Solstice

Issue 67

Nana Ennou *by* Savannah Angela

TOD'S


JIL SANDER
THE CANNOLO BAG DOCUMENTED BY ROE ETHRIDGE, LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM
JUNE 2024


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Solstice Magazine mainly focuses on photographic editorials made by creatives in the fashion industry, but also exhibits work such as illustrations and written editorials.

All work in this issue has been specially created for Solstice and is exclusive to the magazine.

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Editor's Letter

Issue 67 of Solstice has been a pretty easy one to produce compared to normal. We have published editorials that we have had lined up for this issue for several months. On the contrary, we have also published an editorial that came in at the last minute, which replaced an editorial which we were waiting for the finished credits for and didn't get them in time. We are an international magazine however the majority of our readers and followers are based in North America, Europe and Northern Asia, therefore we skew more towards whatever seasonal trends are prevalent in the northern hemisphere. This issue is the last one this year that is to be fully spring/summer. In Europe and North America it has already started to turn more autumnal, and the days are starting to shorten, with nights creeping ever closer into the day. Here in London, this past week has been completely cloudy with spells of rain, and I already miss the hot sunny days that we had just a few days ago.

The cover story was shot by Savannah Angela in the Aeolean Islands, off the northern coast of Sicily, Italy. The editorial is very simple, with a focus on 4 things: the female form, location, simple styling, and light & shadow. We wouldn't usually go for such a simple editorial for a cover story, as we usually prefer cover stories to be a bit more sophisticted in terms of the styling, however this time we thought its summery feel and beautiful aesthetics would make for a wonderful cover for the last of our spring/summer issues. We think the cover itself looks fantastic and I'm sure you'll agree.

I'd like to thank all the contributors for this issue; and indeed all the contributors that have provided us with their wonderful work over the past 10 years of this magazine's existence (we celebrated our 10th anniversary 2 months ago). We truly are nothing without them. I pride this magazine on being a collective effort that is shaped by our contributors' hard work. The magazine is just a vessel for showcasing their incredible work and I cannot be prouder of how we have grown together with our contributors.

Our next issue will be Issue 68, and will be much more Autumn/Winter focused, and we are already working on some excellent editorials for that. In the meantime I hope you enjoy going through this issue of the magazine, a lot of hard work has gone into it and we are very proud of the platform we are giving creatives.

Sebastian Santa Maria, ***Founder/Editor-in-Chief of Solstice***

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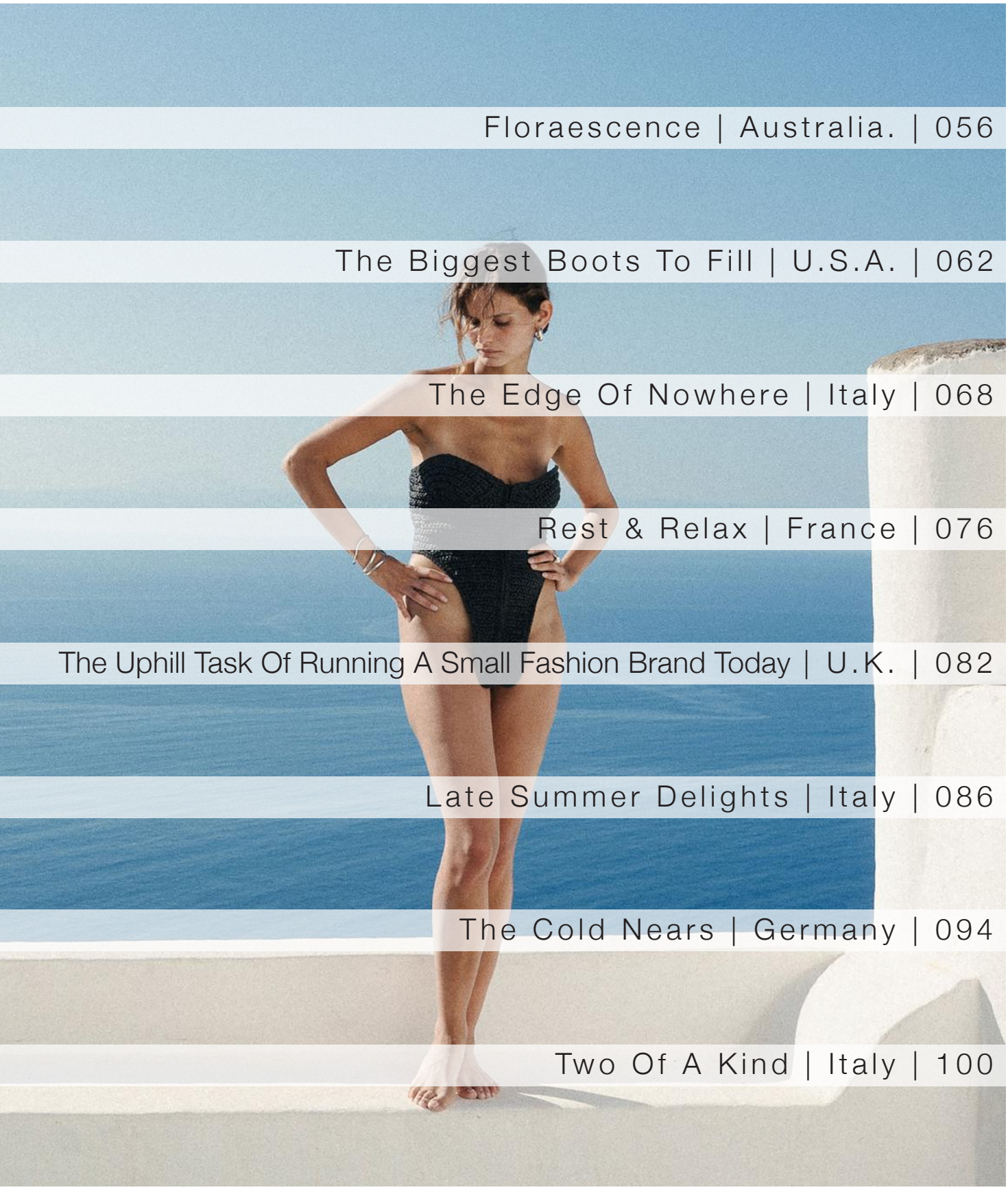


Take Me Home

Photographer: Basile Crespin

Stylist: Rosy Vassallo

Make Up Artist: Rafael Pita

Hair Stylist: Miki Sato

Model: Abigail Sex @ Titanium Management

Dress **Maison Mourcel**

Coat **Jeanne Cigdem**
Bag **Samuel Bemmer**
Shoes **Dolce & Gabbana**

Top & Trousers **Christopher Zuccho**

Sunglasses **Prada**
Top **Maison Mourcel**
Bag **Valextra**

Sunglasses, Bag, Skirt & Shorts **Eleni Paneta**
Earrings **Prada**

COOL AS YOU LIKE

Photographer: Carty Caruso

Stylist: Tuesdai Win

Make Up Artist: Sara Jade

Hair Stylist: Khashely Cantrell

Photographer's Assistant: Natalio Williams

Models: Christina Joanna Sawicki @ Wilhelmina Models NYC & Tenille Joy Sokolow @ Signed World

Top **Layana Aguilar**
Shorts **Okimmi by Simi D**
Boots **Dr. Martens**

Dress **Tiscareno**

Dress **Sarlea Mah**

Bodysuit **Nazarene**

Dress **Valentino**

Bolero **2Madison Avenue**
White Top **Diane Von Furstenberg**
Dress **David's Road**
Shoes **Balmain**

Dress **MiriMari**

Defying Tall Orders

Exploring the historical progression of Western women's body ideals and height, with my perspective as a published petite model fighting for diversity in the industry.

By Tiffany Taylor

One sentence I hear far too often is “You’re too short to be a model!”. My height - a whopping 5'3 (160cm) is considered well below the ‘requirement’ for a model. Yet, after more than seven years modelling in the industry, I have defied expectations and model full-time.

When looking across the several top modelling agencies under their application page, the overwhelming majority will have a minimum height requirement. Typically the absolute minimum is 5'7"- 5'10" (160-178cm), depending on the agency. Some don’t explicitly state a requirement, but when you go to select your height, the options don’t begin below 5'6" (167.6cm). If you're below this height you just have to hope for an extraoridnary circumstance where you get scouted on the street, or you somehow get through to an in-person casting where you actually show your talent.

Statistically, the global average height of a woman is 5'3" (160cm). Given this, you would expect the modelling industry to cater to the average woman, right? In an era where body diversity is increasingly celebrated; why has the height standard not changed?

Karlie Kloss, Lila Moss, Lara Stone, Emily Ratakowski, Shalom Harlow, Irina Shayk & Liya Kebede at a Vogue World event in 2022.

Angelica Kauffmann – Ariadne Abandoned by Theseus, 1774

Why Do Models Need To Be Tall?

Historically, models were not always tall or thin. Female beauty ideals have shifted with cultural trends. In the Renaissance, women were celebrated as muses with curvaceous bodies and soft features, symbols of health, fertility, and wealth. “Fleshy arms and legs, broad hips and a round stomach were all considered desirable – thinness was something of a problem in Renaissance Italy” (Roller, 2022). Thin women were seen as sickly or poor, and height was not a factor.

By the 1800s, Haute Couture pioneer Charles Frederick Worth used models of varying shapes, often everyday women. He believed customers related better to models resembling themselves: “A 5’2” (157.5cm) woman may have a hard time envisioning herself in a gown worn by a 5’11” (180cm) model,” wrote Kate Havelin.

This shifted with the rise of editorial fashion photography and Condé Nast’s takeover of Vogue in 1909. Models became aspirational ideals, with thinness gaining prominence, fuelled by Hollywood’s Golden Era. The hourglass figure, with a small waist and voluptuous bust and hips, defined femininity.

Height, however, was still not central. Icons like Judy Garland (4’11"/149.9cm), Joan Crawford (5’2"/157.5cm), and Marilyn Monroe (5’5"/165cm, with her 22” waist) were all petite. Even Lisa Fonssagrives, often called the first supermodel, was just 5’7" (170cm).

The 1960s brought Twiggy’s boyish figure, replacing Monroe-style curves. At 5’6" (167.6cm), she popularised slim, elongated aesthetics, with miniskirts emphasizing length. Between 1967 and 1987, the requirements were for taller and thinner models with less curvaceous silhouettes.

The 1990s cemented height as a requirement with “Heroin Chic” and the supermodel era. Naomi Campbell, Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford, Linda Evangelista, Claudia Schiffer, and others stood 5’9" - 6’0" (175.5-183cm), all tall and lean. Kate Moss, discovered at 14, reached 5’7" (170cm)—yet was labelled “petite” in a height-obsessed industry. Heroin Chic glamourized pale skin, dark circles, and emaciated features, while tallness reinforced the ultra-thin look.

By the 2010s, body positivity gained traction through figures like Ashley Graham, broadening representation across body types. Yet petite models remain underrepresented, showing that height discrimination persists despite strides in diversity.

Lisa Gonssagrives, 1940

Marilyn Monroe, 1958

Twiggy, 1966

Subconscious Opinions On Height

Perceptions of height often stem from subconscious bias. Chu and Geary's 2005 study found tall women were rated as more intelligent, affluent, assertive, and ambitious than shorter women. Likewise, Jackson and Ervin (1992) noted that taller people were consistently associated with more positive traits.

In fashion, height is argued to give models a commanding runway presence, allowing designers' work to stand sout. A uniform size is also cost-effective for producing samples, and the tall, slim figure has become the industry's default. Many claim taller models appear more graceful, while uniformity keeps focus on the clothing rather than the individual.

As a petite model, I understand the logic. Standard sizing helps during hectic shows. Still, it would be refreshing to see designers embrace full diversity: plus-size, petite, disabled, and average-height women. Realistically, costs and entrenched ideals make this unlikely. Outside high fashion, however, these standards shouldn't matter. In beauty, lifestyle, commercial, and e-commerce modelling—where height is irrelevant—petite models are still overlooked, even for face-only shoots.

My career reflects this struggle. Though I now model full-time, it took nearly seven years of persistence to get here. I've been rejected countless times for my height, even in roles where it had no bearing. At shoots, I've often worn seven-inch heels just to meet expectations. I do this not simply to conform, but to prove petite models can succeed. Every "yes" after so many "no's" is both validation and a step toward greater inclusivity.

Petite Models = Nepo Baby?

I can already hear the response: "But Leyla, there are petite models in the industry." Yes, there are—myself included. However, many of the petite models who dominate mainstream media did not fight their way in; they were born into privilege.

A quick search for "petite models" shows lists largely filled with what Gen Z calls "Nepo Babies"—those from famous or wealthy families who had doors opened for them. Their success is still admirable, but it's important to acknowledge the role of nepotism. For example:

- Lila Moss (5'3" / 160cm), often cited for petite representation, is the daughter of icon Kate Moss.
- Lily-Rose Depp (5'3" / 160cm), a Chanel favourite, is the daughter of Johnny Depp and Vanessa Paradis.
- Devon Aoki (5'5" / 165cm), iconic in the early 2000s, is the half-sister of DJ Steve Aoki.

•Iris Law (5’5" / 165cm), Dior Beauty ambassador, is the daughter of Jude Law and Sadie Frost.

•Cara Delevingne (5’8" / 172.7cm) is often described as “petite”, comes from a wealthy, well-connected family - her godfather was Condé Nast International’s former president.

•Georgia May Jagger (5’7" / 170cm), famous for Rimmel campaigns and her gap toothed look, is Mick Jagger’s and Jerry Hall's daughter.

There are, of course, a handful of non-nepotism petite models who have broken through on grit alone:

- Amina Blue (5’1" / 155cm)
- Arina Maksimova (5’2" / 157.5cm)
- Anja Konstantinova (5’4" / 162.5cm)
- Halima Aden (5’5" / 165cm)
- Jillian Mercado (5’2" / 157.5cm)

If you include mid-height models like Emily Ratajkowski or Charlotte Free, whom both stand at 5’7" / 170cm, they could also count as breakout successes. But compared to the overwhelming presence of privileged names, petite models from ordinary backgrounds remain rare.

This imbalance is exactly why I fight so strongly for petite representation. Progress is being made thanks to social media platforms and grassroots efforts. Instagram pages such as @heightrevolution, @whynotpetites, and @notsopetitemovement are raising awareness and giving petite models a voice that the mainstream fashion industry still overlooks.

Why Not Change The Height Requirement?

While the body positivity movement has made strides in the industry, I still believe that the industry often priorities profiting on women’s insecurities. They want to sell the fantasy - something to admire and dream of becoming, but ultimately must be inaccessible, otherwise everyone would achieve it. In a world where plastic surgery has advanced and Ozempic is popular, what’s the last thing you cannot change? Your height.

My reasons for modelling have been and will always be to have other petite women see themselves in me, to relate to me, and feel beautiful in themselves because of this. I want women to feel represented, to feel included, to feel confident in themselves. I hope to see the industry truly embrace all types of diversity, including petite models, so that every woman can see herself represented.

Yasmeen Ghauri, 1990s

Ashley Graham, 2023

Golden Summer

Photographe & Stylist: Eva Louviot

Make Up Artist: Floriane Barbe

Photographer's Assistant: Jeanne Verdet & Julie Grolier

Models: Alexandra Dia, Anna Medlock,
& Julie Zitouni

Necklace **Bijoux Brigitte**
Swimsuit **Undiz**

Bikini **Ounas**
Bracelet **Histoire d'Or**

Swimsuit **Zara**
Rings **Atelier Domingos**

Hat **Mango**
Top & Shorts **The Oniro Studio**
Rings **Atelier Domingo**

Top **The Oniro Studio**

Calm & Steady

Photographer: Gutyerrez Erdmann

Stylist: Leticia da Cruz

Hair & Make Up: Tabatha

Retoucher: Daria Chernova

Model: Manu Prestes @ Take Agency

Jumper **Grama**
Shorts **Initmissimi**
Socks **Cotton On**
Shoes **Paula Torres**

Top **Haight**
Skirt **Framed**

Shirt **Zen**
Tie **Hugo Boss**
Tights **Lupo**
Shoes **Luiza Barcelos**

Bralette **Andrea Bogosian**
Skirt **Zara**

Dress **Grama**
Tights **Dior**
Shoes **Capodarte**

The Vintage Market & How Vintage Has Become A Luxury

By Ade Sarpong



September Fashion Month is round the corner, with the world's biggest and best designers and brands preoaring for the four major fashion weeks, 'trophy vintage' pieces are increasingly sought after. Samina Virk, US CEO of fashion resale site Vestiaire Collective, talks to us on how pre-loved has become a fashion go-to – even for Netflix's Fashionable hit show 'Emily in Paris'.

Few followers of fashion will forget the moment Kate Moss arrived at a New York fashion week dinner, perfect in a pale yellow dress, worn off-the-shoulder, by 1950s French couturier Jean Dessès. That was 2003 and, for a couple of years, Moss wannabes rifled frantically through the rails of local second-hand stores, in the hope of finding something that would approximate Moss's air of louche glamour. But buying vintage is hard work and, by 2007, when Moss teamed up with Topshop to create clothes inspired by her favourite looks (including the Dessès dress), there was a sense of relief. Vintage was great and all that, we thought – but readymade was so much easier.

Moss herself was simply continuing a tradition among hip cultural influencers. "In the 1970s, Yves Saint Laurent sent models down the runway in rehashes of his mother's '40s evening gowns; Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music suited up in Humphrey Bogart drag and retro GI gear, and kids recreated those looks with flea-market finds," expert Alex Fury wrote in the Financial Times. "Then again, so did people like Paloma Picasso and Loulou de la Falaise, buying vintage clothes for authenticity and validity – the real deal, not a pale imitation."

When Bella Hadid wore a vintage white Gucci gown at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022, she picked a dress that was older than she was. Made by designer Tom Ford during his tenure at the Italian fashion house, the white long-sleeved gown debuted on a Milan catwalk in the winter of 1996 – about 10 months before Hadid was even born.

Designers and makers are very much problem solvers in their own right. Vintage and upcycling as a method are ways to address the problem in interesting ways. The climate crisis is something that is a big talking point these days, and the perception of vintage as the logical retort to fast fashion and of upcycling and repair as alternative forms of making is a sure sign that vintage has real traction. A generation that has everything to gain and nothing to lose by embracing sustainable practices is waking up, and they mean business. However the vintage market has also become fractured into the haves and the have nots, just like the heirarchy we see in the normal fashion industry, with fast fashion at the bottom and higher quality luxe labels at the top.

"Vintage has become its own luxury status symbol," says Samina Virk, the US CEO of Vestiaire Collective, a global marketplace for pre-owned designer fashion. "It's not always about what's new anymore. Sometimes it's about what's old and hard to find." Virk says shoppers are currently combing Vestiaire's site for "archival Gucci," along with Prada, Miu Miu and Saint Laurent. ("Archival" is an unofficial fashion term. It basically means "older than 10 years, and also famous enough that you remember it from a red carpet or ad campaign.") "Trophy vintage" is another moniker used to describe these iconic, sought-after pieces, with Emily Ratajkowski among the celebrities to have favoured the pre-loved route.

Vestiaire doesn't just deal in vintage goods. It also offers a thriving database of designer clothes, shoes and accessories that are sometimes just a few seasons old. A quick scroll through the site's new arrivals shows a pristine bodysuit from Khaite with the tags still on, a pair of worn-once Dior heels, and a Loewe bag that could have come straight from the showroom floor. Buying these gently used pieces can certainly save you money – about 50% to 70% of the retail price, in most cases – but it can also save some stress on the planet.

"Buying a secondhand garment extends its life cycle by an average of 2.2 years," which means new clothes don't have to be produced as quickly, and old ones stay out of the waste cycle for longer periods of time. "But of course, shipping clothes around the world does take up energy," she says. "Just not nearly as much as manufacturing a whole new pair of shoes."

In Virk's view, Vestiaire is a better option within a broken consumer system. It's also a dopamine button for shoppers who love the thrill of the hunt. "You scroll around and suddenly you see this dress you dreamt about, or you remember seeing on a celebrity," she says. "But because the cost is lower, you can have it. It's a bit like those designer collaborations with brands. Vestiaire is bringing that access a bit more down to earth."

Before you get too excited, a reality check: Designer stuff on Vestiaire may be priced less than retail, but it's still not cheap. Miu Miu sunglasses run at about $330 USD (£252); a Vivienne Westwood velvet corset top is about $630 (£481). Shoppers also need patience to find bargains; the downside of Vestiaire's extensive archive is that it requires a lot of scrolling (and scrolling, and scrolling…) to hone in on your dream wardrobe. If you want to have a quick browse through a limited featured selection, you could go to Vestiaire's concession in London luxury department store, Selfridges.

To keep those dreams from turning into nightmares, Vestiaire trains and employs almost 100 "authenticators" worldwide to verify designer provenance. Many of them previously worked at the luxury brands sold by the site, and have intimate knowledge of designer hallmarks like stitching, leather quality and hardware (that's the metal clasps and zippers that come on most handbags and shoes). Still, the only absolutely surefire way to know your Chanel flap bag was made by the vaunted French marque is to buy it at their boutique. But plenty of shoppers like the odds that Vestiaire, and other resale sites like RealReal and Fashionphile, offer. "We know trust is non-negotiable," Virk says. "We won't sell it if we don't believe in it."

Virk began believing in fashion early. As a Pakistani-American teen in Michigan, she used it to help merge her parents' culture and her own. "I grew up in this dichotomy of, 'How do I balance my parents' culture, which they really want to make sure I retain, with being an American teenager?' So I took my mom's sewing machine," she says, "and I started making these traditional Pakistani clothes using modern American fabric. This was the 90s, so I would use all those cool floral prints that you'd see on girls on TV. It came out of the fact that I was living in the middle of two cultures. And the way I figured out how to bridge them was through fashion."

In August 2023 Virk helped Vestiaire build another bridge: one into Netflix's hit TV show Emily in Paris. The show's use of designer fashion has seized the collective imagination of fashion fans. But though the show's outfits are famously fabulous and over-the-top, Virk knew Vestiaire's paid involvement had to feel grounded in the storyline.

"It was important that if the characters were going to mention Vestiaire, the storyline made sense, and was authentic. It couldn't just be crazy and fabulous clothes, with no backbone." In the end, Vestiaire became a kind of fairy godmother for the wannabe pop star Mindy Chen, who in season four part one sells her designer clothes on the platform after going broke in pursuit of her dreams.

Mindy is a fictional girl, played brilliantly by the actress Ashley Park. Other celebrities, like Jessica Chastain, Julia Roberts and Kim Kardashian have sold their own designer hauls through Vestiaire, often as part of a charity sale. Other stars and their stylists have also been known to sell past red-carpet looks on the platform – they just keep it a secret to make the transaction tidier.

Virk can't divulge those celebrity sellers out loud – but if she did, maybe it wouldn't be quite as exciting to hunt around the site, then wonder if the $150 Loewe sweater you just bought was actually the same one Zendaya wore in Challengers. "It's part of the fun of resale," says Virk. "You never know whose clothes you might end up wearing." It definitely adds an air of mystery to a shop and it is one I like.

Return Of A Goddess

Photographer: Alessio Ciaravino

Producer: Francesco Recchioni

Art Directors & Stylists: Alessia Pepe & Andrea Alessandro

Hair & Make Up: Michela Braga

Model: Alice Marconcini @ Models Inc.

Earrings **Giulia Barela**
Jacket & Dress **Annagiulia Firenza**
Shorts **Jacquemus**
Shoes **Alaïa**

Earrings **Riva**
Top **Dolce & Gabbana**
Panties **Agent Provocateur**

Earrings **Giulia Barela**
Dress **Annagiulia Firenze**

Necklace **Andrea Alessandro**
Dress **Nineminutes**
Shoes **Marc Jacobs**

Shirt **Zara**
Shorts **Armani (vintage)**
Rings **Riva**
Bag **Vipera Bag**
Shoes **Clergerie Paris**

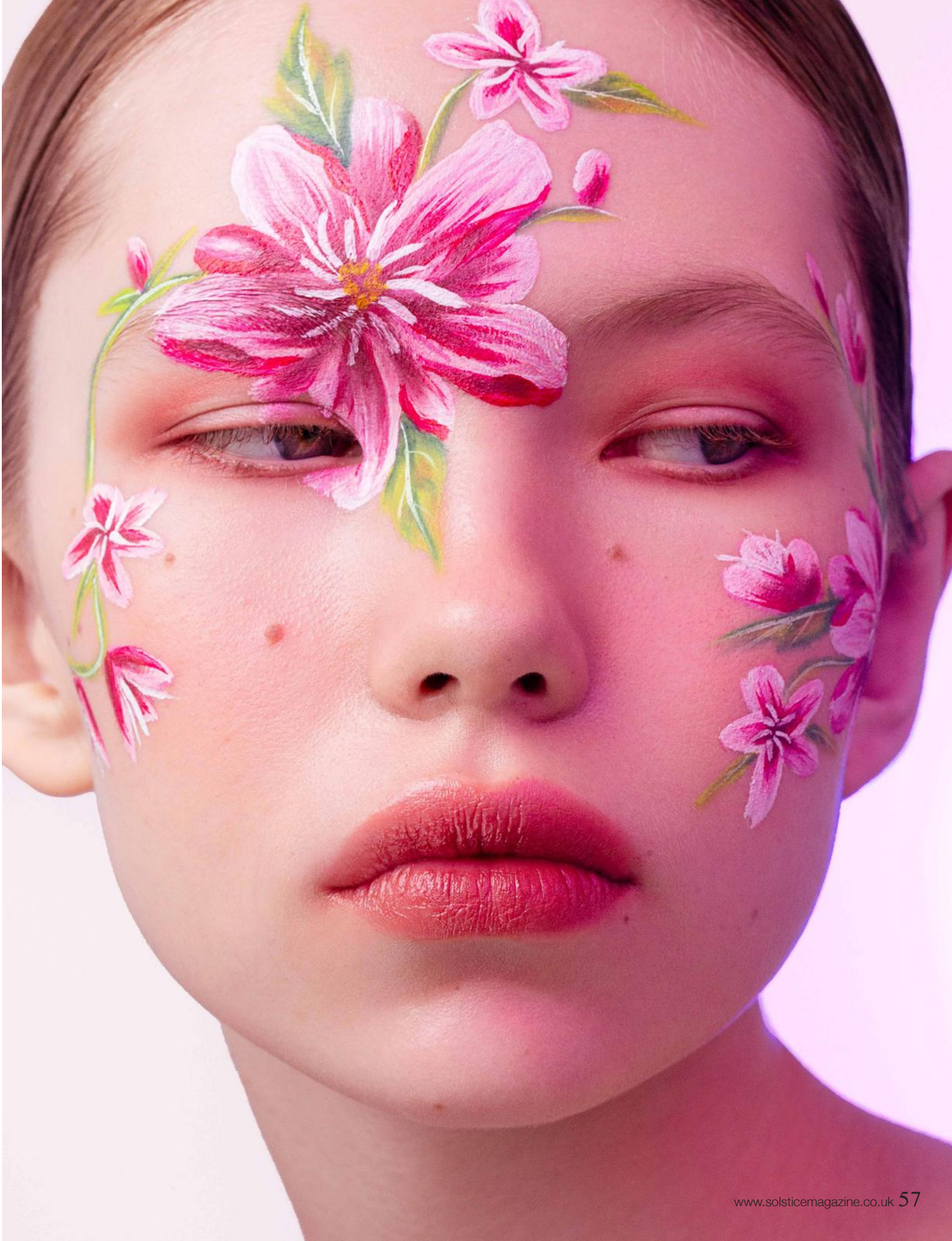
Earring **Giulia Barela**
Top **Reformation**
Bra & Skirt **Elisabetta Sammarco**
Flip Flops **Tkees**

FLORAESCENCE

Photographer & Floral Sculptures: Katriena Emmanuel

Make Up Artist: Brooke Clarke

Models: Layla @ Viviens Model Management
& Paradise @ Chic Model Management



The Biggest Boots To Fill

Anna Wintour's decision to step down from her role as Editor-In-Chief of Vogue sent shockwaves in the industry. We look at her rise to the role, her long tenure as the de-facto head of world editorial fashion and we look at who could replace her in a role that will be daunting to many.

By Declan O'Leary

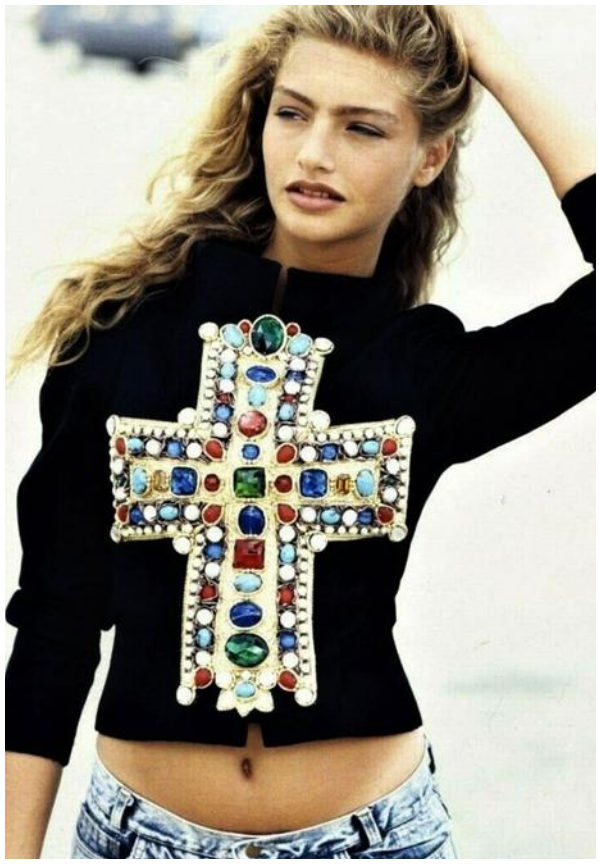
Dame Anna Wintour had just sent off her very first edition of US Vogue in October 1988 when the printers phoned the magazine in confusion. They had seen the cover image and, baffled, asked a simple question: “Has there been a mistake?” The cover in question was unlike anything Vogue had ever published. The model was not one of the industry’s most famous names, but a relatively little-known face, Michaela Bercu. She stood smiling directly into the camera, outdoors on a city street rather than in a studio, wearing a richly embellished Christian Lacroix couture jacket. The detail that shocked the printers most, however, was not the jacket, it was the jeans.

At that time, Vogue’s covers were formal affairs: studio close-ups of perfectly posed models, their faces heavily made up, their looks polished with dramatic jewels. Jeans, by contrast, were ordinary, casual, even rebellious in the world of luxury fashion. For the printers, it looked as though someone had made a production error.

“I couldn’t blame them,” Dame Anna later recalled. “It was so unlike the studied and elegant close-ups that were typical of Vogue covers back then. This one broke all the rules.” The jeans had been a last-minute fix, Bercu’s skirt had not fit properly, but their inclusion symbolised something far greater. Wintour was declaring from the outset that her vision for Vogue would embrace energy, personality, and a sense of realism. The woman on the cover was not a distant goddess but someone readers could imagine walking beside on the street. Something a bit more relatable, something a bit more tangible.

That October 1988 cover signaled what CNN Style’s Oscar Holland later described as “a revolution.” After two years editing British Vogue, Wintour had been handpicked to take over the American edition. Condé Nast’s leadership wanted someone who would shake off complacency and ensure the magazine remained sharp, modern, and relevant as it entered the 1990s.

From that point on, Wintour not only reshaped Vogue but redefined the role of a fashion magazine. Over the following decades she steered the title through multiple eras: the reign of the supermodel in the early 1990s, the grunge years, the explosion of celebrity culture in



the 2000s, the rise of reality stars in the 2010s, and finally into today's digital-first, social media-driven world. Harriet Walker, fashion editor of The Times, observed that Wintour successfully transitioned Vogue "from glossy print editions to a global brand that exists across digital publishing, Instagram, and beyond."

Yet now, after 37 years in the role, Dame Anna has announced that she will be stepping down as editor-in-chief of US Vogue. She is not leaving Condé Nast altogether - since 2020 she has served as the company's global chief content officer, overseeing the editorial direction of all titles including GQ, Tatler, and Wired, a role she will continue. But her departure from the editorial chair at Vogue nonetheless marks the close of a remarkable chapter in publishing history.

Breaking Barriers

Wintour's early years at Vogue were defined by her determination to dismantle rigid traditions. Dr Kate Strasdin of Falmouth University's Fashion and Textile Institute notes that her first covers brought "a greater sense of informality" and set a new tone. More importantly, she began pioneering the use of celebrities on covers.

In 1989, Madonna appeared on the front of Vogue - the first celebrity ever to do so. It was part of Wintour's broader vision of merging high fashion with entertainment culture. "She was the first to make fashion a global cultural industry," said stylist Marian Kwei on BBC Radio 4. Just as crucial, Kwei added, Wintour helped make fashion feel accessible: "She took away the elitism and brought a sense of democratisation. She made fashion this party that everybody was invited to."

This new approach proved enormously influential. Soon, the boundaries between Hollywood, music, and fashion blurred. Designers understood that clothes were not only art but also entertainment, and celebrities understood that Vogue covers could cement their cultural status.

Controversies and Challenges

Wintour's reign was not without turbulence. In 1993, animal rights activists from PETA staged a protest in her office to condemn her support of fur—something she has since abandoned. At other times, her editorial decisions sparked heated debates. A 2008 cover featuring basketball star LeBron James and model Gisele Bündchen drew criticism for allegedly reinforcing outdated racial stereotypes. But the most existential challenge came with the rise of social media. By the late 2010s, fashion influence had shifted dramatically. In 2018, designer Philipp Plein bluntly compared Vogue's circulation to Kim Kardashian's Instagram following, questioning which mattered more for brands. Such comparisons highlighted how digital influencers could rival, or even eclipse, the power once wielded exclusively by fashion magazines.

For Wintour, the task was to preserve Vogue's prestige while modernising its reach. Critics sometimes complained that the magazine leaned too heavily on celebrity culture at the expense of serious fashion journalism. Yet Wintour ensured the brand adapted, building an enormous digital presence and leveraging events like the Met Gala into global spectacles.

The Woman Behind the Sunglasses

Wintour herself became as iconic as the magazine she edited. Her trademark pageboy bob and dark sunglasses created an instantly recognizable silhouette. When asked about the glasses in a 2023 BBC interview, she replied enigmatically: "They help me see and they help me not see… they help me be seen and not be seen."

Her aura of mystery and authority inspired fascination. The reputation of being intimidating was cemented by pop culture portrayals—most famously as the inspiration for Miranda Priestly, the icy editor in The Devil Wears Prada, played by Meryl Streep. Wintour leaned into the comparison with humor, even attending the gala premiere of the stage adaptation. Asked directly if people were afraid of her, she replied simply: "I hope not."

Documentaries like The September Issue and The First Monday in May offered glimpses of her working style—steely, exacting, but also deeply committed to creativity. The fashion industry is a place where "egos and creativity can clash spectacularly," and Wintour mastered the art of navigating it.

Over time, she became a cultural symbol referenced well beyond fashion. Jay-Z, Nicki Minaj, and Ye (Kanye West) have all name-dropped her in lyrics. Political figures, tech billionaires, and celebrities have sought her approval. Former Sun editor David Yelland argued that Wintour effectively "created" cultural moments, from helping establish the Trump family's social prominence with a 1990 cover of Ivana Trump, to shaping Kim Kardashian's rise, and even playing a role in the public profile of Lauren Sánchez, now married to Jeff Bezos.

Who Could Succeed Her?

Attention now turns to the question of succession and it is complicated. This is a challenging era for print media, and Vogue's social media platforms are frequently under fire for the seemingly relentless celebrity content which critics decry as diluting the mission of Vogue. A strong digital presence is undoubtedly vital though. Eva Chen, as director of fashion partnerships for Instagram, brings that expertise. She has long been a Met Gala regular and has to be on the list of potential successors. Chioma Nnadi must also be in the running. She has spent the last two years heading up editorial content at British Vogue and is Wintour's protege, so it could be quite a natural transition. Other possible candidates include former head of Teen Vogue Amy Astley, who still works for Condé Nast. Vogue's senior editor Chloe Schama, Chloe Malle, editor of Vogue's website. Some have called for Victoria Beckham to be a candidate. She is an outsider as she doesn't have much editorial experience, but certainly knows about the fashion industry. Dame Anna's own daughter, film producer Bee Shaffer Carrozzini, could also be in the frame, although she is a long-shot.

As ever fashion is regarded as both superficial and economically valuable. Anna Wintour has had to tread the tightrope of maintaining relevance as far as style is concerned at the very same time that fashion has had to undergo re-evaluation in relation to sustainability, plagiarism and labour conditions. These are the very real concerns that her successor will have to navigate, in addition to newer issues such as the use of A.I.

An Icon and A Legend

For all the debates, there is broad agreement that Wintour changed not only a magazine but also an entire industry. Her ability to capture and amplify cultural moments, to redefine what fashion could mean, and to merge style with celebrity and politics ensured that Vogue remained a cultural force even in turbulent times for print media. She transformed the magazine into a stage where not just clothes, but identities, ambitions, and power itself were displayed and contested.

After nearly four decades, Dame Anna Wintour steps aside from Vogue's editor's desk with her influence undiminished. Her sunglasses and bob remain instantly recognisable; her editorial legacy, deeply embedded in fashion history. She has been at once gatekeeper, creator, and icon.

Whoever succeeds her will inherit not only one of the most prestigious jobs in publishing but also one of the most difficult. Fashion's future is being rewritten in real time, across TikTok feeds and sustainability reports. Yet it was Wintour who first proved that Vogue could break rules, embrace change, and still define the culture. And it all began, fittingly, with a pair of jeans.

The Edge of Nowhere

Photographer: Savannah Angela

Model: Nana Ennou

Earrings, Bracelets & Ring **Agmes**

Dress **Casa Nudo**

Earrings **Agmes**

Top & Trousers **Indoi**

Necklace **Agmes**

Dress **Black to Grey**

Earrings **Agmes**
Corset **Km by Lange**

Rest & Relax

Photographer: Caroline Sénécal

Stylist: Louloua Yammout

Make Up Artist: Agnès Obis

Hair Stylist: Anne-Cécile Tubanza

Model: Iris Werkman @ Dominique

Blue Top & Short **Claudie Pierlot**
White Top **Nimette**
Ring **Zag Bijoux**
Shoes **Monolo Blahnik**

Top **L'Agence**
Bra **Aubade**
Skirt **The Label Edition**

Shirt **Claudie Pierlot**
Bracelets **Zag Bijoux**

Necklace **Tasha Bijoux**
Top **Majestic Filatures**
Underwear **Maroon Collection**
Trousers **Wear Dala**

Top **Claudie Pierlot**
Shorts **Spanx**
Socks **Tezenis**
Shoes **Manolo Blahnik**

The Uphill Task Of Running A Small Fashion Brand Today

By Jazmine Okeke

The fashion world has always been a high-stakes arena, but for independent designers, the past couple of years has felt like an outright battlefield. Since June 2023, a cascade of beloved cult labels has crumbled under financial pressure, either entering administration or filing for bankruptcy. Names like Christopher Kane, Dion Lee, The Vampire's Wife, Interior, and Calvin Luo have joined the unfortunate list of casualties in the padt year or so. Even Roksanda, renowned for its striking architectural designs and red-carpet glamour, teetered on the edge of oblivion after filing a notice of intent to appoint administrators. It was only a last-minute intervention by The Brand Group that pulled it back from the brink. Across the ocean in New York, brands such as Mia Vesper and Puppets and Puppets have been forced into drastic pivots just to keep their doors open.

This isn't merely a string of isolated misfortunes; it's a symptom of profound fractures within the independent fashion ecosystem. Traditional bricks-and-mortar wholesalers were already on shaky ground before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the subsequent e-commerce surge provided only temporary relief. As that boom fizzled out, designers found themselves buried under unpaid invoices, dwindling orders, and a severely eroded retail landscape. Compounding these issues are broader global upheavals: geopolitical tensions, rampant inflation, supply chain disruptions, energy crises, and shortages of raw materials. Together, these factors have created what many industry veterans call the most unforgiving climate in generations.

Stavros Karelis, the founder and buying director of London's innovative concept store Machine-A, doesn't mince words about the severity of the situation. "This is probably the most challenging moment for fashion brands, especially emerging designers, in the 15 years I have been in this role," he states. "There are a lot of global factors affecting the market that are out of our control, but [it's] also a failure of the fashion system. In every step, there was a push for more, which pushed people into extreme fatigue and a situation where the quality or uniqueness of products wasn't reflected in the ever-higher prices. The solution is crazy non-stop discounting, and there's no profitability in that. It is unmanageable and unsustainable as a business model."

Caroline Rush, the outgoing CEO of the British Fashion Council, shares similar sentiments. She points out that while there are more visible support programs for budding designers than ever before, these often fall short in providing the frameworks needed for enduring success. "There are a lot of opportunities to start businesses," she explains, "but to actually sustain them and to build profitable long-term businesses for the future is very challenging." In an era where starting a label is more accessible, the real test lies in making it last.

With so many closures piling up, the pressing question is: What happens now? Rebuilding the independent fashion sector will require a fundamental reevaluation of what it means to be an independent designer—and how we define success in this volatile industry.

More Than Just a Designer

In today's fashion landscape, launching and maintaining a label demands skills far beyond artistic flair. Colm Dillane, the visionary behind KidSuper, likens it to "being a musician and also owning the record label." Independent designers must juggle creativity with sharp business instincts, marketing prowess, and relentless self-reflection. "You spend a lot of time comparing yourself to these big brands," Dillane notes. "One side has a million-dollar budget, and the other has nothing."

This disparity underscores the need for independents to carve out a unique niche. As luxury consultant Christopher Morency advises, "If you really want to just design, there are plenty of good brands to design for. But if you want your own brand, the customer wants to buy into something." It's no longer sufficient to produce beautiful garments; consumers are investing in a brand's identity, story, and ethos.

This shift represents a departure from the industry's past. Inacio Ribeiro, co-founder of Clements Ribeiro, reflects on the 1990s as a simpler time. "When we started our business, the magazines were the gatekeepers and the arbiters of the fashion world, together with powerful buyers," he recalls. "It would seem very elitist now, but it was a much simpler formula. You just had to impress a limited number of people. Now, things feel more democratic, but I don't think they are."

For recent graduates, the chasm between aspiration and reality can be jarring. Edward Crutchley, who runs his eponymous label while serving as design director at Dior, cautions against hasty entrepreneurship. "Frankly, I think it is quite irresponsible to push designers to do so straight from university," he argues. "A six-month work experience placement is not enough to learn how to effectively manage a team and a full product line. The idea of a chef getting a Michelin star six months after leaving catering college is ludicrous. Why do we expect that of designers?"

Rethinking Aspirations in a Dysfunctional Industry

Fashion education is tasked with nurturing creativity while equipping students for a grueling profession. Fabio Piras, director of Central Saint Martins's MA fashion course, stresses the importance of grounded expectations. "It's not about destroying dreams; it's about accepting the fact that students might have a completely naive, ill-informed dream that they want to be a creative director," he says. "You have to prepare the students to work in the industry, but they are entering an industry they know is dysfunctional."

Indeed, the sector's dysfunction is well-documented: grueling workloads, meager compensation, and scant regard for work-life balance are entrenched norms. Financial hurdles exacerbate these woes. Applying for incubators or awards often requires significant upfront investment—thousands spent on presentations, shows, or collections. Surveys indicate that 61% of brand owners skip fashion weeks altogether due to exorbitant costs, which can range from £20,000 to £100,000 per show, even with subsidies.

Yet fashion weeks retain their allure for prestige and exposure. Pascal Morand, president of the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode (FHCM), which organizes Paris Fashion Week, highlights their value: "This creates an incomparable environment where every designer, whether emerging or established, can benefit from exceptional visibility." However, visibility without solid foundations can be deadly. Olya Kuryshchuk, founder of 1 Granary, warns, "If you don't have time to set up your company and produce a quality product, then you don't have time to show. You're just showing that your work is bad."

The fixation on conventional benchmarks—runway spectacles, media hype, and accolades—can distract from viable alternatives. Lulu Kennedy of Fashion East advocates for measured growth: "We'd rather not pressure anyone to run before they can walk. We try to give reality checks without killing their vibe."

Balancing Creativity and Commerce

A core issue is the narrow definition of success in fashion. Morency challenges why commercially robust brands like Corteiz, Gymshark, or Cole Buxton garner less respect than alumni from elite schools like Central Saint Martins or Parsons, despite their superior revenues. Virgil Abloh's Off-White encountered similar snobbery, yet it revolutionized luxury. In fashion's pecking order, artistic prestige often overshadows financial viability, even when commerce ensures longevity.

Thriving brands emphasize discipline. Hyrum Cook, founder of the £50 million activewear label Adanola, stresses, "Staying disciplined is crucial. It's easy to get caught up in new ideas and concepts as the only mechanic to drive growth and attract new audiences."

Astrid Andersen, who relaunched as Stel after a three-year break, embraces a blended approach: selective wholesale deals paired with direct-to-consumer releases that form a cohesive wardrobe. "Stepping away from seasons was a big freedom," she shares. "Nothing is promised, even if you follow that structure perfectly, so you have to follow your own intuition and listen to the person you want to sell to."

The Wholesale Trap

Wholesale offers stability but often ensnares emerging brands. Designer Chet Lo compares its allure to "heroin," highlighting the peril of over-reliance. The downfall of Matchesfashion left countless designers without vital income. Ida Petersson, former buying director at Browns, reveals that some retailers have slashed budgets by up to 80% in the last 18 months—a catastrophe for independents.

Delayed or unpaid invoices plague the system, with two-thirds of wholesale-dependent brands reporting issues. They must fund production in advance, straining resources. Ribeiro now favors direct-to-consumer for affordability: "One of the main reasons I do direct-to-consumer now is so I can offer a better price. It's impossible for small brands to compete with luxury now."

Innovative retailers like Machine-A are trialing equitable models: no minimum orders, pilot collaborations, advance payments, and flexible activations over strict seasonal purchases. The ideal setup includes 30% upfront coverage, long-term commitments, and fair return policies. Without these changes, wholesale will continue eroding small brands.

Capital, Risk, and Predatory Loans

Financial savvy is a glaring deficiency. Aurora James of Brother Vellies started with $3,500 but later grappled with a $70,000 loan that escalated into seven figures. Many designers resort to personal savings (83% do so), family funds, crowdfunding, or risky debt, yet over half remain unprofitable.

Women and designers of color face steeper barriers to fair capital, often leading to exploitative deals. "Fashion is really dependent on angel investors and predatory capital sources, and I think that is significantly hindering growth," James observes. She founded Parity Collective to aid founders of color in consumer goods.

Collaborations can alleviate burdens. Andersen praises her partner Anders Freund for granting her more creative time: "Any creative that has independently run a brand knows that you only get to be creative 5 per cent of the time, and the rest is managing the brand. Now, I still worry about everything, but I don't have to be the one that fixes it."

Toward a New Fashion System

Independent designers confront their gravest existential threat in decades, but this turmoil is fueling vital dialogues on reform. The old paradigms, crafted for a bygone age, no longer suffice.

Survival demands redefining a brand as a holistic entity: blending compelling narratives, strategic alliances, and prudent business tactics. Retailers and funders must foster supportive ecosystems with equitable terms, initial backing, and flexibility for experimentation.

Karelis warns that the loop of overproduction, endless sales, and inflated prices is untenable. A vibrant future requires systems that honor innovation, value profitability, and shield creators from economic instability. Failing this, fashion risks extinguishing the ingenuity of independents—the lifeblood that sustains its cultural relevance.

Late Summer Delights

Photographer: Giada Cucchi

Stylist: Sashenka La Spina

Model: Allegra Giovannelli @ Casting Firenze

Necklace **Natura**
Dress **Zara**

Cuff **Yves Dorsey**
Dress **Patrizia Pepe**

Earrings, Cuff and Rings **Zahara Do Athena**
Dress **Zara**

Swimsuit **Giselle Paganelli**

Necklace **Anyma Gioielli**
Gold Ring **Miriamnori**
Pearl Ring **Giuseppe Mandile**
Dress **Scacto**

Necklace & Cuff **Etrusca**
Dress **Giselle Paganelli**

The Cold Nears

Photographer: Albert Font

Stylist: Olive Duran

Hair & Make Up: Urnaa Uunii

Model: Lana Phatong @ Mirrrs Models

Headband **Boltad**
Jacket **Ganni**
Skirt **Moritz Iden**
Shoes **Prada**

Jacket **Vivienne Westwood**
Shirt **Closed**
Shorts **Hot Miami Styles**
Socks **Hue**
Shoes **Repetto**

Bonnet **Damson Madder**
Stop & Shorts **Bite Studio**
Socks **Paloma Wool**
Shoes **Trippen**

Top Bite Studio
Skirt Supriya Lele
Shoes Nothing Heeled

Jacket & Skirt **Ganni**
Boots **Trippen**

TWO OF A KIND

Photographer: Alessia Świetlik

Art Director & Co-stylist: Elisa Monti

Co-stylist: Lucrezia Chirizzi

Hair & Make Up: Emma Mendola & Shadi Canavesi

Photographer's Assistants: Manuel Neglia

Stylists' Assistants: Irene, Marie & Jonas

Models: Gisele Gelis & Lucia Gelis @ Special Management

Left
Earrings **Stroili Oro Italia**
Top & Skirt **Ayme Milano**
Boots **Voyage (vintage)**

Right
Top **Irene Cabri**
Culotte **Adelbel**
Shoes **Shake (vintage)**

Dress **Desstructure**

Necklace **Pairi Daeza**
Skirt **Vainillato**

Left
Dress **Allegra Amicarelli**
Boots **Maison Margiela**

Right
Necklace & Ring **Amoe Jewerly Paris**
Dress **Dorrin Attarpour**
Shoes **Bottega Veneta**

Jacket & Collar **Manuela Esposito**
Boots **Shake (vintage)**

Dress & Shirt **Galatea**

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