "Suits" category in *The Late Late Fashion Show* awards. During 1997, she went on to dress the Irish president Mary McAleese during her campaigning period. President McAleese also wore *Miriam Mone's* designs for her inauguration (Fig 20) which focused much publicity on the designer. *Miriam Mone* believes that *The Design Centre*, "Due to its size, it provided access to fashion shows and media contact that a single designer in a start-up situation could not achieve". Although *Miriam Mone* did not always make a profit in *The Design Centre*, she generally felt it to be an excellent showcase for her collection. The aim of the *innovative section* was as "a fresh breeding ground to take designers in", said Ms Kavanagh.

As the rent for a full unit would be prohibitive to new young designers just out of college, a rail space would be allocated to these designers, accomadating twelve garments. A three month contract was signed and it cost £20 per week for the rail, or 25% of the turnover, whichever was the greater in 1992/93. The cost of this rail in 1996 was £87 a month. The cost for a rail in 1998 is £120 monthly or 25% of turnover, whichever is the greater. Therefore, the cost of a rail has gone up 30% in three years – a large increase by any standards. Designers are now allowed to put as much stock as will fit onto their rail. *The innovative section* is positioned at the back of the shop in Gallery 2, in the left-hand corner away from the main entrance (Fig 21 and Fig 22).

The Possible Problems in The Design Centre

In entering into a contract in *The Design Centre*, the designer must fully brief themselves on who their commercial customer is, and not the person they may like to personally attract and sell to. Not all designers work out in *The Design Centre*. One





Fig 21: Photographs of the *Innovative Section* in *The Design Centre*, in Gallery 2. (Left hand side)



Fig 22: Photographs of the *Innovative Section* in *The Design Centre*, in Gallery 2, on the right, just inside the entrance.



reason for this is that they cannot adapt to who *The Design Centre's* customer is and what they want. Secondly, they may not successfully get a reasonable turnover to keep them in *The Design Centre*. The cost of a full unit in 1997 was £950 per month plus 12½% of turnover. If the designer cannot perform under their contract, they can be asked to leave. This clause has never been exercised according to Ms Kavanagh. If it comes to that stage, the management would sit down with the designer and talk about any problems that are arising. If after this stage it is still not working with the designer, "they simply leave".

Possible Problems with The Fashion Show

The Design Centre's Fashion Show must be sold as a package. It is the overall impression of their fashion shows that effect *The Design Centre*. The responsibility is on each designer to ensure they fit into *The Design Centre's* brief. This can be a difficult procedure to reinforce. "What the designers do must be in keeping with what *The Design Centre* is about", says Ms Kavanagh. The problem with this is that the onus is on the individual designers to fit into *The Design Centre's* agenda and no allowances are made for anyone who steps outside this. If the clothes do not fit into what the management feels fits *The Design Centre's* label then the collection will not be allowed to go onto the Fashion Show.

Different Areas Within The Design Centre:

Knitwear

Forty to fifty per cent of *The Design Centre's* sales were always in knitwear according to Nikki Creedon. *The Design Centre* has always been noted for its strong knitwear



designs. But at one stage there was a very heavy concentration on knitwear and it outnumbered any other style of design. This was the result of such designers as *Lainey Keogh*, *Glynis Robins*, *Deirdre Fitzgerald* and *Lyn-Mar* doing so well.

Everyone wanted to capitalise on this success. Because of this, many young designers started doing knitwear and subsequently selling from *The Design Centre*.

It got to the stage that they had to weed out the weaker designers, but obviously the stronger designers remained. A problem that arose with having too many of one type of designer in *The Design Centre* at the one time, is that it takes over and is off-putting to the potential customer not interested in knitwear. The other side of this is it prevents free competition as management decide that only a certain number of designers are allowed to do knitwear.

Wedding Dresses

The lack of space available continued to be a problem, both for display and purchase of wedding dresses at *The Design Centre*. Not least because many young women intending to buy a wedding dress required a couple of relatives to see them in their dress, a difficult task in a limited space. They also required special attention. Both for staff and space reasons, this was beginning to be a strain on *The Design Centre*. It was then realised that perhaps *The Design Centre* was not quite the place to buy your wedding dress. *The Design Centre* therefore decided to incorporate three units together for wedding dresses only. Two extra-sized dressing rooms were fitted to facilitate this, which took up much of the available space. The designers involved were *Sharon Hoey* under the label *Shed, Ciara* and *Brid Níhíll*.


Fig 23: Picture of *Lainey Keogh's* men's and women's knitted jumpers. Woman wears wool polyamide sweater £207. Early 1990's (exact date and source unknown) Wedding dresses were awkward also because customers were using *The Design Centre* as a means of looking at their choice of wedding dress and then subsequently arranging to meet the designers in their own personal workrooms. *The Design Centre* was therefore losing out on the sale. *Ciara* wedding dresses had their workrooms near *The Design Centre*, whereas *Sharon Hoey* had hers some distance away."This also posed", according to Ms Kavanagh, "problems as an appointment would be set up for a client for a fitting. *Sharon Hoey* would have to come all the way in to *The Design Centre* for this one client and they often may not turn up". This then proved to be a time-wasting exercise. The whole idea of using *The Design Centre* as a shop window and getting the sale in their workrooms did not benefit *The Design Centre*. "If the sales staff noticed this on the floor the designer in question would be tackled about it. If this situation persisted they would have to cancel the designers contract and let them just go", said Ms Kavanagh.

Menswear

Another venture, which was tried over the years was menswear, but it never quite worked. There have been approximately four or five menswear designers over the years. Back in the early days in the late 1980s, management actively looked for menswear designers in order to capitalise on the men who came in with their girlfriends to shop. It never really worked. Men tended to be too conscious about shopping in a predominantly female environment. *Lainey Keogh* managed to sell "her old style ladies jumpers" (Fig 23) to men according to Michelle Kavanagh. *Lainey Keogh* then had a menswear



section of jumpers which sold well at first but it just did not seem to catch on. It was the wrong atmosphere and men seemed to feel uncomfortable trying on clothes in *The Design Centre*.

Childrenswear

Childrenswear was another area that was tried but mainly in *The Galleria*. The main problem they experienced with this area of design is that it is a particularly competitive market. Department stores such as *Dunnes Stores* and *Penneys* have such a good reasonably priced range of childrenswear that it really is too hard for the designer to compete. It costs the designer nearly as much to make a child's outfit as it does to make an adult's. So the designers in *The Design Centre* found they had to price their garments too expensively for them to sell. *Glynis Robins* had a childrenswear section of jumpers priced around £50, in the late 1980s in *The Design Centre* which is really too expensive. As children grow out of their clothes so quickly there would not be a big market for such a product. So it remains a tiny part of her business at the moment.

Change of Management in The Design Centre

In relation to the management in *The Design Centre*, Nikki Creedon, the manageress, left in June of 1993 followed by the assistant manageress Shelly Corkery a month later. Both left because of a lack of adequate funding for improving the store interior and general apathy on behalf of the owners to change or invest in *The Design Centre*. Niki owns **"Havana"**, a very successful high fashion designer ladies store in Donnybrook, Dublin 4, but both managed it up until Shelley left in November 1997.



Winnie Cunningham, assisted by Jeanette McCloskey, then took over the running of *The Design Centre*. Unfortunately, they both left in quick succession in the summer of 1997. Ashling Kilduff now manages *The Design Centre*, running it with Lisa Hickey.

Michelle Kavanagh said that she left *Power Corporation* back in the summer of 1995, but she was asked to remain on overseeing *The Design Centre*, which she did. Eventually Ms Kavanagh left *The Design Centre* in the October of 1996.

"The *Powerscourt Shopping Centre* itself was sold, which included *elite corporate businesses*. The whole centre was sold in a huge management buy-out and I left at that stage because I had a concern about what were the long-term plans of the new owners. I did not want to be involved in something that might not be there in a year's time for whatever reason...there was not a commitment and so I was not happy to stay with it."

said Ms. Kavanagh.



Fig 24: Picture of *Helen Penny*, the public relations person responsible for *The Galleria* and *The Design Centre* from May 1984 to 1993. From January 1998 her contract has been renewed. *Image* magazine, 1980's (exact date unknown)

Chapter 3: Creating an Awareness of the Design Centre

INCREASING PUBLIC RELATIONS TO FURTHER AWARENESS

In its previous existence, *The I.F.D.C.* employed specific public relations personnel to handle the twice-yearly fashion shows. This was considered to be the most cost-effective way of drawing attention and creating an awareness of the venture. On first opening in *The Galleria*, fashion shows were lined up twice daily over a three-day period. The press show was at eleven in the morning and the public were invited to the one o'clock showing. As *The I.F.D.C.* at that time was located in a basement, special efforts had to be made to inform both press and public alike of its existence. So, the one o'clock fashion shows were specifically geared towards professional working women perhaps just passing by on their lunch hour. This they felt would help capture some of their potential clientele.

Initially when *The I.F.D.C.* started up, *Helen Penny* (Fig 24) was employed as PR on a yearly basis. *Wrangler* Jeans, *Penneys* and *Kilkenny Design* were some of *Helen Penny's* other accounts. Prior to this, she had sole PRO responsibilities for *Brown Thomas*, which she left in 1983. *Helen Penny* was brought on board to handle the launch and ongoing public relations for *The Design Centre* over a period of ten years.

At the beginning, Ms Penny recalls the "great enthusiasm rather than organisation," she experienced in the start-up. It was "great fun", and "it felt to be the beginning of something exciting and vital in promoting young Irish talent that did not have

Chapter 3: Chearing an Awaraness of the Design Centre

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the finances to set up on their own". Over the last four years (since 1994) *Caroline Kennedy* had been handling the public relations. She was employed only for two short periods in the year to deal with the fashion shows only. As of January 1998 Caroline Kennedy's public relations company's contract has ceased and *Helen Penny* has been re-employed once again from January 1998.

How The Design Centre was initially promoted

At the beginning, Ms Penny sold *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* "As a fun place to shop and support new Irish talent". Prices were not rock bottom but were value for money. It was the place to shop "for innovative and original fashion, in contrast to mass produced chainstore merchandise". Ms Penny "tried to broaden the appeal as much as possible, as women of all ages like to look individual. With so many different designs under one roof, it was like a kaleidoscope of choice with a high degree of individuality running through it".

So a central aspect that was capitalised on when promoting *The Design Centre* was its diverse nature. Its strength was that there were all sorts of clothes being sold. From classic to zany, traditional to modern and from leathers to denims.

No official marketing surveys were ever carried out according to any of the management in *The Design Centre*. Ms Penny believed that "it was a gut instinct by Robin Power that there needed to be a shop window for developing Irish fashion".

"The customer profile was basically young, but not to the exclusion of the older lover of fashion. The main aim was to offer women who wanted to wear Irish clothes, a selection of innovative fashion, in small quantities which were not mass runs". Helen



Penny explained. The vision of the public relations team in selling the initial concept of *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* was that it had to be taken seriously even though on the other hand it was a fun place to shop. This was the view that they wanted both the press and the public alike to receive. They also wanted them to see *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* as the number one showcase for quality and innovative Irish fashion.

In order to create a good public image one must work very closely with the leading fashion journalists, and media. Public relations had to ensure that the media had the necessary background information on all the designers. Stylists were encouraged to come into *The Design Centre* in order for them to be aware of what was in there. This would ensure the stylists including at least some designers in their future shoots. "Automatically the bigger designers would get more publicity, that's a fact of life, no one can control that", says Michelle Kavanagh. "This is due to their contacts in the media and with PR people". *Lyn-Mar*, for example, when starting out at first as a small designer, felt that she could not thank the media (and all the facets of the media) enough for all the help they had given her on the road to her success.

In order to keep up with the audience of women in the eighties in Ireland, "Irish magazines had to change", recalls Eddie Shanahan. "European magazines were coming in" in the early eighties, whetting the Irish market's already hungry appetites for fashion. *Image* magazine, which was set up in 1976, addressed this niche in the Irish market for Irish photographers, stylists and designers to comment on what the Irish fashion industry was doing. *IT* or *Irish Tatler*, *U* and then later **D-Side** entered the Irish market. These magazines all contained excellent references to what Irish and foreign designers were doing with their latest collections.

THE DESIGN CENTRE

Jeanette McCloskey

Powerscourt Townhouse Centre, Clarendon Street, Dublin 2. Telephone: 6795718 Fax: 6795863

Fig 25: The Design Centre's business card around 1992

The Design Centre

Powerscourt Townhouse Centre, Clarendon Street, Dublin 2. Telephone: (01) 6795718 Accounts: (01) 6795863

Fig 26: The Design Centre's business card around 1994



Fig 27: The Design Centre's shopping bag from around 1994.

The Design Centre Catalogues

Three catalogues have been produced so far for *The Design Centre*. Eight to twelve designers would each put in photographs of their work. This was compiled into book form and many thousands were printed and distributed in the centrefold of *Image Magazine*. Although this form of advertising was reasonably successful, it was felt that publicity from the press gained a wider audience. They found they received a more immediate response from the press articles. The last fashion shoot in **Image** was the autumn/winter 1995 collection of *Lyn-Mar* and *Miriam Mone's* clothes..

In the Appendix, there is an original copy of the first **Design Centre** catalogue produce by the **Powerscourt Townhouse Centre** in 1987.

The Design Centre's Business Cards and Shopping Bags

The first business card which I had collected during my freelance styling days (Fig 25) was in about 1992. The bag was plain with *"The Design Centre"* printed on it.

I received the second business card (Fig 26) at the *Shannon Design Show* on 14th October 1994. The aim of this fashion show was to give new young fashion designers recently graduated from colleges in Ireland, an opportunity to display their creations to interested businesses, buyers, and the public alike. It was the very first show of its kind and it was the concept of *RTÉ* who also televised it. The fashion show was partly sponsored by many Irish businesses, including *The Design Centre*.

It was also around this time in October 1994 that they produced their new shopping bag for *The Design Centre* (Fig 27). There was a seminar before the fashion show which gave various fashion businesses and financial institutions the opportunity to



Fig 28: Photograph taken by *Barry McCaul* showing two Irish models in *Cafe en Sein* on Dawson Street, Dublin in 1986. This shoot was initiated by Winnie Cunningham, ex-manageress of *The Design Centre*. The dynamic image has been used successfully on *The Design Centre*'s swing tags and shopping bags since1996.



Fig 29: The Design Centre's large shopping bag showing how the new image (Fig 28) was adapted for use. It has been reproduced on the shopping bag since 1996.



speak to individual young fashion designers. Winnie Cunningham and Jennette McCloskey were both there scouting for potential design talent which they believed might be suitable for *The Design Centre*.

Similarly in 1996 *The Design Centre* decided to update both their shopping bag again and their swing tag. They enlisted Barry McCall to take the photograph of two Irish models in *Café en Sein* on Dawson Street, Dublin. It has a very continental flavour, depicting two beautiful well-dressed young women busily chatting over a cup of coffee after shopping in *The Design Centre*. (*Fig 28 and fig 29*)

The manageress, Ashling Kilduff, has her own business card which is similar in layout to the previous cards. The typeface is more simplified and discreet with a more contemporary feel. But it is this new image that *The Design Centre* promotes very successfully for their clothes' swing tags and shopping bags. (Fig 30)

The Design Centre's Fashion Shows

It was considered extremely important that the overall concept of *The Design Centre* was promoted as a whole despite the diversity it promoted. The accumulated cost of the fashion shows were equally spread amongst the twenty-five designers for their first shows in 1984. It therefore averaged out at approximately £100 for the whole six fashion shows held in *The Galleria* for the autumn/winter collection in 1984. This included the entire cost of the press, invitations, public relations, photography and the fashion show. Management insisted on hiring the best professional photographers in Ireland at the time. The designers also had to have a professional fashion shoot consisting of at least two of their outfits before the fashion show.



Eddie Shanahan and his production team were always used for the fashion shows. The photographers varied, but initially Mike Bunn did the fashion shoots, others later included Tony Higgins and Brendan Bourke.

The bi-annual fashion shows normally took place as they still do in the first week in September and in mid-February. Two weeks before the fashion shows, the photographers are brought in to do the fashion shoots. For her last autumn/winter 1997 collection, *Lyn-Mar* paid £1,200 for the fashion show. This was for sixteen models whereas *Claire Garvey* told me she paid £400 for eight models. According to Lynn Elliot of *Lyn-Mar*, the average fashion shoot for one day costs between £2,500 and £3,000. The model alone costs £700 for a day. *Lyn-Mar* gets two of these shoots done every year before each fashion show. This she believes must be done for a designer of her calibre. *Claire Garvey* on the other hand shares the £1,000 a day fashion shoot with a friend to bring down her costs.

The shows exhibit spring and autumn collections. Essentially *The Design Centre* promotes itself as being an all-Irish retail entity, housing twenty-five Irish designers. The shows are deliberately the first shows of the season – this is tailored to maximise on publicity. Usually in late January and late August with the sales coming to an end, the press eagerly await the forthcoming new season's creations. This year's Spring/Summer 1998 Collections were held in Kilmainham on 12th February 1998. Four hundred tickets were issued free to their most reliable customers. Their list covers in excess of eight hundred clients.



The Models used in The Design Centre

There were two main model agencies in Dublin in 1984 – *Nan Morgan's* and *Geraldine Brand's*. Mike Bunn, the original photographer usually used *Geraldine Brand's* as she had more of the top models on her books. The models which he used for *The Irish Fashion Design Centre's fashion shoots* were the top models at the time in Dublin. Some of the models he used were Beverly Keegan, Hazel Kenny, Orla Nash, Evelyn Barry, Alison Doody, Sharon Bacon and Marie O'Leary. Mike Bunn remembers using the latter two in his fashion shoots for *The Design Centre* in the beginning, particularly.

The models used in the fashion shows were from Eddie Shanahan's model agency, called "The Agency". One or two models would usually come from London, the rest were Irish. Sixteen models in all were used. Marie Staunton and Laura Bermingham, two of Ireland's top models were always used from his agency.

Designers are allowed to use their own photographers and models but they had to show the results to *The Design Centre*'s management to see if the standard was acceptable.

The Sales in The Design Centre

On visits to London for fashion shows, management noticed retail outlets with an area designated all year round to sale stock. As they had an empty section at the back of the shop, they approached Louise Kennedy, who already rented substantial space there, asking her if she would be interested in renting it. They had heard that she was selling off her sample range in her workroom. This area worked very well, and was set up in 1994/95. This permanent sales area now includes most of all the main unit holders in *The Design Centre*.



Fig 31: Photograph of The Design Centre's sale window.

The actual end-of-season sales in *The Design Centre* are very important because they are widely known to have excellent genuine reductions (Fig 31). They have as much as 50% off in most cases, with other clothes being marked down to one-third off the original price. These sales bring in new clients and help broaden the customer base.

Like their competitors, *The Design Centre* start their winter sales straight after St Stephen's Day. In relation to their other sales in the summer, they would be the last to run theirs. This is due to the fact that tourists play a huge role in their business. They frequent *The Design Centre* en mass in June and July. For this reason their sale usually starts after July 25th. Whilst all the other shops start around the 13th of June. These extra five to six weeks make a significant difference to the designers.

The sales normally end just before the new season's collections come in. It is requested that all the sales stock is removed from *The Design Centre* prior to the fashion show.

The Late Late Fashion Show Awards

Apart from the twice yearly fashion shows staged by *The Design Centre* and the ensuing advertising, the biggest publicity vehicle in the year for *The Design Centre* has always been *The Late Late Fashion Show* awards. According to Mike Bunn (photographer) these awards "were initiated by Noelle Campbell Sharp", editor of *Social and Personal* magazine.

Public relations have to try and ensure that as many designers from *The Design Centre* are included in as many of the various categories on *The Late Late Fashion*



Show as possible. Generally, the public relations company have to work constantly at trying to get **The Design Centre** featured in the media, because "budgets did not permit any support advertising" said Helen Penny.

The Late Late Fashion Show is televised by RTÉ. This is the biggest fashion show to be held nation-wide in Ireland. It is hosted by Gay Byrne; Ireland's most acclaimed television broadcaster. The show is televised live and it gives the Irish public a chance to see Irish fashion designers at their best. The first show was held back in 1985. It ran for three years until they took a break in 1988. This was due to the fact "that in common with many businesses, the fashion business seemed to be a little depressed, a little in the doldrums, not much happening" said Gay Byrne to the audience of *The 1989 Late Late Fashion Show* award. He continued, "we bring you our presentation tonight from the RDS with great enthusiasm, great confidence and great optimism for the future."

This set a precedent for *The Late Late Fashion Show* awards to be held every second year since 1989. In its twelve-year history, many of the individual category winners and the overall winners have held or hold a unit in *The Design Centre*. *"The Late Late Fashion Show* awards were great, because the week after, our sales would just have shot up, it was brilliant exposure", Ms Kavanagh reported.



Chapter 4: A Profile of the Designers

PROFILING A SELECTION OF INFLUENTIAL FASHION DESIGNERS FROM THE DESIGN CENTRE

At The Late Late Fashion Show awards, The Design Centre has invariably won most of the categories. This includes the "overall winner" title, in four out of the last five consecutive shows. This is added to the fact that, without exception, there is resounding agreement from every facet of the Irish fashion industry that The Design Centre is a great success. Many of Ireland's top professionals in their field from Helen Cody as stylist, to Mike Bunn the photographer, Eddie Shanahan as model agent and consultant, to Robert O'Byrne, Irish Times fashion journalist, they all unanimously agree that The **Design Centre** has contributed quite substantially to Irish fashion design. It has housed most of Ireland's younger generation of top designers at some stage in their career. Many of the designers who remain in *The Design Centre* today have been with it since it began in May 1984. It also has to its credit the fact that more designers have started up their businesses from The Design Centre than any other outlet in Ireland. The designers themselves also unanimously agree that although the rents may be high, they are much less than what one would pay if one had to rent a shop in the centre of Dublin's shopping district.

The designers I have chosen to profile include **Sharon Hoey**, a wedding specialist, **Glynis Robins**, a ladies fashion and knitwear designer, **Lainey Keogh**, a designer of international renown, and **Late Late Fashion Show** winner **Lyn-Mar**. My selection of designers also covers both past and present members. This list also



Fig 32: This picture is an example of *Lyn-Mar*'s early work in *The Design Centre*. The model wears a cardigan and shawl. (*Sunday Tribune*, 29th October, 1989).



Fig 33: Lyn-Mar's unit in The Design Centre, which is situated right beside Mary Gregory's unit.

includes those that started their business from *The Design Centre* such as *Clare Garvey,* a hand-crafted fabric-blending specialist. This is contrasted by the more established designers like *Louise Kennedy* who already had a reputation prior to joining *The Design Centre*.

Lynn Elliott of Lyn-Mar

Considered "a great success story", a diligent hard worker, Nicky and Shelly told me how *Lyn-Mar* was "doing excellently now". *Lyn-Mar* consistently sold more than any other designer in *The Design Centre*. It

Lyn-Mar

was Lynn Elliott of Lyn-Mar who approached The Irish Fashion Design Centre showing them her own sample range of machine knits. Nikki Creedon and Shelly Corkery offered her some advice on The Design Centre's clientele and Lyn-Mar structured her designs accordingly.

Lyn-Mar specialises in machine knitted ladies dresses, jumpers and overgarments. Her strengths are her choice of yarns and her use of colour and texture in her designs. (Fig 32).

With no formal training Lynn Elliott has become one of Ireland's foremost designers and one of *The Design Centre*'s biggest successes. (Fig 33) She went into business with her partner Marie Tutor, in a co-operative back in 1983/84. *The Galleria* was the first outlet that she had stocked and over the years has built up to supplying forty different shops nation-wide. She "did not make a penny", she told me, in her first five



years in business. She then discovered the yarns at tradefairs around Europe and her profits have increased ever since.

Lyn-Mar held a unit in *The Design Centre* virtually from the beginning and certainly credits *The Design Centre* hugely in the success of her business. She won the 1993 knitwear *Late Late Fashion Show award* and then the "Evening Wear" category in 1995. In 1997 she won the "After 6" award and was then crowned the "overall winner" (Fig 34). She will be showing her latest creations in February 1998 being one of the lucky eight picked out of one hundred and eighty others to show in London's Fashion week. Already exporting to the States, Canada, Belgium and Britain, she is considering *Sacs* in New York as her next venture.

Lyn-Mar has done exceptionally well since 1996. In December 1997 she broke all **The Design Centre**'s records for sales grossing £52,000.

Claire Garvey

After receiving her degree from **NCAD** in 1992, *Claire Garvey* completed an MA in Costume Design in Russia. In 1994 she set up her own label from *The Design Centre*. She showed them a sample range of ten garments and



subequently rented a rail. Eventually she graduated to a full unit. Originally **Claire Garvey** sold only to **The Design Centre**, but found that gradually she began supplying other shops around Ireland, most of whom contacted her from seeing her clothes in **The Design Centre**'s fashion show. She found that as she is now "supplying more people"



she can no longer supply as much to *The Design Centre*. So she has now gone back to renting a rail in the Innovative Section.

Claire Garvey has found her experience with *The Design Centre* to be very positive. She found Nicky and Shelly both helpful and encouraging, especially as she was just starting up her own business from *The Design Centre* They advised her what would sell, and what would not, in her initial collection. She also supplied *Sé Sí Progressive.* This is a small forum for designers starting out. But with their very young clientele and 100% mark-up she felt "you cannot make any money from it, and *The Design Centre* has more wealthy clients." She felt that especially when Nicky and Shelly managed *The Design Centre* "they had an awful lot more contacts and an awful lot more people came in because of them." They were particularly good at telling her what "was selling" very well and "to do more of it". The biggest "benefit of *The Design Centre* were the shows", they are "quite cheap in comparison to doing your own fashion show". Also "the publicity, the fact that a lot of stylists go in there", all make *The Design Centre* worthwhile, this is what you are paying for.

Personally speaking, I have had some experience of working with *Claire Garvey's* clothes. From 1992 to 1994 I worked as a freelance stylist for *IT* and *Social and Personal* magazines, and during this time, used some of *Claire Garvey's* range for a centrefold fashion shoot (Fig 35 and Fig 36). I found The Design Centre a very good place to go for styling shoots. For one, they had up to the minute innovative Irish designs. Secondly I found it easy to select from a wide range of different types of clothes.

Claire Garvey intends to stay in the *innovative section*. The full unit requires far too much stock which is difficult to maintain, as she has only one other person working for her, sewing full-time.

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Claire Garvey mends to star in the *Innovative* section. The full chit requires far too

her sewing to time





Fig 37: Wedding dress designed by *Sharon Hoey* - the style for which she became highly sought after in 1988/1989. Bo-Peep style dress in cotton organdie trimmed with satin ribbon and featuring a corset, £395 approx.*Sunday Independent* 1989, exact date unknown).

Claire Garvey would be one of the youngest and newest designers to be included in **The Design Centre**. Her work consists of mostly hand treated velvets and combine an unusual assortment of coloured wool and velvet ensembles. Betty Hall (stylist)and Mike Bunn (photographer) both said of Claire Garvey's creations that they "always love it, simply because it's colourful...it's a bit theatrical...she's so individual."

Sharon Hoey

After studying fashion in the **Grafton Academy, Sharon Hoey** asked Michelle Kavanagh if she could rent a small unit in the **William Elliott Centre.** She shared a unit there with *Mareike Von Engelbrechten.*

SHARON HOEY

It was *Sharon Hoey* that Michelle Kavanagh credits as having helped her arrive at her concept of *The Design Centre*. "I was a founder member of *The Design Centre*", said *Sharon Hoey*. She had also a "fairly ongoing and developing wholesale business around the country and that was the one I was concentrating on, more so than *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* in the beginning".

Sharon Hoey initially designed separates and suits for women. She then began designing eveningwear and this led her to designing bridalwear. Her bridalwear became highly sought after in Ireland, particularly in the late 1980s, and well into the 1990s. (Fig 37) Because of this she finally decided to specialise exclusively in bridalwear. Winning many awards in Ireland, she won *The Late Late Fashion Show's* "bridal" section in


1993 which gained her great publicity. She designed at first under her own label, and then whilst in *The Design Centre* she designed a second collection under the label "Shed".

Sharon Hoey thought the whole **Design Centre** concept "was quite a novel idea". She "actually turned out reasonable figures", in **The Galleria**. The rent at the time in 1984 was £60 plus 20% approximately of the turnover for a 40 square ft unit. Although this was expensive "it was better than wholesale, you were getting a slightly better return than if you wholesaled it out, or if you were selling to another shop". **The Design Centre** and the designers "built up a reputation and we all went from "strength to strength", she recalls.

Sharon Hoey remained in **The Design Centre** "from the media point of view. I felt when it had moved to the **Powerscourt** that it was quite good. We would have got a lot of coverage in magazines like **Image** and **IT** and certain papers."

Sharon Hoey left The Design Centre in 1995. (Fig 38), This was in order to fully concentrate on her own clientele, which come from her successful work cum showrooms in Pembroke Street, Dublin 4. "I miss the profile", Sharon Hoey tells me about The Design Centre – "I'm having my first show in years in February and I'm quite nervous about it. What I want to do now is export."



Fig 39: Photograph of an early *Lainey Keogh* sweater, the style of which she became highly renowned for in the late 1980's. The model wears a playful colourful jumble in a crochet patchwork tunic. £295.95. October 1990 (source unknown).



Fig 40: Lainey Keogh with Marion Gunn O'Connor from OTOKIO, to whom Lainey Keogh credits as having "discovered" her. Image magazine. (exact date unknown). Photograph by Colm Henry.

Lainey Keogh

LAINEY KEOGH

Working as a lab technician in Jervis Street Hospital, after qualifying as a microbiologist, *Lainey Keogh* initially started knitting as a favour for a friend. She went on to assist *Michael Mortell* with his 1984 collection, and subsequently rented a unit in *The Galleria*. "We are original members of *The Design Centre*" she told me. (Fig 39) "Her basic philosophy of style is simple and understated with the emphasis on comfort and traditional design", reported Barbara McMahon, *Head to Toe*, December 4th 1990.

In 1985 Lainey Keogh won the knitwear award at The Late Late Fashion awards. She won the Christian Lacroix award which is the Prix de Couer in 1989 in Monte Carlo. In the same year she won The Late Late Fashion Show "After six/Weddings", section.

With no formal training *Lainey Keogh* has built up her knitwear business to the stage that she now employs three hundred knitters. She refuses any additional orders at present in order to keep her quality high. "Marian Gunn O'Connor of "OTOKIO" fame discovered us", (Fig 40) She explains and adds "*The Design Centre* concept is completely amazing, we learned a lot". She gives it her full supprt - "I hope it continues its successful story especially for the benefit of all future talent emerging in fashion/textiles in Ireland." *Lainey Keogh* left The Design Centre in 1992/93", according to her assistant (2 February 1998, by telephone).



Fig 42: Naomi Campbell bears all in a spider's web knitted dress by Lainey Keogh at her London fashion show collection in 1997. (Ireland on Sunday, 15th February, 1998).

Fig 41: Kate Moss dons a Lainey Keogh knitted dress at the London Fashion Collections 1997. (Hello magazine, 11th October 1997)

Lainey Keogh exports to *Browns, Harvey Nichols* and *Joseph*. For spring 1998 "she will have five windows in *Sacs* in New York", according to Sharon Hoey. At the moment she has the highest profile of any fashion designer in Ireland. "*Lainey* is probably doing the best of everybody", Sharon Hoey said.

Lainey Keogh's garments are frequently shown in Vogue and Hello magazines (Fig 41). In fact, Hello covered her latest collection telling us that, "the covetable knitwear from...Lainey Keogh...has now taken on almost cult status", and adds that it was a "winning show". (Hello magazine, 11th October 1997, page 94) (Fig 42).

Louise Kennedy

"Her designs appeal particularly to professional women, who appreciate the fine tailoring and attention to finish in these suits and separates." **Cara** Magazine, Robert O'Byrne Jan/Feb 1998, pg 36)



After completing foundation year in *The College of Marketing and Design, Louise Kennedy* trained in *The Grafton Academy.* She set up her own business in 1984 shortly after leaving college. Her family owned a drapery department store in Thurles in Co Tipperary, where she acquired her initial business skills. Another successful Kennedy is Louise's sister, *Caroline Kennedy*, who was responsible for the Public Relations in *The Design Centre* from 1995 to 1997. *Louise Kennedy* was one of the first young



Fig 43: This is an example of *Louise Kennedy*'s earlier work. White Linen Raglan shoulder line with narrow tapered cuff trousers, and linen shirt with co-ordinating cotton T-Shirt.
Example of *Louise Kennedy*'s famous hand printed silk scarf. The scarf detail matches the top and is dyed to match. (*The Sunday Tribune*, 19th May 1991).



Fig 44: An example of *Louise Kennedy*'s excellent tailoring for which she is celebrated. Beth four button jacket, £359, *Isabel* trousers, £189. (*The Tribune* magazine, 23rd March 1997). designers to rent a unit in *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* in 1984 and has remained with them ever since. (Fig 43)

The Design Centre has always been known for its excellent tailors and many would believe Louise Kennedy to be top of this list. (Fig 44)

"Louise clearly designs for a market that she has cultivated and enticed by using only the most luxurious fabrics as in her wool and silk blend jackets. Her eveningwear collection evolves from the most stunning fabrics on offer" (*Barbara McMahon, Head to Toe,* 4th December 1990).

Michelle Kavanagh said

"for value for money I think *Louise Kennnedy* is as good as an *Armani*, her finish is remarkable, she's able to compete in that market".

Louise Kennedy won the category for "Suits" and also became the "overall winner" in 1989 on The Late Late Fashion Show awards. In 1991 she won both the "Coats" and "Suits" award. She continued to win the suits award in 1993 and in the same year went on to win The Satzenbrau Designer of the year award.

"The publicity that followed her outfit for President Robinson's inauguration a year later consolidated her position as an established front line designer" (*Deirdre McQuillian - Image - December 1996, page 70*).

1994 saw *Louise Kennedy's* "successful expansion into English markets...she has a good home market and has had London outlets from the late 1980s she has shown with the British Design Group since 1992" (**McCrum**, 1996, page 66). Louise Kennedy's



Fig 45: An example of *Louise Kennedy*'s silk devore wraps for which she is also well known, Beth long-line blue jaquared jacket, £359, devore wrap, £180 (*The Tribune* magazine, 23rd March 1997)



Fig 46: Illustrations of the intended uniform for the Aer Lingus cabin crew, designed by *Louise Kennedy.* (*Cara* magazine, January/February 1998).

designs are sold in Ireland nation-wide (Fig 45). Her clothes are now available in some fifty-five British outlets", since 1996 she has exported to many of the "high profile stores such as", *Austin Read, Fenwicks, Fortnum and Masons, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Libertys* and *Simpsons.* (*Cara magazine*, Robert O'Byrne, Jan/Feb 1998, page 36).

Louise Kennedy's most recent accolade is the fact that she "has been commissioned to create a new look for Aer Lingus cabin crew", (Fig 46) (Cara magazine, Robert O'Byrne, Jan/Feb 1998, page 36).

Centre. This unit lines the main throughway in a wall of windows (Fig 47) enabling Louise Kennedys Designs to be seen over and above the other designers.

Glynis Robins



Glynis Robins recalls her experience in The Irish Fashion Design Centre as

"Brilliant, it was absolutely fantastic in the beginning, for all the time it was in **The Galleria** really. Yeah, there was always loads of coverage and we had big fashion shows. I mean it was very new too, it was a completely different thing. It was a different concept. It was great for somebody who wanted to have their clothes out there and yet they didn't want to have a shop of their own, they didn't have all the overheads and headaches that went with it."

designs are cord in trevers nation-wide (Eg 45). Her dothes are now avaitable in some http://we.Brites.outuom: since 1956 sou has exported to many of the 'high arc 'he stants such as : Austim Road: Ferrwicks, Formum and Masons, Harrods, Harvey Michols, Libertys and Simpsons. (Care mediculo: Robert O'Byrne, Jar/Feb 1998, page 76) Lutitsety Konnedy's incort recent, accolade is the fact that sho inversioned commissioned to meate a new look for Aer Lingus cabin drew", (Fig 46) (Care megazine

Louise Kennedy continues to sel from the main front largest unit in The Design Centre. This unit lines the main throughway in a wall of windows (Fig 4.7) enabling Louise Kennedys Designs to be seen over and above the other designers.

Glynis Robins

S*tynis Robbus* reu do her experience in **The Irish Fashion** Design Centre as

Britiani Hous absolutely fantastic in the beginning for all the time uncault The Dational reality "have there was always loads of coverage and we used big fouries shows of mean it was very new too, "it was a completely different bigs, at was a different concept. It was great for symebody who wanted to have their on their out there and yet they dida't wort to have a shop of high own mey orditineve all the overheads and headaches that went with it."



Fig 47: Photograph shows *Louise Kennedy*'s unit in *The Design Centre*. She has the largest area there and also uses half the main front windows for display purposes, leaving her full unit very visible to passers-by in *The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. Red dot indicates *Louise Kennedy*'s wall of windows.



In the beginning, according to Glynis Robins, *The Irish Fashion Design Centre* gave her practical support "they would bring in people to help give us advice from time to time. I found that helpful."

When The *I.F.D.C.* "moved to the *Powerscourt* I had at that stage moved from the basement of *The Galleria* into my own shop," in The *William Elliott Centre*. After two years there she moved back into *The Design Centre*, now housed in the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre*. (*Fig 48*).

Glynis Robins won the "knitwear" section on *The Late Late Fashion Show awards* in 1989. She then left *The Design Centre* in 1994/95, to fully concentrate on her own boutique and workrooms in Dalkey in Dublin (Fig 49). She firmly believes that *The Design Centre* largely contributed to her success,

"Oh absolutely, I don't think I would have had the confidence to kind of go out there myself...**The Design Centre**...definitely has done a lot for me...they would sort of force you to go in for all the competitions going like **The Late Late Fashion Show**, that certainly puts your name out there. It's free publicity, The **Late Late Fashion Fashion** Awards, you couldn't buy that sort of publicity."



Conclusion

"By the end of the 1980's Ireland's top fashion designers had made their mark on the international fashion world, and many more had built up strong national reputations, which in most cases would expand in the 1990s." (*McCrum, 1996, Page 79*)

Without question **The Design Centre** fulfilled its initial intentions. That was to offer new up-and-coming fashion designers the opportunity of having their creations in a high street outlet with a prestigious address. The designer could then reap the benefits from this without the headache of running a business themselves.

Robert O'Byrne, **The Irish Times**' fashion writer, firmly believes that **The Design Centre** has helped both the fashion industry and designers in Ireland since its inception thirteen years ago.

"It did provide an outlet to a lot of designers who wouldn't be able to afford a place of their own. When it started selling, there were very few places which would stock unknown designers. Secondly...it helped raise a profile because it was a very large presence...and made the idea of Irish designers more visible within the country and specifically within Dublin...By being associated with *The Design Centre* designers automatically acquired a cachet and that obviously benefited them because it meant consumers would come back again.

The quality of the actual pieces, the clothing itself had to be up to scratch too, it's not just enough in any circumstances to have a name. You got a name usually because what you do is good."

Robert O'Byrne believes.

From my many varied interviews, I have gathered that *The Design Centre* seems to be somewhat in decline as we head towards the year 2000. Both Eddie Shanahan and

Conclusion

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REVENUE SERVER DUVERUES

From a , many varied interviews. I have gathered that The Design Centre seems to be somewhat in decine as we head towards the year 2000. Both Eddie Shanahan and Francis McDonagh feel it should be closed down and totally revamped. "It's old, dated, not up with the times", says Betty Hall, (stylist). "It should be made a far more agreeable place for men to shop in, with their partners" Mike Bunn believes. But *Lynn Elliott* explained that "profits have never been affected in *The Design Centre*. They are going steadily up". This makes sense or why else would one hold a unit in there, and undoubtably the units are always in demand. The bottom line is that it is an expensive venture, but any rents in the heart of a prestigious shopping district are going to be high.

The Design Centre is under reconstruction literally as I write. The plans are in the pipeline. But despite further questioning, **The Design Centre** management and *Lynn Elliott* will not reveal what these future plans are. "All will be revealed in good time" *Lynn Elliott* responds.

The designers feel they would like a plusher, more luxurious service in keeping with their main competitors, *Diffusion, Havana* and *Khan* in Dublin. "Red carpet, comfy couches, coffee machines should all be installed", *Lynn Elliott* feels. These suggestions are all valuable and I'm reliably informed that management of the *Powerscourt Townhouse Centre* intend to take them on board. The competition in Dublin, especially with the new *Jervis Centre* and with all the new English shops is extensive. And *The Design Centre* will undoubtably move with the times to take advantage of this current economic boom.

The Design Centre has greatly influensed fashion design in Ireland. Most of the designers who were in **The Design Centre** at some stage of their career, believe that **The Design Centre** has attributed to the success of establishing their fashion design business.

Franc's McDenegtrifect it should be crosed down and totally renamps of the olduridated in this upper location is a Geny Hall (shrint). "It should be made a far moth approache plane for mention and their partners. Mike Buna believes. But firm Elevit explained that forofits have never been affected in *The Design Centre*. They are going steadily up?" This makes never been affected in *The Design Centre*. They are going undout tably the units are classical on why elas would one total a cart is an appeared would one total a cart is steadily up?" This makes sense on why elas would one total a cart is the sense or why elas would one total a cart is there, and a venture, but any make a classys in domand. The bottom Plant is that it is an appeared in *The Design Centre* is under reconstruction therably as from a size of the plants are in the plant and the plants are under reconstruction (therably as from a largement and the plants) as from a size of the plants are in the plant and the plants are under reconstruction (therably as from a largement and the plants) are up to be basis.

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"In some ways **The Design Centre** was there to educate people...When it opened it did one wonderful thing which was to give new life to the **Powerscourt Townhouse** and that certainly was beneficial, it was very smart and original at the time because not many things such as that existed. **The Design Centre** when it first opened in **The Galleria**, was quite a big deal because it was so long ago and in those days the notion of shopping centres didn't exist really in Ireland certainly. So to go to a place which was smartly done over with a lot of intimate well finished units was quite special...It was done quite nicely there was chrome and marble used throughout. It was meant to look expensive and it was meant to suggest that what was being sold there was rather smart. I think it has been very successful." Robert O'Byrne of The Irish Times explained.

The Design Centre has helped to develop fashion consciousness and designer awareness in Ireland. It has also helped bring Irish fashion designers to a world-wide stage. In addition, **The Design Centre** has assisted designers in getting started and to develop their business and reputations. It is vital therefore to document this important episode in Irish history.

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Interviewee Location Date	Miriam Mone (Fashion Designer) Central Hotel, Dublin 2 11 October 1997
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Location	Central Hotel, Dublin 2
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Interviewee	Betty Hall (fashion stylist)
Location	By telephone and fax
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20 October 1997

Date

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(All interviews were conducted by Orfhlaith N/ Mhordha).

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Shelly Corkery (Ex-manager The Design Centre) Movema Literations, Dublin 20 October 1997

Interviewee	Mary Gregory (Fashion designer)
Location	By telephone
Date	20 October 1997
Interviewee	Michelle Kavanagh (Founder of The Design Centre)
Location	Sorrento Terrace, Dalkey, Co Dublin
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Interviewee	Helen Penney (Public Relations for The Design Centre)
Location	By telephone and fax from London
Date	31 October 1997
Interviewee	Ashling Kilduff (present manager of The Design Centre)
Location	The Powerscourt Townhouse Centre
Date	3 November 1997
Interviewee	Karan O' Rourke (fashion designer & part-time lecturer in NCAD)
Location	National College of Art and Design (Fashion Department)
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Interviewee	Sharon Hoey (Bridalwear specialist)
Location	19 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2 (workrooms)
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Interviewee Location Date	Frances McDonagh (Head of Fashion & Textiles in NCAD) and Angela Woods (Head of Design in NCAD) National College of Art and Design 8 December 1997
Interviewee	Mr. O'Sullivan, (Lecturer in Economics in the College of Marketing and Design)
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Mary Gregory (F ashion de signer)	Interviewee
Michelle Kava <mark>nagh</mark> (Founder of The Design Centre)	Interviewee
Helen Penney (Public Relations for The Design Centre)	Interviewee
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Appendix

1. Catalogue - *The Design Centre, Powerscourt Townhouse Centre,* Clarendon Street, Dublin 2. Date 1989.

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Catalogue – The Besign Centre, Powerscount Townhouse Sentre, Clarendon Street. Diversio State 1989

THE DESIGN CENTRE

Powerscourt Townhouse Centre, Clarendon Street, Dublin 2.



Deborah Veale

Deborah Veale is a prizewinning graduate of Fashion Design at the National College of Art & Design, with three years' experience as Design Assistant to Nicky Wallace of the Nicky Wallace International Clothing Company. This entailed assistance with fabric sourcing and co-ordination in conjunction with designing ranges for the international market.

This is Deborah's second range for the Design Centre. Her main objective for the immediate furture is to capture the imagination of the Irish fashion consumer through a range which allows for an expression of the individual. Building on this, she aims to capitalise on the opportunities represented by 1992 and the establishment of an integrated European market, through export links to several of those individual markets.









mariad whisker

Since setting up her business in Dublin in 1984, Mariad Whisker has achieved an outstanding reputation as a designer of quality high fashion women's wear. Her collections over the seasons have maintained a standard worthy of international appeal. She has been consistent in her use of exquisite fabrics, particularly high quality wools, Irish tweeds and Irish linens.

This consistency has been reflected in the acclaim she has enjoyed through winning several of the top awards for fashion design in Ireland. In 1985 she won the best suit category in the Late Late Show 'Designer of the year' awards. The following year she won the overall designer of the year award for her 1986 Winter Collection based on an Amish theme.

In August '88 Mariad Whisker won two out of three caregories in the wool secretariat awards for wool garments of the year – the best dress section and also the best coat section. Also in '88 Mariad Whisker exported her Winter Collection to New York and Canada. In '89 Mariad Whisker won the Fil d'Argent Linen Award for her Spring/Summer '89 collection and this was closely followed by Mariad winning the Satzenbrau Designer of the Year. Mariad continues to export to Canada and New York and hopes to have her next collection available in Europe in 1990.







Una

Una graduated with a degree in Fashion Design from the N.C.A.D. in 1987.

She designs a full range of contemporary womens seperates including knitwear and evening wear.

Una has sold to 14 of the top speciality designer stores across the U.S.A. and Canada.

Her own retail outlet will be opening in central London in mid-February.







LAINEY KEOGH

Lainey Keogh's brilliantly imaginative knitwear has taken her to the forefornt of the Irish fashion world and has been featured extensively in the international fashion press.

Her designs have been an important influence on the regeneration of Ireland's world renowned knitwear industry.

Her designs have been awarded the Late Late Show's Knitwear Designer of the Year Award, International Wool Secretariat Award, 1st Runner-up to Fil Argent and "Le Prix de Coeur' from Christian Lacroix in the International Linen Awards, Monaco.

Lainey Keogh is one of the founder members of the Design Centre.







SHARON HOEY

Sharon Hoey studied Design at the Grafton Academy for 3 years. In 1984 she started her own business and joined The Design Centre the following year. In the first 2 years of business Sharon designed clothes for every occasion while discovering her speciality and what area of fashion she most enjoyed.

Shortly after opening, the demand grew for Sharon's evening and occasion wear, so in the last eighteen months Sharon decided to specialise in cocktail, evening gowns and bridal wear.

In Autumn 1988 Sharon launched a wholesale collection of evening wear with such success that in Spring 1989 the 'Sharon Hoey' Wedding Dress collection was available wholesale for the first time. Now it's possible to buy 'Sharon Hoey' cocktail evening and special wedding dress collection throughout the country.

The Autumn 1989 collection is all silk – Taffetta satin , velvet, chiffon and organza. In particular the emphasis is on braiding, beading and sequine ware.

When designing for an individual Sharon pays attention to the colouring, figure and personality of the client in order to design a dress that is stunning and most important comfortable to wear.

Over the past few years Sharon has built up a clientel of private customers who enjoy wearing her designs because they appreciate the luxury of glamorous fabrics and who feel unique and confident when wearing a 'Sharon Hoey" design.







<u>Ioui</u>se Kennedy

Louise Kennedy established her design company in 1984, having completed her studies at the College of Marketing and Design and the Grafton Academy. She has built a reputation around uncluttered, tailored and always wearable clothes – which are extremely flattering and easy to wear. Each season her collection evolves through the use of superior quality fabrics – pure new wools. cashmere silks, linens and cottons. Her collections are always sensitive to changing fashion – yet carry their own distinctive hallmarks. Coats and suits form the backbone of each collection and she has received a Late Late Fashion Award for her coats. This company now exports to many retail companies throughout the U.K., Germany, Canada, Australia and Japan.







Glynis Robins won the Irish section of the Eurofashion and then representing Ireland came second overall in Europe. She also won the Special Award from the Late Late Show in 1987.

Her knitwear designs come from Celtic culture and "Aran Stitches" combined in a totally unusual way.

She only works in natural yarns and fabrics. As well as having a strong home base she exports successfully to U.S.A., Japan and Great Britain.





MARY GREGORY

A founder member of the Irish Fashion Design Centre in 1984. Mary is a contemporary but classical designer.

Her emphasis are on beautifully cut clothes in 100% natural fabrics. Cashmeres, wool venetians, linens, silk chiffons. Her designs are paradoxically simple with unusual touches and details. She concentrates on superb tailoring with hand sewn detail as each of her garments are individually made and attended to.

Mary has built up a regular clientel because her look is instantly identifiable. Each season her range is designed from a single concept using five unusual colours. Her clothes are available through The Design Centre and she is exporting to America and Canada.







Lynn-Mar

Lyn Elliot is the name behind the Lyn Mar Knitwear lable. Lyn started designing 3 years ago and commenced her first venture with The Design Centre. Though conservative, her range of both hand and machine knits cater for the customer looking for something a little different.

Lyn's collection is very flexible with flattering unstructured styles in both cropped and oversized sweaters and also a more classic Aran look.

Lyn designs excellent knitwear constantly experimenting with new wools and yarns.









Tony has been involved in the fashion industry for about 18 years having studied at the Grafton Academy and through the years has worked with renowned names such as the late Jack Clarke and Patrick Howard.

His love for clean tailored lines and classic looks spurred him to create his own range which he first showed three years ago.

The theme for the coming season is the timeless classic co-ordinating look of tweeds and fine wools, and that something special for after six.









HOT DOT

Hot Dot Knitwear was set up approximately two years ago by designer Dorothy Ronan.

Since then it has become an established and successful label on the home and on the export market. Only the finest yarns are selected, including mixtures of a 100% cotton, wool, mohair, alpaca, angora and silk and these are combined to create a new range of designs, shapes and colours every season.

The Hot Dot label appeals to a wide range consumer market. A new range of sheepskins, leathers and suedes is presently being launched under the label bodyrock.



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Marieke was born in Germany and moved to Ireland with her family at an early age.

Having completed her three year studies at The Grafton Academy of Fashion Design she set up her own business selling wedding dresses and a variety of evening wear.

She joined The Design Centre when it opened in 1984 and here she launched her first daywear collection.

Marieke works with linens, cottons and silks. Her range is suitable for all ages and prices are most competitive.







PAISSING QINK QTD.

Carmel Carroll spent 3 years as a successful graphic designer before entering the fashion industry finding graphics too restricting.

Initially involved in the production of printed and hand printed fabrics, this stemmed a thriving success story in the design and manufacture of day and evening wear.

With the Design Centre since its origin, Missing Link Ltd. with Carmel Carroll has proved to be a distinctive and unique innovation. This is clearly substantiated by consistently well designed and marketable collections plus the introduction of a second label "Carmel Carroll" which brought to the fore the diverse design ability of this company headed by Carmel Carroll.

Missing Link/Carmel Carroll comprises of a wide range of fabrics and garment design including the renowned jerseys and cottons of the Missing Link collections to the tailored and structured collections of the Carmel Carroll Label.







Having read law at UCD, Michelle joined the Irish Tourist Board, working in London and Dublin in public relations. She then worked in FIne Art and antiques and started making clothes as a hobby. She has always been passionately interested in fabric and textile design. Michelle started her career as a fashion designer at the Galleria and has been at Powerscourt for the past two years.

Michele loves to work with natural fabrics, using Irish linens for her Spring/Summer and fine wools for Autumn/Winter.







Pat Yom

Pat Young finished her Degree at the University of Ulster, Belfast in 1986. Before establishing her own company in 1988 she worked as a Freelance Designer in London, Germany and Hong Kong.

Earlier this year she represented the U.K. at the International Linen Festival, Monte Carlo.

Favouring softly tailored separates in natural fabrics, she is currently showing her 2nd collection for Autumn/Winter '89.





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