

Q&A: CRISTINA MANFREDI: FASHION, JOURNALISM AND TAKING CHANCES

AN INTERVIEW WITH CRISTINA MANFREDI
BY MURSSAL AKRAMY

If you had told Cristina Manfredi at age 15, that one day she would be trekking across the globe, hobnobbing with fashion's elite and working with some of the world's most successful publications, you'd likely have been met with disbelief. Having studied language and literature in university, it wasn't until later, that she thought about pursuing a career in fashion. After working in showrooms, Manfredi fell into fashion journalism and hasn't looked back since. Currently working as a freelance fashion journalist, Manfredi is a frequent contributor to Vanity Fair, Marie Claire and L'Officiel, reporting on relevant topics in the industry and interviewing high profile personalities. With over 15 years of experience under her belt, Manfredi has a wealth of knowledge. She generously imparted some of what she's learned along the way, with me.

Murssal Akramy: What made you decide to go freelance after working exclusively at Vanity Fair for so long?

Cristina Manfredi: I always said to my friends that resigning from Vanity Fair was the best decision of my life. Not because it was a bad situation; actually - back then especially - it was the most important magazine in Italy. Working there, I was given opportunities to do the best stuff in fashion writing.

Leaving was the best decision because I felt like I needed more freedom. Working with Vanity Fair, you usually work with bigger names (which is super exciting, don't get me wrong), I've always felt blessed, but I was feeling like I was losing contact with what was going on in the gut of fashion. I also wanted to challenge myself and I believed I could do it.

If You've mentioned you didn't know exactly what you wanted to do in the beginning. What advice would you give to people who want to start a new career path in fashion, but don't know where to start?

Try different things. If you don't know what you want to do but you know that you have a passion for fashion, try starting at a showroom as a sales assistant – which I did for a while – or as an assistant to a stylist. The only way to find out what you like, is to try. Learn how to go with the flow, embrace new opportunities outside your comfort zone and give yourself a chance. The path to fashion journalism isn't linear. You don't do 'this and this' and then become 'that and that'. Dare yourself to do new things.

When was the moment you felt you truly achieved your goal as a fashion journalist?

Oh (expletive). Ah, okay, you never really feel like you've achieved your goal, otherwise you'd probably stop and start something different. But if I could pinpoint a highlight of my career, it would probably be an interview with Raf Simons when he was at Dior, which was a very difficult thing to get. Or, when I resigned from Vanity Fair, I knew I was going to lose a lot of privileges, like tickets to fashion shows. But when I received invitations that year, I said to myself, maybe this means that people are acknowledging that I'm working hard and that I'm serious about what I'm doing. That was a pretty good moment.

Q&A: CATCHING UP WITH SCIASCIA GAMBACCINI

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BY MURSSAL AKRAMY

Sciascia Gambaccini is a household name for those immersed in the fashion industry. International Editor at Large at Vanity Fair Italia, Gambaccini has formerly held the role of Fashion Director at Vogue Italia, Interview Magazine, Marie Claire and Jane. She has pioneered revolutionary editorial content for global publications, consulted and styled iconic fashion campaigns for the world's most renowned designers, and worked with fashion's biggest names, including Franca Sozzani, former Editor in Chief of Vogue Italia.

Most recently, Gambaccini has added Fashion Advisor for the Amazon series 'Made in Italy' to her expansive portfolio of work. The series follows the professional career of a young woman working her way up in the fashion world in the 70's, a time of fashion revolution in Milan.

I had the chance to sit with Gambaccini, to discuss the project and the process of curating all the iconic looks.

How did you apply your previous work experiences to this project?

Sciascia Gambaccini: For 25 years I was a magazine stylist and then suddenly, I wasn't. Magazines are slowly dwindling, so I had to reinvent myself and find opportunities that I could apply my experience and knowledge toward. I had never done TV, but I was approached by the production company and they asked me to oversee the editorial content of a new TV show, 'Made In Italy'.

It's a fictional show, so not everything is true, but it's definitely very faithful to the years in Milan during the fashion revolution, the beginning of Fashion Week and the big Italian designers that came out in the 70's. My job was basically to oversee the script writers and make sure that it was accurate. For example, they would not have been called stylists – but rather journalists, during that time. I also had to make sure it was adaptable for the general public. We couldn't approach it like a magazine because we would lose a lot of the audience.

After that, I contacted all the Italian designers and their archives to recuperate as many archival clothes as possible from the 70's, so we could recreate the fashion shoots and the fashion shows of that period. It was a learning curve for my legendary impatience.

What does your creative process look like?

My process has always been one of spontaneity. When I worked for Franca Sozzani at Vogue Italia, and even at (Harper's) Bazaar, I didn't really have time to think. Everything kind of needed to be done yesterday. But that has been to my advantage because I think spontaneity can be very beautiful, and a lot of people work very well under pressure. I'm definitely one of them.

But my process basically starts with a concept, then I visualize what that concept would look like, so sometimes I would sketch it, or sometimes I might do mood boards. With those visual references, you start looking for the clothes, the accessories, the models – that fit that concept - and I can assure you that 99% of the time, you're going to end up with a product that looks completely different from the concept because ideas evolve, ideas grow and unknown things come up. I cannot stress this enough; unexpected accidents usually turn out to be for the best.

What about your process for the work you did for 'Made in Italy'? How much did your process need to change?

(Laughs) Listen, once we got all the clothes and received blessing from the designers, which took a year – everyone said no at first and then one by one, they started saying yes – we were able to get them made, or copied.

We were lucky in that we were able to stick to the script. But there were instances where we had to pivot, for example, we were shooting ten girls in Rome, wearing red Valentino dresses from the 70's, when one disintegrated because it was so old. What do you do? I had to run to the Valentino boutique and find a dress that sort of looked like the original. In TV, it's different because there's a schedule you have to meet and it's a little less creative than a magazine.

How excited were you to have the opportunity to work with some of the iconic pieces from the designer archives?

This has really been one of the most unexpected results of this TV show. You know, I've seen a lot of beautiful clothes in my career, but each time I crossed the door to one of these archives – whether it was Fendi, Missoni or Krizia – we were shaking like little girls because it was so amazing. The pieces and garments we saw were so full of thought and care. Each item was really made to convey a message, not just for sales.

And lastly - a very serious question to end this off - now that you've immersed yourself in it, if you could go back in time, what trend would you change or get rid of.

I would definitely skip the big shoulder thing in the 80s, it just didn't work for me. A great test is to go into a vintage store and see what you can wear, without making any alterations. As soon as you start hitting the 80's and 90's, the big shoulder's, and the bright, ugly colours, you definitely start thinking about making alterations. Even the masters like Saint Laurent - god bless them - they're amazing, but you put them on and you have to lose a kilometer of shoulder if you want to wear them. So yeah, big shoulders and hot pants, I can live without.