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THIRD FLOOR

David Downton  Alexis Knox  Rob Templeman
Terry Mansfield  Nikita Karizma  Jonathan Baker
Eye shaped earrings from Topshop; Wooden peace symbol bracelet and jewelled headband from River Island; Pink traditional Chinese fan and blue floral scarf Stylist’s Own; Lomography Dreamer Diana F+ Camera from Lomography.com

Photography and Styling by Jennifer Frazer
“When the whole of the country is frowning, the fashion industry is smiling.”

Gareth Bryn Lewis

Welcome to the fifth issue of Third Floor. After the success of last year’s ‘Inspiring Minds’ issue, 2012 has seen the publication take a new direction, creatively and innovatively evolving Third Floor into an established fashion publication that defines the fashion world of today.

Influences such as the recession, the London riots of summer 2011, global climate change and the suggestion of the end of the world have had a huge impact on the content of the fifth issue. We are currently amidst a time of great change, living in a turbulent and uncertain society where the future is unknown.

The fifth issue of Third Floor adopts the theme of ‘Resilience’, examining the different ways people manage, explain and define themselves in the face of adversity. The publication will be broken down into three chapters; State of Mind, State of Life and State of Emergency. The subthemes of Oblivion, Conspiracy, Optimism, Unity, Chaos and Hedonism are exemplified through an array of fashion editorials, interviews and analytical writing.
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state of Mind

CONSPIRACY - OBIVION - SUBCONSCIOUS

The subconscious choices our minds make in order to reflect and adapt to current circumstance and adversity. Consciousness versus oblivion and the act of conspiring to find a means of explanation and understanding for all that is going on around us.
Recently appointed chairman of Graduate Fashion Week, Rob Templeman discusses his extensive retail experiences, Graduate Fashion Week and how businesses can succeed in the tough economic climate.

Rob Templeman is a widely respected businessman, perhaps best known for his positive work towards the turnaround of Debenhams during his time as chief executive of the company. More recently, Rob has been appointed chairman of the largest graduate fashion event in the world – Graduate Fashion Week (GFW). This year he will take over from Terry Mansfield CBE who has been chairman for the past seven years, and will be working with a fresh new team that Martyn Roberts, co-founder and director of Vauxhall Fashion Scout and newly appointed managing director of GFW, will overlook. This highly important fashion event gives graduating fashion students the opportunity to showcase their final collections and exhibit their portfolios, with the hope of kick-starting their careers.

Rob is currently chairman of Gala Coral Group, the RAC and the British Retail Consortium, as well as a trustee for Children with Cancer. Through his commitment to the retail and fashion industry and his success at Debenhams, Rob was awarded the prestigious Draper’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011; this is a moment in his career of which he is very proud. Rob told Third Floor: "I was very proud to win that award and a lot of it is about having a good team around you."
At the end of the 1960s, the fashion industry invented a new model of research known as fashion forecasting. This new method of research consisted of the prediction of new trends, taking into consideration the colours, materials and forms that consumers would buy into in the short term. The invention of fashion forecasting was a direct result of the industry's transition from haute couture to prêt-à-porter, which went on to become revolutionary in terms of both production and consumption within the field of fashion.

From the perspective of fashion brands, one of the most relevant aspects of the fashion forecasting process was the emerging demand for the prediction of future consumer trends. Brands recognised the opportunity to use this in acquiring a competitive edge over their rivals, which eventually led to the structured activity of collecting information about the future directions of fashion, managed by the Bureaux de Style and embodied in trendbooks. In recent times, this activity has often been referred to as “coolhunting”, a striking term which implies that trend research is an intuitive “hunt” for the incipient signals in fashion that reflect in consumers’ lifestyles. Another word used to refer to this activity is trendwatching, although many other terms are also used.

The methods of the ‘coolhunter’ broke the mould of traditional marketing techniques during the 1990s by using ideas more in line with anthropology and sociology in an attempt to achieve full immersion into the lifestyle and consumption habits of its (mostly) young target market. The professional role of the coolhunter was interpreted by some as a signal that the rules of trend diffusion had been inverted: style and fashion would now be for the young, the subcultures and the effervescent areas to produce. Originating from the bottom of the fashion pyramid, style innovation would spread through to the highest social classes. A celebratory tale depicts the coolhunter as a young man travelling the world with his digital camera in hand, searching for cool images to send to customers and research agencies. Some dispute this view of a coolhunter’s role, and authors such as Naomi Klein have described coolhunting as a myth, a frivolous activity in which the coolhunter exploits authentic subcultures in order to sell to brands and companies suggestive information that has questionable commercial value.

Exploring the topic from a historical perspective, we notice that coolhunting, on the one hand, is rooted in fashion forecasting, but on the other is characterised by a search for novelty. Above all, it is the shifting of research from an over-riding interest in fashion fads to socio-cultural trends that involve the fast changing wants, needs and imagination of the customer. Interestingly and importantly, the fashion forecasting model has now extended to many branches of cultural production, which have become increasingly involved in the constant effort to spot emerging trends.

To better understand this, we need to look in a bit more depth at fashion forecasting. From the opening of the first atelier by Charles-Frédéric Worth in 1857, to the first Salon du prêt-à-porter in Paris in 1957, fashion functioned according to a highly centralised model in which the French capital was the indisputable ‘jet engine’ of style. It was not until the 1960s that the forecast of trends emerged as a necessity, when the birth of prêt-à-porter allied with fundamental shifts in youth culture and radically changed the face of fashion. The introduction of the industrial production of clothing gave brands the opportunity to develop their own lines of products, thereby abandoning the imitation of high-end fashion, and offering the public accessibly priced clothing in up-to-the-
minute styles. As fashion changed, fashion designers started to copy ideas from urban subcultures as they recognised the need to produce clothes in line with the trends that were emerging from the media and pop culture – or, as many love saying, ‘from the street’.

From an industry point of view, the growing competition emphasised the need for brands to stay on top of market movements, giving rise to kinetic activity in an attempt to forecast trends. Fashion forecasting began to focus on two areas of interest. The first, inside the fashion industry, tried to identify lines and colours for new collections through a constant dialogue with the production factory and the observation of competitors. The second, outside the industry, looked at what was happening on the street in the fashion zones, attempting to understand changes in the styles of consumers.

It is now possible for us to make a distinction between fashion forecasting and coolhunting. Fashion forecasting is a practice oriented towards the internal trends of the fashion system, whereas coolhunting responds to social trends. In reality, this theoretical distinction is less than clear-cut and is the reason why a fashion company’s acceptances of the coolhunting process can range from the sourcing of external consultation to working from directly within the fashion brand. The fashion cycle is very fast and demanding, which poses a problem for fashion brands. If they are to provide radical novelties at a rhythm of every six months, then the industry has to chase after a continual recycling of styles, even if already seen, updated, reinterpreted and reimagined. This relentless cycle inevitably led to the need to study and anticipate trends. Fashion has provided a model of production and consumption that is today expanding into the ever-multiplying sectors of the ‘cultural industry’. For example, the market research agencies that use coolhunting (sometimes given different names like trendwatching or trendspotters) are based today on the interdependence between fashion and lifestyle, considering clothing as only a part of a more complex picture in which the consumer buys items less as a status symbol and more as a lifestyle symbol. In this way, coolhunting acquires a new face, making itself autonomous from the fashion sector. If the internal trend research of the fashion system is the job of the fashion designer, then the analysis of socio-cultural trends needs to be wider and less sector-specific. This form of coolhunting, far from the simple activity of researching stylistic details, represents a qualitative research approach that looks at socio-cultural images and analyses the evolution of the consumption experience with the commercial aim of translating it into creative ideas for the client or buyer, through the production of descriptive reports, conceptual maps and classifications of new trend phenomena. Coolhunting offers research techniques – still developing and with little structure – with the ambition to have a rapid impact on transforming the world of consumption, a world that is becoming ever more subject to the cyclical laws of fashion.

If we focus for a while on the geography of trends, we may ask ourselves if there is a risk that the activity of coolhunting is creating a homogenised world where trends are globalised, everyone looks the same and wants the same things. In other words, does the army of trend observers deployed in both acknowledged and emerging trend cities risk creating a cauldron of information that dilutes geographical and cultural differences? This contamination between styles and cultures could wind up creating a style that is rather uniform and global.

Analysing the above question, we can see that, on the one hand, coolhunting is often accused of promoting a homogeneous sense of fashion taste and a globalisation of styles. On the other, it is embraced enthusiastically as an overturning of the ‘trickle-down’ trend diffusion model, giving power back to the consumer, and to the styles and fashion created by those at the bottom of the fashion system pyramid. A balanced view of the question suggests a more articulate version of the scenario: coolhunters are new players in the industry who set out to identify stylistic trends and ideas from every corner of the globe, regardless of the ‘geography of fashion’, the symbolic power of fashion cities and the cyclical nature of style. Identifying a trend in Moscow or Cape Town does not automatically make those cities into new centres of influence. Rather, it means that the sources of trend inspiration are multiplied. The development and transformation of this inspiration into product lines is still a highly structured system, and the creative industrial structure of cities such as Paris, London, New York and Milan means that they are much better prepared to respond to new trends. New cities entering the global fashion market often find themselves playing the role of chasers, pursuing the style of fashion capitals and thus rendering the geography of style and fashion much more dynamic.

So far, I have used coolhunting and trendwatching as interchangeable words. Finally, I would like to explain why, in my view, the former is the most powerful description of the phenomenon. This is primarily due to the semantic richness of the word ‘coolness’, that is, the subject of the hunt. The socially constructed search for ‘authenticity’ as something to be sought after and valued is common to both mainstream and alternative consumers. The role of the coolhunter, as indicated in the name, has to do with the search for ‘coolness’, an intangible quality that simultaneously represents an individual’s preferences, but also an ‘aesthetic for managing economic power’ and the ethics of late capitalism, as Daston and Parkins pointed out.

However, what are the distinctive characteristics of coolness? And what are the elements that make a person, an object or a lifestyle ‘cool’? In my opinion, we can list at least five: authenticity, self-expression, the search for novelty, empowerment and adaptability to changing situations. Having said that, coolness often manifests itself in the context of consumer behaviour, where the ‘cool’ demonstrate their mastery of social context and their ability to feel appropriate to the current situation through self-expression and in how they present themselves to the world.

‘Coolness’ thus becomes a goal which is subject to a fiercely competitive game among players, who at industry level wish to take control of the definition of coolness, associating it with specific brands, marketable products and services, and on the consumption side look for visible ways to express their cool attitude, or, more accurately, their ‘coolness capital’. This game has incredibly high stakes, and not only in its economic consequences. The drive to baptise cool lifestyles and consumer goods has a lot to do with the power to categorise which, in the words of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, involves a ‘struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of the social world’. Coolhunting today is a complex field populated by three categories of players, all contending for a stake in a market with huge economic value. Fashion industry insiders, research agencies and freelance ‘coolhunters’ mediate between production and consumption and are all ‘cultural intermediaries’ with the power to define what is (and what is not) ‘cool’, dominating and guiding the tastes and choices of particular groups of consumers.

Words by Marco Pedroni
Edited by Emma Rehling
The Hasan Hejazi woman is confident, fun and sexy. Hasan discusses with Third Floor his opinion on the fashion industry and how to remain positive in this difficult climate.

Since graduating, up-and-coming womenswear designer Hasan Hejazi has already achieved a tremendous amount and shows no signs of slowing down. Hasan graduated two years ago from The London College of Fashion with a masters in Fashion Design. His graduate collection consisted of glamorous and powerful evening gowns that combined decadent luxurious fabrics with an indigo colour palette. The collection was showcased at the V&A and soon after was selected and stocked in Harrods as part of the ‘Harrods Launches’ initiative. “My first collection got picked by Harrods and it sold really well, which was amazing.” Growing up, Hasan had a keen interest in fashion design and at a young age he
began experimenting by sketching dresses. “When I was really young I started
designing wedding dresses for my mum. She was already married though, so I’m
not too sure why I did that.” Hasan’s passion for dresses still influences the mainody of his work today, with his signature luxury gowns and dresses accounting
for the majority of his designs.

When it comes to fashion design, Hasan has always been persistent and
determined. He applied to study at Manchester University and, after being knocked
the first time, he pursued his dream and a year later was finally accepted. After
graduating from Manchester University, his talent was recognised by London
College of Fashion and he secured a place on their masters Fashion Design
course.

Hasan’s design aesthetic combines luxury garments with a fresh sporty edge,
and for him the strong relationship between celebrities and his brand is extremely
important. When designing, Hasan has been known to name his dresses after
the celebrities he has been inspired by. “One of the most inspirational women
to me is Madonna, so I named one of the dresses M because I didn’t want to
be too obvious about it. Another dress, the ‘Kylie’, was navy and chiffon, and
immediately Hasan thought it would suit the celebrity. I found the e-mail address
for Kylie’s stylist, William Baker, and he said they loved the collection and a fitting
with Kylie was arranged. Unfortunately, Kylie wasn’t very well so the fitting didn’t
go as well as planned. However, they told me she tried on one dress which she fell
in love with and it turned out to be the dress I named after her, before she even
knew what it was called.”

Kylie Minogue, Marina and the Diamonds, Fergie from The Black Eyed Peas and,
more recently, Jessie J have previously worn Hasan’s designs. His garments have
graced the pages of Dazed and Confused, Tank and Vogue India, and the highly
respected photographer Rankin shot his Spring/Summer 2011 collection look
book. Scott Clark, the stylist for Marina and the Diamonds, contacted Hasan
about wearing one of his designs for the NME music awards. Hasan and
Scott built up a strong working relationship. Scott also happened to work as a
stylist for Rankin’s shoots: “I all came about from connections and he loved what
I did. I found myself completely star-struck by him.”

When asked about his typical customer, Hasan describes her as: “A woman who
is sure about who she is. She is powerful, but sometimes she might feel more
powerful by putting on one of my dresses. I get inspired by lots of different types
of women.” For his second collection, Hasan decided to name his dresses after
women that he has found inspirational throughout his life. “Sometimes I will design
a dress and I think it would suit a certain celebrity or musician so for my second
collection I decided to name all of my dresses.” During the design process, colours,
as for any designer, are extremely important for the talented Hasan. It was after his
graduate collection that he made the decision to include pink in every collection,
and it is now established as his trademark colour. “Somebody once wrote that
Valentino has his red and I have my pink. Pink can be really fun and sexy, and then
really sophisticated at the same time. Last season, even if a dress was white or
green, the lining was always bright pink; it is my trademark colour.”

Despite the current economic climate, Hasan remains optimistic and has a
positive mind-set when it comes to designing. “To be creative doesn’t cost money;
I love sketching and will happily sit and sketch away, although it can often be
disheartening knowing some designs might not get made.” Offering advice to
those starting out in the fashion industry, Hasan states: “If you haven’t got passion
and designing isn’t something that excites you every minute of the day, I would say
give up now.” However, having a reality this may seem, Hasan’s passion for fashion
design has had a huge impact on the success he continues to have today. “The
fact that I love designing so much helps me stay positive and excited.” With regular
celebrity commissions and private consultancies coming in thick and fast, Hasan
has made the decision to go against the grain, taking a couple of seasons out to
design what he wants and when he wants.

Words by Katie Handy-Beith
Sheer fabrics and dark draping conspire with tricks of the light to channel the dark intensity of an overactive mind.

SUBLIMINAL MESSAGING

Black sheer body from Miss Selfridge; Spiked shoulder pads by Nikita Karizma; Black cubic zirconia ring by Vamp London; Pleated maxi skirt by Anne Jeanne

Photography by Jennifer Frazer; Styling by Sophie Hawkes
This Page:

Black sheer body from Miss Selfridge; Trousers from Aqua by Aqua; Black cubic zirconia ring by Vamp London; Chunky heeled shoe boots from Topshop.
This Page: Black sheer cut out dress from Miss Selfridge; Black body Stylist's Own; Buckled black leather belt, wire cuff bracelet, studded metal earring and black court shoes from Topshop.

Opposite Page: Black lace top from H&M; Leather spiked necklace from Topman; Black turned up trousers by Jaida Hay; Socks by Calzedonia; Shoes by Underground London.

Model: Stephanie Tanner, Hair & Make up: Tasha B Harris & Danielle Batey, Photography Assistant: Sam A B Vaughan, Fashion Assistant: Kiera Liberati.
With the current economic climate in the state that it is, people are becoming even more careful with how they spend their money. Brands are now using visual merchandising such as window displays and in-store point of sales, brands have the opportunity to entice more customers to part with their cash.

Visual merchandising plays a huge role in terms of an in-store retail experience. Originally known as window dressers, the people who created shop windows were often unseen, but behind the scenes they were there, busy creating inspirational, eye-catching works of art. Today the role of a visual merchandiser is a much sought-after position within the fashion retail industry. The creative role of visual merchandising provides the opportunity to be creative and imaginative whilst assisting the process of building a brand’s identity. Visual merchandising is essentially a method used to increase sales and to ensure that customers receive a positive and memorable retail experience. A well-dressed window can subconsciously entice customers into a store and provides an effective advertising tool for the retailer in creating brand awareness. What is it that makes visual merchandising such an important part of the retail experience for consumers?

Consumer psychology has great value when considering the role of visual merchandising, also known as the ‘silent salesman’. The way that a product is displayed will directly affect sales. Shoppers might not realise to what extent they are affected by visual merchandising but undoubtedly display techniques greatly impact on the store atmosphere, ambience and the buying decisions that they eventually make. Today window displays are often an eye-catching piece of artwork, as well as a method of displaying merchandise and promoting the store.

In 2011, Barney’s, the luxury department store in New York, collaborated with singer Lady Gaga to create a Lady Gaga-inspired range of gifts. To accompany and aid in promoting the merchandise, they created a series of innovative and artistic window displays. One window display, entitled ‘Lady Gaga’s Boudoir’, filled the window space with a beautifully crafted Baroque style set. Barney’s also infused digital technology within their window displays for the collection, with one window showing an interactive video of the artist.

Often highly prestigious department stores are the leading innovators in visual merchandising, with eye-catching window displays and the huge array of window space and merchandise they have to work with. Selfridges is known as one of the most influential trendsetters in the field of visual merchandising. Its flagship store in Oxford Street is well known for its striking and attention-grabbing windows. Selfridges revolutionised the world of visual merchandising when it started leaving the window lights on when the store was closed. In July 1909, Louis Blériot famously became the first aviator to fly over water, and within hours Selfridges arranged for the plane that Blériot flew to be sent to the London store to be exhibited. The plane spent four days at the store and staggeringly over 150,000 people visited, making it a very exciting time for the retail environment in general and Selfridges in particular.

Window displays are quite often filled with seasonal products and themes that aim to not only promote the store but also remind passers-by of upcoming events, such as Valentine’s Day, Easter or Christmas. Printemps, the Parisian department store, showcased a beautifully crafted winter wonderland-themed window display for Christmas 2011, which was injected with a dose of humour, displaying countless mini versions of Chanel designer, Karl Lagerfeld. The mesmerising display shows how window displays can still be interesting and eye-catching when following a seasonal pattern.

Words and Photography by Katie Handy-Beith
Lecturer and chief expert in visual merchandising, Jonathan Baker makes a huge impact on the visual merchandising industry and with his work and passion for visual merchandising he has the opportunity to travel the world, analysing the malls of Dubai to the luxury stores in Paris and New York.

Jonathan Baker is a man of many talents. He is currently the course director of Visual Merchandising at the prestigious London College of Fashion, a position he has held for over 12 years. He is also the founder of the popular blog Retail Store Windows, which has been live for almost three years. As well as this, Jonathan is also a freelance consultant and has worked for clients such as Dubai Duty Free at Dubai International Airport and Timberland (USA) and is chief world expert in Visual Merchandising for Word Skills.

Jonathan’s first degree was in Interior Design, a passion which has fed into his interest in visual merchandising. He then went on to do a master’s degree in Art and Architecture. Whilst working at Topshop in Oxford Circus, Jonathan found his love for visual merchandising: “I came across window displays and just wanted to try it and apply my design skills where I could.” Jonathan then secured a job at Arcadia head office and was working for eight of their brands on window displays. In 2000, Jonathan was approached by University of the Arts, London about teaching and having already gained his postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE), it seemed like a perfect idea. “It was not something I wanted to do from a young age, but then again, I was never going to be a fireman!”

You are currently the course director at London College of Fashion, a chief expert in visual merchandising and, to top it off, a design external examiner; where do you find time for yourself?

I love what I do and am really passionate about my industry and subject area. I couldn’t not do what I do; this is my time for myself. I have to do something creative every single day or I would go mad. Even though I have a lot of roles, I really enjoy all that I do. I get to travel a lot as well, which is great. It is fantastic because it is the payback for all the hard work I have to do, all the long nights, working through my weekends and walking the streets in the middle of the night to gather in visual resources from wherever I find myself in the world whatever the weather. My blog generates a lot of interest, so from this I’ve been working in New York, Amsterdam, Paris, Dubai, China, Germany, Sweden and of course here in London, my education and experience has opened a lot of doors.

When you started your blog, did you expect it to become as popular as it did?

No not at all. I started my blog mainly because nobody was actually talking about the industry and nobody had a voice or stand up and say anything either. At the time we were going through a recession, I have seen about three recessions, and every time it happens, the visual merchandisers are, for some reason, always the first to go. My blog was really a voice to say, hang on a minute this is wrong, they should be the key people in your company. Somebody had to stand up and say it, because, as I am neither a supplier to the industry nor a retailer I was in an ideal position to be able to write whatever I thought through my blog and while I never intentionally intend to offend anybody I do tend to tell it like it is. After all, retailers rely on us as customers to spend our money so why should we accept poor vision standards? Although Visual Merchandising education is still on the periphery of our industry it is still very much a part of it. This gave me the opportunity to write about what I really thought about the industry as no-one else seemed prepared to do it. I am quite critical about some brands on the high street, but equally lavish praise on others who clearly get it right. As a result of this brands now actually contact me to be included and actually seem a little offended if I haven’t. My original thinking was that if creative directors couldn’t achieve what the brand wanted on their small budgets that they were given, and many clearly couldn’t, then by being critical of various brands, those creative directors were able to lever their influence to get more financial input through the use of the blog. I am often asked by creative directors to review their schemes, particularly when they have a difficult CEO to convince that what they are doing is right, to lavish praise on their schemes in order to get their creative vision in place. The blog is simply another voice and blogging essentially is just about influence.

Is there a brand or designer that stands out to you when it comes to an innovative approach to visual merchandising?

One of the leading brands in visual merchandising at the moment is Louis Vuitton; the displays they have in their London, Paris and New York Maison’s and also what they roll out globally is of a phenomenally high standard. Louis Vuitton will pick a theme for their store windows and really work with it. Selfridges, Bergdorf Goodman, Barney’s and Harvey Nichols are also fantastic and are very much leading the way. Selfridges really pick up
on the fine art trends and emerging artists in Britain, and they have an incredible niche style. Louis Vuitton and Bergdorf Goodman consistently do amazing displays; this is Visual Merchandising at its most spectacular.

Do you think there was a turning point for visual merchandising?

Yes I do. Up until the early nineties it was purely known as window display. Things were really creative and there were lots of creative teams. Brands were producing some really creative ideas and heavy weights such as Salvador Dalí, Andy Warhol and even Vincente Minnelli were involved. During the last recession everything went corporate and that's where the creativity was then crushed, so that every window looks the same. What we are starting to see now is brands that will have their corporate look but then have some stores, particularly flagship stores which will have a slightly different scheme or sub-brands with different identities.

With the current economic climate, people are becoming more careful about how they spend their money. What do you think brands can do to overcome this and remain profitable today?

By constantly making things desirable, research tells us that it takes a few seconds to entice a customer into a store, so from a VM point of view it is important to make sure the product is desirable and that the customer wants it. Being able to turn things around quickly is key – ASCS are great at doing this – the level of service that means that you can buy a product and then send it back in the same day – incredible! The future will be very much service-oriented. With everyone spending so much time on social media, but not actually interacting personally, what we are now beginning to experience in retail are customers wanting some form of personal interaction. Many people will now spend hours within luxury stores or independent retailers without ever buying anything just to fulfil their need for company. Some stores now even go as far as hiring ‘props’ such as cars and clothes to view luxury homes that they will never be able to afford, just to live the fantasy of living in such places even just momentarily.

As previously mentioned, you travel a lot with your work; if you could choose one city in the world, where would you say is the most inspiring in terms of visual merchandising?

I live in it, London! Sometimes I think it is a shame I am from here, because I always wish I was coming as a visitor, purely because it is so exciting. To be based right on Oxford Street is great – I couldn’t be any closer to where you need to be. Although if I was offered the opportunity to work in New York or Tokyo for a period of time, I absolutely would. London first, then New York and then Tokyo.

What excites you about the creative talent in London?

To start with, there is so much of it; I think London really does breed the quality. It is also equally harsh; however as it really does sort out the men from the boys. We have to work so hard in the VM industry; otherwise you will just fall by the wayside and maybe in the worst case scenario end our days working in a bank – I think I would go mad. For those who really have a passion, they will make it and get the good jobs and succeed in the industry. It really is hard work but we love it.

You carried out a forecast for the future of VM in 2020, where you collated opinions from various designers, bloggers, visual merchandisers and industry suppliers to see their predictions. In conclusion to this, what do you see for the future of VM?

It is really difficult to predict accurately what we think will happen in 2020 and we can only really guess at it. I can only make general assumptions based on what is happening right now, although these can only ever be like reading your horoscope which are so general that they can’t help but come true. That said and looking into my crystal ball, I think that we will see a lot more digital technology within retail through the use of new technology that we never thought would be possible. In fact some of it actually already exists and being used within window displays, such as augmented reality and this will have a massive impact on visual merchandising. It is also important I believe to reinvent or continually redefine what we think of as visual merchandising. If, for example, we look at the front of a newspaper, you see the brand logo at the top, you have a main photograph as your store window, you have your strap line and so on, so that even a newspaper or magazine can be seen as visual merchandising although these may no longer exist in their same format as they do now. We may see luxury brands reaching out to us in newly defined pop-up versions of their brands at the end of our own streets and we could be using technology which was only ever fantasy up until that point. Brands may branch out into previously unknown territory such as education, weddings and funerals. Can you imagine a Louis Vuitton University? A Versace wedding? Or a Gucci funeral? Sites such as YouTube who have made pop stars and celebrities out of previously unknown people is still relatively in its infancy with regards to Visual Merchandising so who can tell what opportunities may exist that are yet to be explored. Ultimately I hope it continues to be fun.

Words and Photography by Katie Handy-Beith

35
Nostalgia for a forgotten era creates an oblivious sense of being. Fading fabrics and dramatic layering against a crumbling backdrop.

Vintage white lace netted dress from Hepwright's; Fabric Stylist's Own

Photography by Jennifer Frazer; Styling by Sophie Hawkes
Lace bra top from Urban Outfitters; Lace embroidered cardigan from Zara; Caged pannier skirt from National Theatre Costume Hire; Pearl and cubic zirconia ring by Vamp London. Fan: Stylist's Own.

Opposite Page: White button up shirt from Urban Outfitters; Caged pannier skirt from National Theatre Costume Hire; Vintage brooch: Stylist's Own. Cream tights and buckled boots from Topshop.

He/She? Write one of these to me.
This Page: Vintage white lace dress from Hepwright's. Umbrella Stylist's Own.

Vintage white lace dress from Hepwright's

Model: Rosanna Derrick
Hair & Make up: Danielle Batey
Photographic Assistants: Katie Handy-Beith & Jay Wennington
Fashion Assistant: Kiera Liberati
NEW TECHNOLOGY

Advances in technology are having an increasing impact on the fashion industry, particularly within the field of fashion design. Third Floor explores the ways in which new technology is being utilised and considers the affects this is having on the industry. In the past, the fusion of fashion and technology has generally focused more on practicality and heightening the functionality of clothing rather than on inspiring fashion designers and their catwalk collections. The relationship between electronics and textiles initially started to become popular with prototypes such as sunglasses which, in addition to simply protecting your eyes from the sun, also enabled the use of Bluetooth and phone functions for their wearer. Experimenting with fashion and technology has grown even more popular within recent years and is being driven by constant advancements in technology.

One way that technology has impacted on the fashion industry as a whole is through the use of the internet. From marketing campaigns on social networking sites to online magazines and stores, the internet is a significant contributing factor to the success of some fashion brands through its use as a promotional tool. The element of instant accessibility and the worldwide audience that the internet allows them to reach has meant increasing popularity for brands such as ASOS and Net-a-Porter. Often nowadays, new magazines just starting out will be based solely online, causing some to question the future of the printed magazine.

Throughout the world, Fashion Week remains one of the most important dates in the fashion calendar, but because of easy access to the internet via smart phones, the exclusivity of fashion shows is to some extent a thing of the past. It is now common practice for designers to stream their fashion shows live for the rest of the world to watch, which means that the exclusivity and importance that fashion shows once conveyed can sometimes be lost. Twitter offers the chance for those interested to get ‘to-the-minute’ fashion updates and inside information at fashion events, as long as they know the right people to follow. Live images of catwalk shows and new collections are now often sent to Twitter and Facebook, giving people an inside look at the fashion world.

For Chloé’s Autumn/Winter 2012 collection, the decision was made to only show their Paris fashion show online in the form of a pre-recorded show. The absence of a bank of photographers, front row celebrities and exclusive goody bags can, to some people, diminish what a fashion show is all about. However, in the current economic climate, it could be seen as a smart move for a brand such as Chloé, whose designs are for the ready-to-wear market. By showing their collection online, Chloé are perhaps reaching a wider audience, and the approach to an online-only fashion show could be more beneficial for them. Perhaps in the forthcoming seasons more designers might opt for online fashion shows in a bid to cut costs and in the hopes of reaching a wider audience.

These days, technology can often act as an influence for designers, as they look towards the incorporation of technology as a challenge in the design process. For some designers, technology plays a larger part in their collections than others. For instance, Burberry is one of the leading innovators in luxury fashion and infuses technology brand forward day by very essence. For Burberry’s Summer fashion show a ‘tweetwalk’ before the show was arranged, before the show was arranged, offering preview was a clever move by Burberry, who number two on charts, but to break their record of minute. Hussein is another who has relationship technology through his body of work. Chalayan was one of the first designers to inject the use of technology into his collections, as he astonished his audience with shape-shifting designs in his Spring/Summer 2007 collection, entitled ‘One Hundred and Eleven’, where the garments transformed themselves to represent a chosen era. This was made possible through the use of micro-chipped garments and a collaboration with the special effects team behind the ‘Harry Potter’ film. Since then, Hussein has continued to impress at his preview Twitter, offering an exclusive fashion week. The use of technology in driving the fashion industry is evident. Third Floor explores the ways in which new technology is being utilised and considers the affects this is having on the industry.
An exciting and ground-breaking company in the field of wearable technology is London-based CuteCircuit. Best known for their extraordinary interactive designs, the company’s designers Francesca Rosella and Ryan Genz take wearable technology to the next level, as they continually push the boundaries of fashion design. The Galaxy Dress, created in 2009, was the centerpiece of ‘Fast-Forward: Inventing the Future’, and contains 24,000 full colour LEDs, making it the largest wearable display in the world. When asked why he thinks the relationship between technology and fashion is so important, Ryan Genz, CEO of CuteCircuit, elaborated: “Perhaps because innovation can seem to move slowly, sometimes we tend to forget that design and innovation are intimately linked; until suddenly some startling new approach surprises us and reminds us that new technologies offer great opportunities for design.” The input of technology into CuteCircuit’s designs can vary, and can often be used to accentuate the purpose of an outfit as they continue to experiment with functionality and wearability. A magnificent example of this creation of ‘wearable technology’ by CuteCircuit is the ‘M-dress’, which pushes the boundaries of practicality and acts as a phone as well as a coat. The coat accepts a regular sim card, it is activated when the wearer lifts their arm and the call is ended when the wearer lowers their arm.

Another designer to watch in the fashion tech industry is Netherlands-based Anouk Wipprecht who creates both concept-based and technology-driven fashion pieces. After achieving a bachelor’s degree in Fashion Design at Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht, she pursued her interest in technology and studied Interaction Design at the University of Malmö. Her designs have included a ‘disappearing’ dress, ‘DareDroid’, ‘Pseudomorphs’ and more recently a technology-infused piece for Fergie from The Black Eyed Peas to wear at the 2011 Super Bowl half-time performance. One of her most innovative concept-based designs is ‘Pseudomorphs’, which was inspired by her fascination with the ‘dance’ that happens when ink is dropped into water. The project includes ink-absorbed dresses, creating uncontrolled patterns from a ‘controlled’ source, and the results prove spectacular. More recently, Anouk has organized an exhibition entitled ‘Technosensual’ which will showcase pieces under the slogan ‘Where fashion meets technology’.

Although the future remains unknown, it would appear that technology will continue to have a huge influence on the fashion industry as the demand for technology and fashion is becoming increasingly evident through celebrity commissions and events such as the aforementioned ‘Technosensual exhibition. With companies such as CuteCircuit and designers like Anouk Wipprecht, Burberry and Hussein Chalayan embracing the relationship between fashion and technology, their designs will continue on an innovative and experimental route. The internet is a significant aspect of most businesses nowadays and, through the use of social networking sites, will continue to inform those not in the fashion industry of new developments and news.

Words by Katie Handy-Beith
Whilst difficult circumstances can bring out the worst in some, it can also bring out the best in others. Unity: pulling together for a brighter, more optimistic future. Keeping hope, faith and aspirations alive and dreaming bigger than ever before.

unity - optimism - faith

Illustration by Joe Staples, Photography by Emma Rehling
A textile vision realised

With growing concern for Fairtrade products, it is becoming increasingly difficult for consumers to ignore where their products originate from and who they are produced by. Heshima is a project that was founded in northern Tanzania by Alison Rogers and Steve Ngugi in 2009 and aims to teach local Maasai women textile skills in the hope that it will help them to build a sustainable source of income for themselves. Naomi Crocker, manager of the Harrods textile department, shares her experiences at Heshima and how she has helped the founders realise their vision.

Words by Emma Rehling

‘Heshima’ means ‘respect’ in Swahili and I came to know the true meaning of the word after spending three weeks in May 2011 volunteering for a little known project in Kisongo, just outside Arusha in northern Tanzania. I went there specifically to realise the vision of charity co-founders Alison Rogers and Steve Ngugi, helping to set up a textile handicraft training centre for a small group of local unemployed Maasai women. Up until then, the charity was aimed primarily at offering local deprived children education through creative tools such as sport, art and drama, but it was set up by Alison and her friend Emily Rowe that the local women’s livelihoods could be greatly enhanced by learning new skills. I was so struck by the amazingly gracious hospitality I encountered, and so deeply moved by my experience with the women and the inspirational testimonies of Alison and Steve, that I revisited the project later in the year, this time with Naomi Crocker.

I was born in a remote village in northern Zambia and lived in the country until we returned as a family to the UK when I was five. There is something about Africa that seems to uniquely root itself in the hearts of many people I have known over my lifetime who have been blessed enough to spend any length of time there, and my fondness for the land of the Maasai people. The outlook for this pastoralist, hunter-gatherer community is becoming bleak.

Peoples’ Rights. It is inevitable that the city is growing in size and is therefore encroaching on what has for generations been the land of the Maasai people. The outlook for this pastoralist, hunter-gatherer community is becoming bleak.

In northern Tanzania, traditional life for the Maasai is being threatened. Land is becoming expensive. Arusha is fast becoming a major Tanzanian city due to its close geographical proximity to Mount Kilimanjaro and the Rift Valley, with some of Africa’s most famous national parks. Also, since 1994 the city has hosted the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda which has finally come to a close this year. Arusha is also the location of the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights. It is inevitable that the city is growing in size and is therefore encroaching on what has for generations been the land of the Maasai people. The outlook for this pastoralist, hunter-gatherer community is becoming bleak.

Words by Emma Rehling

Heshima and the life of a Maasai woman

The life of a Maasai woman is tough. She is a wife (often to a polygamous husband), mother, builder and home-maker, collector of firewood, water and food, and a cook. She looks after the cattle and makes beaded decorations for her family. Although she does most of the work, she has no possessions. The house and cattle are the husband’s property.

I knew very little from Alison and Emily about their expectations for this new venture, but I did know that the long-term aim was that the women would learn skills at the centre which would eventually lead to a fair income from the products they produced. It was hard to know what to expect in those months leading up to my flight in May. I prepared a folder of images from the Fairtrade magazines Trade Craft, and People Tree, together with images and photographs collected during my degree and cuttings of articles and trends from haute couture publications such as Vogue.

I was a little daunting and kept me focused, rather than contemplating any emotional thoughts about ‘returning home’. The journey went smoothly, passing fantastic scenery...
at the Kenya-Tanzania border and taking in my first glimpses of the primitive nature of the people I’d be working alongside for the next three weeks. The extreme of my life, working at Haddeo, was a million miles away, but I felt instantly that this was going to be the best experience of my life.

It was great to have Emily meet me at the bus stop. From there we traveled to the International School, Braeburn, which would be my home during my stay. I was initially surprised by the beautiful school compound and the very good accommodation for the teachers, the majority of whom are western. I was quickly made aware that long-experience and opportunities for good education and social mobility are prevalent in all communities, especially when seeing the poor conditions of the local state school across the road.

**My contribution**

It was fantastic to finally meet Alison and to better understand how Emily and Alison’s idea of introducing a textile side to Heshima came about. I felt that Alison and Emily were somewhat re-energised about this idea with me being there (with them holding down full-time jobs at Braeburn, it must have been very frustrating not to be able to commit more time to their vision), so I was pleased to feel that I could hopefully push things on for them a little.

Day one at Heshima was so exciting, and made less daunting to commit more time to their vision, so I was pleased to feel that I could hopefully push things on for them a little.

Year one at Heshima and the start the women were open to the idea of learning new techniques. I realized that these women had great potential. They had never been exposed to the creative sources that I had always taken for granted, yet they were imaginative, innovative and rich in a beautiful culture centred on the importance of community and surviving together as a strong unit – I knew after this experience that I would be back again soon.

**Second trip**

Within a month of returning to the UK, Haddeo agreed to me taking (sabbatical) leave and once again I booked my flights and started the short countdown to trip number two, which this time was to last two months; a real opportunity for me to throw myself into life in Tanzania. My independence was greatly enhanced by the loan of a bike and very quickly, my confidence increased enough for me to use my own (mostly wooden and local transport – a sure way to feel the full impact of local life. I’m sure I provided a lot of entertainment on my daily cycles back and forth to Heshima, my maxi dress was flowing behind me whilst being overtaken by countless other jeeps!

It was fabulous to be reunited with the women, including a few new faces. This trip, however, I was accompanied only by my Swahili dictionary and phrase book. Melissa had gone to Dar Es Salaam to start her first term at university. Sinyanti, one of the ladies who had been there in May, wasn’t there this time but I soon found out she had just had a baby daughter three weeks earlier. I just had to go and see her. Maasai mothers stay indoors for six months until the baby’s defence systems are thought to be strong enough. I just couldn’t help thinking how difficult that must be for the mother. She made it clear that she wished she could see how we were getting on, so I frequently visited and showed her pictures of our efforts.

Grace and I worked together very closely to begin with, so that she could understand that for Heshima to succeed, consistency was essential. We went shopping together and Grace showed me the best shops to get the highest quality fabrics, especially with the bulk of cloth I would need to buy on each occasion. I became very good at bargaining and the shopkeepers enjoyed the banter once I became a regular customer.

In my first week back, the ladies had had fun, cutting animal shapes and then appliquéing them onto contrasting fabrics using various hand-stitch techniques. These would later develop into products including Christmas stockings, bunting and various souvenirs separated and small greeting cards with arrangements of layered, embellished fabric used up any tiny scraps; the women were able to stamp their own personalities onto these tiny, yet beautiful, individual products.

I felt that real relationships were now being formed and the thought of eventually leaving these beautiful women was hard to stomach. Every break-time became an English lesson, and with no one to help me translate this time, my Swahili progressed surprisingly quickly. Maasai being their first language and Swahili their second, to learn a third is difficult; however, they desperately wish to learn English as when it comes to employment, it is invaluable in such a culturally diverse city as Arusha. Their understanding of English certainly increased and Grace made a point of encouraging the ladies to speak to me in English. I’m sure that the dictionary left with them is being used well!

As the time for me to leave drew closer, the bonds created amongst all of us were evident. Worries and concerns about my departure and how Heshima would continue to the same standard also grew. I planned to take a weekly break towards the end of my trip to see more of the country; I felt I had very little time to explore this area up to this time. However, I left a lot of what I expected Grace to achieve over the week. It was actually a very good idea for me to completely step away for that week as it allowed me to establish how they would cope without me. I then had my final week at Heshima, seeing how they had got on without me and spending my time observing, speaking mainly to Grace, rather than allowing the ladies to depend on me for confirmation of good work. I had to see this consistency being instilled through Grace alone now.

I’m so proud of all that the women have achieved and feel encouraged by the dedication to learning they exhibited whilst I was in Kisingo. All the women training and working are uniquely talented and have amazing skills, but they need help to expose this talent to the rest of the world. In time, Alison and Steve hope to offer a fair income, as well as basic business skills and English lessons, through the textile centre, so that they can become more independent. Heshima is also working to offer a recognized certificate on completion of training, so that the women can set up their own businesses. Alongside the long list of aims, Heshima is also working towards gaining ‘Fairtrade Craft’ status.

Heshima is a UK registered charity: 1114419

Words and Photography by Naomi Crocker
David Downton is one of the most prolific and inspirational fashion illustrators working in the industry today. His iconic illustrations are featured everywhere: from the pages of the world's most prestigious fashion magazines, to luxury fashion brand ad campaigns, M&S shopper bags and the store windows of some of the world's most famous department stores. For anyone even vaguely interested in fashion or art, David's illustrations are instantly recognisable from his distinctive, visionary drawing style and his ability to capture an element of elegant spontaneity within each of his illustrations.

After graduating from Wolverhampton University in 1981, David spent the beginning of his career taking on a diverse range of projects, while working as a freelance illustrator. It was not until 1996 that David realised his natural aptitude for fashion illustration when the Financial Times sent him to Paris to draw the Couture shows. Since then, David has managed to build up an impressive fashion portfolio, with commissions from clients such as Tiffany & Co., Bloomingdales, Harrods, Topshop, Chanel, Dior, Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. He has also produced portraits of some of the most beautiful women in the world including Erin O'Connor, Dita Von Teese, Paloma Picasso and Linda Evangelista. In a recent interview with Third Floor, David Downton discussed his illustrious career, his experiences in industry and also how he thinks fashion illustration has managed to survive, despite the digital age we now live in.
What was it about studying illustration that first appealed to you?

I was always drawing. As a child I thought I was a genius. Picasso boasted that he could draw like Raphael from the age of eight and that's roughly how I felt — although I had never heard of either artist. It was only when I got to art school that I realized that I was not so special, that everyone could do what I did. I became an illustrator really because I wanted to make my living by drawing.

You say that your career as a fashion illustrator started by accident; now that it's happened, could you ever imagine doing anything else?

Truthfully, I am having the best time doing what I am doing. I can't imagine doing anything else.

Despite the fashion industry now being so photography-based, fashion illustration has still managed to survive — why do you think that is?

Everyone thinks they can be a photographer today, in part thanks to the iPhone. You see them pointing everywhere! Although drawing predates photography by centuries, right now I think it looks more considered and, in a strange way, more modern. I think illustration is more personal. It is one person's vision.

Capturing the essence of Couture collections in your illustrations is something that you excel at. What is it specifically about Couture that moves you?

I count myself very lucky to work with some of the most creative people imaginable. Fashion illustration is really about absorbing someone else's creativity and reinterpreting it. And when it is successful, it represents the best of both of you. I defy anyone, whether they are interested in fashion or not, to fail to be inspired by a Galliano or Gaultier show, or not to be amazed by Lacroix's extraordinary and surprising use of colour.

For you, what makes an interesting fashion subject?

The person wearing it! Or at least the reaction of the body to the clothes and vice versa.

Of all the amazing designers you have had the opportunity to illustrate, who is your favourite and why?

I loved Christian Lacroix couture, it was a masterclass in artistry, in drama, in the mixing but never matching of colour. It was very difficult to draw, especially for me, as I generally respond to a kind of pared-down fluidity. A Lacroix show was always a transcendent experience.

Throughout your career, what has been the most difficult stage that you can remember and how did you overcome this?

As for most people, the hardest thing was getting started. I didn't have a particular style or focus when I began. I just knew I wanted to be an illustrator. I thought that the best thing I could do would be to be versatile, to tackle any subject matter. A lot of what I did in the early days was dross, but to be honest I didn't bother me. I was learning and I loved the phone ringing; it was like being asked to the party. Work was easier to find when I started out in the 1980s, but good, challenging work was as scarce then as it is now. There are always highs and lows in any career, but in the end, there are few problems you can't draw yourself out of.

The elimination of detail in your illustration must be very difficult. How do you decide which details remain and which ones go?

Before I can start eliminating what I consider to be extraneous detail, I have to know where everything goes, how it works. Then I can begin to unpick. I like to leave a 'breathing space' in my drawings, a gap, something for the eye to fill in. Then I use a light box and start to work in ink on good paper, leaving out what I feel is extraneous.

What is the most important thing you always try to communicate through your work?

A sense of the moment. A certain fluidity, the appearance of effortlessness. It is about capturing the spirit of the person/the clothes as economically as possible. Line has always fascinated me; we can all draw a line, but some people can make the line funny, some can make it sexy or invest it with emotion — yet
still it’s just a line. I work very hard to make it look easy.

In recent years there has been a lot of talk about the ‘revival’ of fashion illustration. What do you feel is the reason for this?

Fashion illustration hasn’t been ‘fashionable’, at least in magazines, for the last 30 years. That said, for an art form that has been dying on its feet for all that time, it does seem to be in remarkably good health. The depth and breadth of talent today is extraordinary. The truth is that we will always need artists to record and interpret a designer’s work. It’s a symbiotic relationship, one art form describing another.

Working to the variety of different briefs and deadlines that you do requires you to be very versatile and experimental. Over the years, what has been your favourite job?

Always the next one.

What is the most challenging aspect of your job and how do you manage to keep it all together?

Illustrators are commercial artists (but so are fine artists today – have you seen Damien Hirst’s trainers for Converse?) and you have to remember that it’s a business; a profession as well as a passion.

You say that a lot of your work has been inspired by timeless, classic fashion illustrators such as Gruau, Antonio and Eric. Is longevity and timelessness something you consider when creating your drawings? How would you like people to feel when looking back on your work in 20 years’ time?

I never wanted to be the illustrator of the moment, because the moment always passes. Once I became focused and started working within fashion, I definitely wanted to be in it for the long haul. Gruau worked into his 90s, a role model for us all. If people are still looking at my work in 20 years’ time, I will be delighted. I hope it will conjure up a kind of nostalgia without looking too dated.

What is it that inspires you about fashion today?

Mainly it’s the people in the industry who are driven by beauty, by passion, by a love of what they do and who, in my experience, can be the most fun to be around. We all know the AB FAB stereotypes and they do exist for sure, but there is a whole other side to fashion. I celebrate that!

Words by Emma Rehling
Two halves of a whole come together as opposites attract with optical prints as androgyny meets a monochrome edge.

Opalec

Dissillusion
Polka dot button up shirt and silk striped trousers from Zara; Black and white platform shoes from River Island.
This Page: Black and white striped dropped hem shirt from ASOS; Sheer black dress by Project; Black platform shoes from Topshop
Opposite Page: Dropped waist dress by Peridot; Vertical striped tights and platform black shoes from Topshop
White Shirt by Peridot; Tight black shorts and platform shoes from Topshop; Polka dot black and white tights from H&M.

Model: Toni Caroline; Hair & Make Up: Tasha B Harris; Photographic Assistant: Uljana Rättel; Fashion Assistant: Kiera Liberati.
With a career spanning over 50 years, Terry Mansfield CBE is undoubtedly one of the industry’s most influential and iconic figures. Former chairman of Graduate Fashion Week, and ex-CEO of National Magazines, Terry is something of an expert in the world of media and publishing. One of the most striking things about Terry, aside from his charismatic persona, is his unique ability to adapt and change with the times. He continues to remain just as relevant, fresh and innovative today as he was when he first began work at the age of 16. Awarded a CBE in 2002 for services to the magazine industry, Terry’s wide breadth of experience has given him an aptitude for spotting new creative talent, something that really has become a kind of talent within itself. His involvement with Graduate Fashion Week as chairman for the last seven years has allowed Terry to stay at the very forefront of fresh British fashion talent, and although he has now stepped down as chairman in 2012, he is still very much involved in the creative industries and, of course, in nurturing tomorrow’s talent.

What was it that first attracted you to work in the media and publishing industries?

It was the day I was taken by my school to see the local newspaper. We spent the whole day there and I thought it was the most exciting thing I had ever seen. I fantasised all the way home that I would wear a press card in my trilby hat (which was fashionable in those days) and I would discover a major story, a murder or something like that. I would stop the front page, get the story in the newspaper and get the girl, but unfortunately it didn’t quite happen like that and I had to start by getting a job. The owner of the first advertising agency that I went to work for said that, as I was the only one that had applied for the job, he would give me a try, and if I was hopeless I would have to be gone by the end of the month. I tried to make sure I wasn’t totally hopeless and I only got promoted because they said my tea was terrible, one of the golden rules in life is never to make good tea, otherwise you will be doing it forever.

You have been a central figure in the industry for such a long time – what do you think has been the key to your success?

My father always used to tell me that I have two ears and one mouth, which means it’s twice as important to listen as it is to speak. I’ve always worked very hard, and I love creativity and I love ideas. When you have ideas and when you are a creative person, you just have to do it, you can’t not do it as it is just something that you have to do. Also, I’ve been very lucky – people have given me a chance. In many cases, I owe my career to other people who believed in me at a certain moment in time.

What has driven you to stay in the industry for so long?

I am a natural interferer. I’m curious and I’m fascinated to know how things work. And as my wife will tell you, I don’t know when I’m working and when I’m not.

What inspires you?

A new day. Every day, a new day.

Throughout the 50 years of your career, what have you learnt about resilience?

I think if you think about it, you’ve got to be disciplined and you’ve got to be able to sniff the air and act accordingly. Very talented people don’t always find it easy to be normal. Some of the very best writers I have worked with are unable to write until 4 o’clock in the morning, they’ve had nine cigarettes, five cups of coffee, the telephone is in the fridge, they are two weeks late and they can’t open the front door because the editor is trying to break their windows – then they can write like angels. Until they get to that stage in the process, they can’t write at all, so they have to be brilliant for people to put up with their nonsense. Usually, it’s somewhere in the middle.

Throughout your 50 years in industry, what would you say has been the biggest, most revolutionary change that has had the most impact and why?

Technology. Technology is moving so quickly that the things that we are using today could be obsolete in 16 weeks. If that, everything’s so fast now, isn’t it? That’s the world we live in. In magazines we used to be able to feature Ascot, which is in June, in the September issues – you couldn’t do that today, people want to see it as it happens. Technology is the biggest revolution. Another thing I like very much that’s happened during my career is the evolution of the success of women. When I first came into the magazine business, a lot of the editors for women’s magazines were men, it is hard to believe now. What is so nice about it is that young women today just assume they’re in charge. I have daughters and they can’t imagine not being in charge.

It has been said that the printed magazine industry is a dying business – is this something that you agree with?

It’s been dying for 500 years. I remember when television first came along and everybody said to me: “Get out of magazines and come into television, that’s where the big action is!” but we are still here selling more magazines today. Do you know there are 3,400 magazines on the newsstand in this country at any given time? There certainly wasn’t when I first came into the business. Magazines are like a cockroach: wherever you go in the world, there’s always a cockroach somewhere that manages to survive, and magazines are like that. Every time you think that magazines are going, another one comes up. I think that the very best magazines will always survive.

Of all your achievements, what is the one thing you treasure the most?

The Estee Lauder company was started by an amazing lady called Estee Lauder and I knew her for a very long time – I remember when the Estee Lauder brand first came over to this country from America. When she died, I was asked, with Liz Hurley and one other person, to speak at her memorial service, and I thought that was special. After all, I was her supplier, I produced magazines, but I knew the family very well enough for them to ask me to speak at the memorial service. I thought that was incredible.

What has been the most difficult point in your career that you can remember? How did you cope with this?

Having to close magazines. There have been different
Where do you find the balance between practicality and creativity?

Well, that’s a miracle that the newspapers have to deal with every day and magazines have to deal with every time they publish. In publishing, we move from a creative process to a manufacturing process, just like fashion. Fashion designers do a drawing of a garment and then someone else comes along and has to work out how many pieces it takes to make that garment into something that is three-dimensional; you have to pattern cut in such a way that the initial vision can be sewn together and becomes wearable. The same thing applies to a magazine: you start with the raw copy and the photographs and you bring it all together with the same voice. You have different people with different skills, and it is a team effort. Everyone does different things to make it work, just like running a theatre.

What was it that first made you want to get involved with Graduate Fashion Week?

It was completely by accident. I had known the fashion designer, Jeff Banks, for a long time and was asked to give an award for his 13-year contribution to Graduate Fashion Week. In my head I thought I would turn up on time, say some nice things about Jeff, have a glass of wine and go home. Two days later he phoned me and said: “I’ve been doing it for 13 years, what about you giving it a go?” I’m very superstitious and I think that there are three stages in life; you have to pattern cut in such a way that the initial vision can be sewn together and becomes wearable. The same thing applies to a magazine: you start with the raw copy and the photographs and you bring it all together with the same voice. You have different people with different skills, and it is a team effort. Everyone does different things to make it work, just like running a theatre.

What is fashion?

Fashion is the biggest energy in the world – there is nothing bigger than fashion. What happens on the catwalks will flash across the world faster than a war. Fashion is, for me, not about clothes; it is about everything we do in life. It impacts on how cars are designed, the kind of fabrics that are used in upholstery, in food – we have magazines like Good Housekeeping where we do a lot of food pictures and it’s amazing how a Yorkshire pudding that we have photographed say two or three years ago now cannot be used because it doesn’t look right. It’s a bit like the way you keep clothes in the hope that they will come back into fashion – and then when it does come back, it never quite comes back the same way. It’s cut differently, and the fabrics aren’t quite the same. Beauty follows fashion, fashion never follows beauty.

What gives you hope for the future?

Young people – they’re the hope for the future, aren’t they? I’ve run my raspies and they are the future. Futures can be improbable; they are not a straight line. Life is a journey and that journey will have twists and turns, but that’s what makes it life. It’s the mistakes that you make and all the things that didn’t quite work out that make you what you are when you’re a grown-up person. You have to create an interesting life for yourself, because you are going to spend more time working than you will anything else.

What do you find most inspiring about working with young people?

New ideas. Young people do not see the snags, and because they’ve not experienced the snags they just have a go, which I think is lovely.

What impact do you think the current difficult economic climate is having on the creative industries?

I think that there is a different behaviour as far as fashion design is concerned. You have two ends of the market running, the top end of the market and the bottom end of the market. You have the classical designers, like Burberry who are doing fantastically well, and then at the opposite end, people like Primark and the supermarkets who are also doing incredibly well. It is the middle ground that is the most difficult. Another big problem is the lack of opportunity for young people – paid opportunity anyway. To be honest, I find it very troublesome how many young people I have met who are doing internships somewhere or other and they’re not even getting their bus fare; sadly companies take advantage. Young people feel it’s better to be inside the company in the hope there might be a job tomorrow or the day after than being outside. The government are trying to reinvigorate apprenticeships which I think is a good idea, because then at least they get paid something.

What do you think it is that sets Britain apart in terms of young creative talent?

I think we are the most creative country in the world. What is not generally known about the creative industries in Britain is that you were put to them all together, they would be more valuable to this country than financial services. In the UK we have the most creative energy. How many languages do you think we speak in London? 300. We are the most diverse city in the world when it comes to fashion, culture, food, lifestyle, everything. Everybody wants to be associated with London in some way or another. Tom Ford wants to be here in London because he loves the energy. The offices of the chief designer for Ford cars are not in Detroit, they are in Carnaby Street, so they design cars for all over the world.

In London. When it comes to education, being educated in Britain gives students an edge.

Words by Emma Rehling

Image courtesy of www.catwalking.com
Gareth Bryn Lewis is an accomplished accessories designer with a passion for innovation through his use of materials and techniques. Gareth began working as a bespoke tailor when he was only 16 as he searched for a creative pastime outside of boarding school. “I started learning to pattern cut and was really interested in fashion and the social relevance of it in society.” Although a great skill, Gareth found pattern cutting a bit bland and this led to an interest in accessory design, where he became increasingly inspired by footwear designers such as Salvatore Ferragamo and Manolo Blahnik. “I started an internship in footwear design for ShoeFolk but I didn’t find my feet and felt like I needed more creative freedom.” Gareth then enrolled on an accessory design-based course as he felt he had the ability to be a lot more creative with space and concepts. After graduating from London College of Fashion's Cordwainers College, Gareth's unique approach to accessory design was recognised when he was awarded Young Designer of the Year 2009 by Drapers.

Gareth's exploration of geometry and symbolic patterns within his designs gives his work a unique and stimulating feel. He uses a versatile approach to handbag design, and his work in the past has ranged from a collaboration with Kuni Arai to a project for French company, Cop Copine. Gareth is currently based in a sleepy village outside of Venice, Italy, where he is part way through an apprenticeship with the luxury brand Bottega Veneta, resulting in a capsule collection which will be considered for putting into production.

Nowadays handbags are used to carry anything from your macbook and phone to a tea cup dog, but for the most part practicality is essential. Is this something you consider when you design? It depends what you're designing for – my final MA collection was the last chance I had to be really creative and I didn't have to worry about aspects such as practicality. If you consider designers such as Gareth Pugh or Hussein Chalayan, half of their collection will be concept pieces to show the concept of the collection, but the other half will be totally sellable. It's important to have concept pieces in your collection to really show off what you're trying to say, and if you want to make a statement within your work, shapes are a great way of doing so. For my MA collection, the whole point was to be impractical, whereas now at Bottega Veneta, practicality is extremely important. Bottega Veneta's Cabat bags are hand woven, cost up to £10,000 and are made up out of eight crocodile skins. They have to be absolutely perfect and usable. However, when it comes to my capsule collection for Bottega Veneta, I might hopefully be able to do something more innovative again.

As an accessory designer, there are many stages you have to go through to form a finished product. What is your favourite stage of the design process?

For me personally, it is design realisation, when you first see your concept and pattern cutting come together and you're in the stage of watching your concept grow. It's almost as if you're a parent and you watch your kids graduating from school – it's like the ball is rolling now. Finishing is also quite nice – you can fiddle around with it, add a couple of stitches here and there, buff it up a bit. It's like getting up in the morning, it's like you're ready to face the world.

You won the Drapers young accessories designer of the year in 2009 – this is a great achievement, you must have been extremely proud. How do you think an award like that...
benefited you?

Having an award behind you, such as Draper's, really shows that someone believes in you. I think for me, more importantly, it proved to myself that I could design women's accessories and having such an award really demonstrates that you really can do something. I hadn't met anybody at Draper's until the awards ceremony; I submitted some work but they had no idea who I was. It goes to show that, without having met someone, you can judge their style. It was a concept-driven bag but it was practical, so it showed to a lot of people my full ability with concept vs design.

Where do you draw the line between fashion and art?

When you design, you have an artistic intention but often your design is pre-mediated, whereas art isn't pre-mediated. It is sporadic. You draw the line as a designer where you feel best comfortable – it's a personal call. If you are designing for a project, a brand or freelance, then it's important that you fit in line with the project details or design brief.

Geometry and symbolic patterns are noted influences on some of your work; what else inspires your designs?

Primary research is always a key inspiration. My main inspirations come from a variety of different places: architecture, fine art or often from science. Inspiration can come from anywhere. Recently I've been heavily influenced by theories of mathematics and chaos theories. When designing, I like the idea that you can make shapes using maths, for example; to make a polyhedron, it's a number of faces, and every time you add another face you add another level – it's an ongoing spiral. Maths and science give a lot of interesting pathways that I can follow within my designs.

What do you think about fashion now?

When the whole of the country is frowning, the fashion industry is smiling! We have to keep a smile on our face, irrespective of the economy, and try to keep some happiness in life. The fashion industry brings out the best in our culture; even though the current economy is stuttering, we need to give it a tap on the back and say 'come on let's keep going'. There are a lot of cutbacks and a lot of young people without jobs, but that also means there are a lot of young people with the opportunity to do something for themselves. People are spending just as well as before the recession; they are just taking more of a hard line on quality and sustainability. People realise that buying a jacket from Primark is probably only going to last one season, but buying from a top-end designer is going to last a lot longer. My dad gave me a Christian Dior suit that he bought when he was my age and it is still wearable now, it is still fantastic. However, the longevity of making things really good quality might mean that people don't come back to you. Tanner Krolle trunk makers say they make them so well that they last forever, but then you would only need one, so you wouldn't have repeat customers.

As you say, people are ever more persuaded by the sustainability of a handbag and how long it will last. Within your work as a designer, are sustainability and quality important factors?

Yes of course. I think relevancy is an important factor as well. Using relevant materials is important. Some people don't know enough about the materials they use and this is a great shame. In France and Italy, they have big guilds who are so involved in training young people on what leather is good for and what fabrics are good for what. It would be great to see someone introduce a British guild to help designers and manufacturers, sourcing the right types of material for the use intended.

You are currently part-way through your placement at Bottega Veneta. What other plans do you have for 2012?

I'm going to take things as they come for now. I love being out in Italy, it has given me a great sense of character. I have smaller boundaries in Italy: at Bottega Veneta, they spend almost two weeks testing the leather that they will use for a bag and put it through about 20 different processes to test the quality. I think being in Italy is going to help refine my style and encourage me to become more unique and appealing as a designer. I think possibly for the time-being I might also spend some time in Paris, because there are possible collections that I'm planning on working on there. I'm sure there will be some more crazy stuff before not too long!
Both vintage and contemporary fashion have the same function and wearability, but often hold a completely different design aesthetic. The demand for vintage has become so significant that vintage is seemingly everywhere. Vintage fans often take to the streets of the UK and independent vintage shops are now scattered across the country. Whether it be genuine vintage pieces or high street brands that replicate historic garments, there is no denying that vintage is out there. This leads us to question what it is about vintage clothes that appeals to the modern market.

Some vintage garments, due to their historic background, are rare and hard to come by and people can sometimes feel they are picking through racks of vintage clothing more satisfying than picking up a generic garment from their nearest high street store. With high street clothing, you can often find that somebody has the same garment as you, whereas with vintage, this risk is a lot lower as pieces are usually one of a kind.

Rachel Duckir is the director of Shikasuk, a vintage store situated in Primrose Hill specialising in stylish garments, bags, jewellery and fine art. Rachel strongly concurs with the idea of the appeal of nostalgia surrounding vintage fashion and believes individuality is a trait many aspire to when dressing themselves: “As a teenager, I loved the uniqueness; no one else was ever wearing the same clothes as I was.”

Vicky Brearley, the voice behind the popular vintage blog, Vintage Vixen, suggests that no retailer has its own sole identity these days: “Once you could visit a shop and expect to find a certain style more or less exclusive to that store. Nowadays the same prints, shapes and styles are available everywhere.”

Rachel Ducker is the director of Shikasuki, a vintage store situated in Primrose Hill specialising in stylish garments, bags, jewellery and fine art. Rachel strongly concurs with the idea of the appeal of nostalgia surrounding vintage fashion and believes individuality is a trait many aspire to when dressing themselves: “As a teenager, I loved the uniqueness; no one else was ever wearing the same clothes as I was.”

Jo-ann Fortune, who launched and runs the vintage website, Vintage Vixen, suggests that vintage fashion is a way of life. Jo-ann described vintage fashion as being “that special find”, as each piece of vintage clothing has a history, a story behind the garment or item. Putting on a dress and imagining its history provides much more of an experience to its wearer than putting on a high street dress manufactured and sold to the masses.

For consumers, knowing where and when to source the best vintage garments can be a fairly daunting experience. Vintage fashion stylist Naomi Thompson recognised this barrier between the vintage industry and the consumer. On her mission to bridge the gap between vintage fashion and the customer, she created her website, Vintage Secret. Naomi now holds one-day events, issuing personal styling advice and guiding potential vintage customers to their nearest boutiques and stores. She presents an interesting and creative service package and has achieved significant press coverage including features in Vogue, the Sunday Times Style Magazine, the Daily Telegraph and Cosmopolitan. She has also presented a segment on the BBC's The One Show. Naomi has recently launched a book entitled 'Style Me Vintage'. The book aims to teach its readers which vintage era works best for different body shapes, and gives advice on building a vintage wardrobe to fit a specific budget. The book is not a guide on how to dress, but is an inspirational memoir displaying vintage style and a collection of the useful tips that Naomi has collated throughout her career. Naomi sees vintage fashion as an investment; she describes why she believes people desire vintage fashion: “It’s like a treasure hunt. It turns up everywhere and you never know what you will find. For a long time people made their own clothes, so it’s not hard to own a completely one-off piece. It can get utterly addictive though.”

Vintage fashion is very much a love/hate affair. Some vintage garments, due to their historic background, are, for some, challenging to wear. Fiona Stuart, the co-owner of Rellik, a vintage retailer based in Golborne Road, London, feels that vintage is still desirable. “Once you could visit a shop and expect the same prints, shapes and styles are available everywhere.”

When asked why she believes that people are turning to vintage fashion, she answers: “The desire for vintage is personal. It can stem anywhere from a simple childhood memory when they were younger, to wanting a couture item which they could never afford, or simply falling in love with a rare and special piece.” Fiona suggests that vintage fashion allows people to feel unique and gives individuals the opportunity to seek out pieces that they would not be able to find elsewhere, with one person’s history becoming someone else’s future.

Although the vintage trend has been a recurring theme within the fashion industry for several years now, it seems that people are not tired of it yet and perhaps the fashion industry will always enjoy looking back to the past for inspiration. The vast growth of vintage blogs such as Vintage Vixen, Diary of a Vintage Girl, Sally Jane Vintage and Blooming Leopold is keeping the vintage phenomenon alive. As long as people are still shopping within vintage stores, this popular trend will continue to expand and develop.

Words by Sophie Hawkes
A fusion of pastel tones complimented with upbeat sorbet shades make for a positive vibe. The chalky colour palette and refreshing hues are finished off with sharp minimal tailoring.
Sleeveless trench coat by Maryling; Pastel pleated shirt from Zara; Pink tights and Mint lace trim socks from Topshop; Brown court shoes from River Island

Opposite Page: White structured body by Aqua by Aqua; Sheer floral shirt from Hepwright's; White framed sunglasses from Zara
Pink floral shirt and Mint knitted jumper from Zara; Cropped trousers and gold and mint earrings from Topshop; Strappy green and orange shoes from River Island.

Floral print suit from River Island; Yellow button up shirt by Gallery; Pearl necklace from Topshop.
Mint green cropped t-shirt and Pearl collar necklace from Topshop; Pink faux leather jacket from Hepwright's; Cream pleated trousers by Corrie Nielson; Love heart ring by Adrienne Honie; Pearl earrings Stylist's Own

Model: Celyn Marshall; Hair & Make Up: Tasha B Harris; Photographic Assistant: Uljana Rättel; Fashion Assistant: Kiera Liberati
The launch of London Collections: Men this year landmarks a huge step forward for the British Menswear industry, putting London on the map as the fashion capital to watch for 2012. Third Floor reflects upon the elements that are making British Menswear so exciting today, and understands why Menswear is no longer prepared to be side lined to its female fashion counterpart.

It is no secret that in recent years, British menswear has slowly been gaining credence as an increasingly progressive, inspirational and significant source of cutting-edge, contemporary fashion. Over the last few seasons, the menswear market has seen a huge growth in the attention it has been receiving from buyers, editors and press, with London seeming to be at the epicentre of all the excitement. While the rest of the industry is feeling the full effects of tough economic and financial constraints, menswear is not only just surviving, but actually appears to be flourishing in these difficult times, showing great resilience in overcoming the current recession. In a recent study carried out by Bain & Co Consultancy, it was found that the luxury menswear market is currently expanding at twice the rate of womenswear, meaning that although menswear has traditionally been sidelined by its female fashion counterpart, it is now becoming a fashion force in its own right.

From the days of Beau Brummel and the dandy, to the internationally renowned Savile Row bespoke tailor, London has always been considered a world leader in mens fashion and historically has played a fundamental role in defining the face of British fashion. The city’s unique, creative energy and wide range of diverse street style is sought after by trend forecasters all over the world, and the British capital often acts as an inspirational focal point for designers, buyers and brands alike. London is where people come to hunt for fashion innovation, and menswear is no exception, which is why the extension of Men’s Fashion Week in 2012 comes as little surprise. The launch of London Collection: Men, headed by GQ Editor Dylan Jones, coincides with one of the most important years in London’s history, recognising the growing demand for men’s fashion in London and also landmarking just how far British menswear has come in the last few years. The new menswear initiative begins this year, and will not only kick start the menswear fashion calendar for 2012 but will also give the best of British menswear designers the chance to showcase their work, some of them for the very first time.

When asked what London Fashion means to him in 2012, chairman of the London men’s showcase Dylan Jones said: “This is one of the most important years in London’s history, and one of the most important years in the history of menswear too.”
Classically, men’s fashion has always moved at a much slower pace than women’s, with the rates at which male trends are adopted being a much more gradual process than the frequent seasonal changes that women’s fashion undergoes each year. But in an age where men are becoming much more concerned with their appearance, the traditional ‘one new suit every year’ approach just isn’t cutting it anymore and for the first time in decades, we are amidst a time of great change in the world of men’s fashion; the man of today wants variety, they want cutting-edge trends and they want them as soon as they can get them. Charlie Rander, creative director at online menswear retail platform MYEROS.co.uk, explains why she feels there has been an increasing shift towards menswear in the last few seasons: “I feel that in recent years men have become a lot more comfortable and open in caring for their appearances. Men are no longer going to London Fashion Week just to see the girls, but they are also now going to see men’s fashion too. Up until this year, menswear has only been featured for one day. I have been toying on this a lot – these days it seems everywhere is harking on about values, sustainable and ethical fashion, but what about equal rights of menswear?”

One of the most noticeable changes in menswear over the last few years has been the sheer amount of choice and variety that is now being made available to the male consumer – brands are starting to stock a much more varied range of trends and styles, and there has also been a huge increase in the amount of fresh, new menswear designers starting out in the British market. Whereas in the past men were limited to fairly rigid trends and a more conservative aesthetic than women, the market has steadily begun to diversify in an attempt to try and satisfy the changing wants and needs of the contemporary man; in the twenty-first century he is no longer having to conform to traditional, bland fashions of the past and is using the opportunity to be more experimental in the trends that he adopts and the way that he dresses. A result of this has been to open the minds of the consumer and people working within the menswear market to fresh fashion design ideas, allowing for a much more innovative approach towards British menswear and tailoring, as well as making room for creative young talent such as JW Anderson, Christopher Shannon, James Long and Martine Rose. Winner of Vauxhall Fashion Scouts Ones To Watch for 2012, Frances Phillips is one of London’s most exciting up-and-coming menswear designers and the driving force behind masculine design label TOBEFRANK, a brand that aims to reflect the image of the real British gentleman. Phillips shared some of her views on the ascension of the British menswear industry with traditional fashion influences from our amazing historical stories; my Autumn/Winter collection this year was inspired by the working man and the business combined as one.”

Unlike their female equivalents, men have typically been much more concerned with the resilience and quality of their clothing over its aesthetic value. Despite the increased sense of fashion freedom that we are now experiencing, it is unlikely that men will be any more willing to compromise on the quality or craftsmanship of their apparel due to their strong sense of garment sustainability and practicality. In terms of attire, high-quality craftsmanship is something that has always been intrinsic to British menswear and is something that TOBEFRANK aims to encapsulate in the production of its garments. Explaining how TOBEFRANK takes its influence from the traditional British gentleman, Phillips states: “English tailoring and English design is such a strong inspirational element that I just truly love. It’s about the quality of make and the design inspiration; looking back in time and seeing how our fashions have evolved throughout the different classes and the years is amazing.”

Every jacket and pair of trousers that TOBEFRANK creates is ‘franked’ with a unique identification number, which lets the customer know exactly where and when each individual garment was produced. Designs are also sold with a USB drive that describes to the client exactly how their garment was made, who cut the patterns and who stitched it all together. Living in the digital age that we now do, this personal touch and element of authenticity can be something of a rarity, but it is something that Phillips manages to capture and homogenize within her designs. TOBEFRANK understands the significance of honesty and frankness in menswear, and Phillips draws upon the traditional working class man for inspiration: “I like being able to go first-hand to the inspiration, seeing the inspiration and meeting the people who have inspired me. I design using stories; my Autumn/Winter collection this year was inspired by the working man and the business combined as one.”

This fusion between heritage and modernity is one of the elements that is making British menswear of today so exciting. Unlike womenswear, there is much greater scope in menswear to push boundaries as it still remains a relatively unexplored field within fashion design – not everything has already been done or tried before. When compared to other fashion capitals, designers in London are a little less scared to think outside the box and do not feel the pressure to conform to set expectations; reworking and rethinking fashion is something we have always excelled at and when this knack for innovation is combined with traditional fashion influences from our amazing historical backdrop, London is certainly set to become the menswear city to watch in 2012. As Dylan Jones says: “Whether you’re involved in sport, fashion, media, retail, entertainment or tech, or indeed in any industry, London is the place to be in 2012.” This year highlights a big step forward for the menswear and British fashion industry, this summer, eyes from all over the world will be watching London, and this time it will be for all the right reasons.

Words by Emma Rehling
Tim Soar is a British fashion designer of both menswear and womenswear, who was one of this year’s featured NEWGEN designers. He is also the owner of the global music consultancy company, Music Concrete, through which he has collaborated with brands such as Fendi and Adidas. Tim’s keen interest in fashion design was first sparked when he established POST Design in the 1980s with the renowned graphic designer, Neville Brody. Since POST Design, Tim has continued to design using menswear as his main focus, and his menswear label SOAR was launched in 2006.

After six years working successfully as a menswear designer, Tim made the decision to branch out into womenswear: “I love menswear but there came a point when I thought womenswear is definitely going to be the way to establish my business and to move forward in fashion.” For his womenswear collections, Tim carries over his signature style into his collections, but altered with a feminine touch. Through his NEWGEN sponsorship, Tim’s Autumn/Winter 2012 womenswear collection was allocated exhibition space at London Fashion Week in which his collection was showcased. This collection as a way of establishing his business and making a name and profit for himself. Notoriously, the late Alexander McQueen only started going into profit three or four years ago and he was one of the biggest designers Britain has ever produced.” For the time being, Tim’s main focus will be predominantly menswear, but he still continues a menswear collection, with his eventual aim to bridge back into menswear.

For Tim’s menswear collection, NEWGEN has been a huge contributing factor to his success. “I knew about the BFC [British Fashion Council] from my menswear, so it was natural to apply for NEWGEN with my menswear.” NEWGEN is one of the world’s most internationally recognised talent schemes, working in conjunction with the fashion industry, and in the past has supported designers such as Alexander McQueen, Matthew Williamson, Christopher Kane and, more recently, Meadham Kirchoff and Mary Katrantzou. Discussing the benefits of NEWGEN, Tim states: “It is fantastic and a great platform for designers.” NEWGEN is internationally known, the BFC is internationally known, and therefore to be associated with it is just amazing!” London Fashion Week is very different when compared to other fashion capitals in terms of its strong support network for up-and-coming designers: “London has a great artisan history; something similar to NEWGEN doesn’t exist in Paris and it doesn’t really exist in New York or Milan. London is great because it has eclecticism.” London has a huge influence on the fashion industry worldwide and, in 2011, took the fashion capital of the world top spot from New York, according to a survey by Global Language Monitor, conducted each year. “One of the biggest things that London has given to the fashion industry in the last ten years is vintage as a concept. It’s all about mixing style together and eclecticism, mixing old and new with expensive and old.”

When it comes to the inspiration behind Tim’s designs, he uses a combination of physical and mental artefacts, as he says taking these mental references and turning them into designs is about “developing the mental picture in my head”. “I have been involved in the fashion industry for a long time now and have a huge mental reference of the last 30 years of fashion.” When it comes to physical artefacts, Tim loves vintage clothing: “I buy a lot of vintage pieces, and will often take a mood from them.” Within Tim’s designs, resilience remains an important factor for both his menswear and womenswear collections. “All of my garments are made with really good fabric that I know is going to last, and I think that is really important. There are some pieces which you know are going to be season pieces. They may not be physically tired but you know that, visually, people will want to have moved on. As a designer, it’s important that the price of your garments is heavily reflected in terms of quality. Your clothes have got to last – if people are paying a lot of money for your designs, then the clothes have got to last.”

Within the turbulent economic climate continues to have an effect on the fashion industry, for Tim the ‘sale’ aspect is something that he takes into account when designing his collections: “The fashion industry is going through a tough time, the general economic situation is not good and that leads to stores being more conservative about what they sell and becoming ruthless if items aren’t selling. It has to be a business, so to a certain degree this can limit what you’re doing, as you need to acknowledge that you need to make money. You know are going to be season pieces. They may be physically tired but you know that, visually, people will want to have moved on.”

As a designer, it’s important that the price of your garments is heavily reflected in terms of quality. Your clothes have got to last – if people are paying a lot of money for your designs, then the clothes have got to last.”

Photography by Katie Handy-Beith

Words by Katie Handy-Beith
Act now, deal with the consequences later. Hedonistic, destructive attitudes bringing chaos and panic as people lash out with raw and irrational emotion. Going against the grain, fighting for change in unstructured disarray.
Alexis Knox is a London-based freelance fashion stylist who, as well as working on various runway shows and fashion editorials, is the fashion director of Notion magazine. Alexis’ role at fashion, music and art magazine Notion gives her the opportunity to use her creativity and watch her styling ideas come to life. After completing a degree in illustration, Alexis moved to London to venture into an exciting career in the fashion industry and to see what the capital city had to offer: “I embarked on lots of different types of work experience but it was fashion assisting where I felt most comfortable.” By day, Alexis remains busy with a wide array of styling work, but by night she hosts surrealist club night ‘Circus’, alongside Jodie Harsh, at Café de Paris, London, which she uses as her own time to showcase her own unique sense of personal style. Alexis’ extensive list of commissioned work and direction of fashion editorials at Notion has allowed her to work with a list of well-known names including Marina and the Diamonds, Nicola Roberts, Daisy Lowe, Jessie J and MIA, amongst many others.

More recently, Alexis has turned her styling abilities to television projects and she has carried out the role as on-screen stylist mentor for shows such as ‘New Look – Style the Nation’, ‘Pineapple Studios’ and ‘Britain’s Next Top Model’.

What is your first fashion memory?
I remember being eleven and going halves with my friends on some ‘shag band’ bracelets from Topshop – I remember feeling pretty cool because only the older girls at school were shopping in Topshop!

You are the fashion director of Notion magazine; what does your role entail?
I make decisions on all the content and then delegate it out to writers and other stylists. I try to make sure that the content is varied and exciting.

What do you enjoy about your job?
Every day is different and there aren’t any limits to the future! I also get to meet lots of amazing people.

As a stylist, how would you cope with a personal fashion crisis?
I don’t know if I’ve ever had one! I would probably have a Starbucks chai tea latte and phone my boyfriend Gabriel. He’s probably the closest thing I have to my own stylist!

What relationship do you have with photographers at shoots?
Mutual respect; for example, if I have an idea for a shoot, I’ll go to the photographer who I think will embrace and understand it best. In return, I listen to photographers’ suggestions about how we could take my original idea further. Equally, I’m always happy to style to brief, but where I can I will try and contribute.
ideas and fresh visions.

What do you think it is about you that makes you stand out as a stylist?

Given that I come from a fine art background and I care about style and the process of picture and character building far more than depicting fashion and trends. By the time something is established as a trend, I’ve become pretty bored of it.

Imagine a scene of chaos at a photoshoot; how do you react?

I will lock it right down. Get to the centre of the chaos and spread my calm and logic from the inside out!

How do you think the economic climate has changed the fashion industry?

It’s gotten rid of the jokers – if you’re in it, then you’re in it for the love, certainly not for the money.

What are your thoughts on street-style photography? Do you think subcultures are relevant today?

I think it’s a cool way to communicate and spread ideas on style. It’s great because it’s not predominately dictated by trends! I think subcultures are more relevant than ever! With the growth of social media communication, my friendship stretches across the world to people I’ve never met. Subcultures are becoming more prominent even through simply hash-tagging a picture on Twitter.

Do you like the idea of trying a different role at a photoshoot; do you think you would ever try photography?

My role varies from shoot to shoot, but I do like being the boss. For me, the idea of setting up equipment, then taking it all down, and editing all the pictures doesn’t hold much appeal. With photography and styling there is so much extra work to do that people wouldn’t imagine. I much prefer leading the artistic process of developing a vision. I dip in and out of art directing various shoots, working with hair and make-up and photographers – I would like to spread my wings with that role.

Words by Katie Handy-Beith
In an increasingly digital age, image retouching has become a large part of the photographic industry, and can often cause controversy. Rebecca Manson demonstrates how retouching can have a positive effect on people’s lives.

Rebecca Manson is one of the most experienced photographic retouchers in the industry. Manson first became interested in photography when she was at school, and she began retouching professionally in 1993. Manson has had a wide range of experience in the creative industries, with a list of previous clients including i-D, Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar. During her career she has completed work for some of the world’s most prestigious fashion photographers including Christopher Griffith, Alasdair McLellan and Annie Leibovitz.

On Friday 11 March 2011, Japan was struck by the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. Thousands of lives and businesses were swept away in this devastating natural disaster. These events affected people worldwide and soon after many began to provide aid in any way they could. Rescue missions from across the world commenced to save people and their livelihoods from the debris. All Hands Volunteers, an organisation based in Massachusetts, provided hands-on support for Japan after the earthquake and tsunami struck. With them, they brought hundreds of volunteers to assist and help recover the lives of the victims.

Having always had a love for travel, Manson was affected by the catastrophic events of the 2011 Japanese tsunami and found herself inspired by the work and aid which All Hands were doing. Manson then made the decision to put her bustling New York career on hold to volunteer in Japan; whilst she was there she started to think about ways in which she could apply her skills to help. For many people, photographs can mean so much, and often hold cherished memories that cannot be replaced. During her voluntary work, Rebecca began to find damaged and dirty photos in the wreckage and focused her efforts on recovering the images.

Using her industry contacts, Manson began to get others involved in the colossal project by messaging people on social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to see if her plan to rescue photos would work. “Put a shout out on Facebook and said ‘If I did this, would any of you help me out? I sent it out to 25–30 people, and about 15, 20 get back to me and said ‘Yeah, it’s a great idea’. She initially had 20 friends and volunteers who were interested in the appeal, the numbers quickly swelled to 400 volunteers from around the world.

Manson had a small team cleaning the photos in Japan, ready to be scanned and uploaded to a cloud drive. Volunteers could then download the photographs and attempt to retouch and restore the images. Once the photographs have been repaired, they are sent back to Manson to be printed and returned to their families.

The appeal has now drawn to an end, with plans to restart in more villages in Summer 2012. Manson has now begun a new project in Binghamton, upstate New York, recovering photos that were destroyed in floods after hurricane Irene. The team again will be scanning and uploading photos for people to restore.

For survivors, the photos are precious reminders of times before the tragedy, and those affected by Manson’s work describe it as a miracle. The photos all have great stories behind them and high sentimental value to their owners, many of whom lost everything they owned in the tsunami.

The rescued photos are currently displayed at a temporary library, available for survivors to search through. The photographs exhibit a strong sense of community and family. So far, over 150,000 photos have been cleaned and 320 photographs have been retouched after the severe damage.

Words by Jennifer Frazer
The clash of Aztec prints combined with the chaotic colour palette are complemented with warm summer tones, a walking contradiction.
Patterned multicoloured vest top by Apricot; Beaded necklace Stylist’s Own;
Pleated panelled dress by Maryling; Opposite Page: Patterned dress and long sleeved pleated dress by Patrizia Pepe
Aztec print cropped shirt by Bill + Mar; Sheer orange harem trousers by Anna Jeanne; Beaded necklace Stylist's Own; Patterned headband from New Look

Model: Monique @ Oxygen Models
Hair & Make Up: Tasha B Harris
Photographic Assistant: Uljana Rättel
Fashion Assistant: Kiera Liberati
Conceptual artist Pandemonia has sparked debate at fashion events and catwalks across the country, causing us to question who really deserves to be in the front-row at a fashion show?

For designers, distributing front-row seats for their catwalk shows has always been a crucial point of consideration and plays a hugely important role in getting media coverage of their brand and collections. Each year at fashion weeks across the globe, front-row invitations are delivered to the biggest and most influential names in the fashion industry and to some of the world’s most photographed celebrities. Recently, Nicole Farhi sparked debate when she stated that celebrities are often spotted at fashion shows because they have been paid to attend and not purely for their love of fashion and next season’s trends.

The media are always quick to mention who attended which fashion shows, and this can often receive more press attention than the actual clothes themselves. However, not all designers agree with the celebrity culture surrounding the catwalk: in 1999 Alexander McQueen famously refused to let Victoria Beckham attend his show because he believed it would prove an unwelcome distraction from the clothes. Designer Marc Jacobs also denounces the celebrity culture surrounding fashion shows and has banned stars from attending his catwalks. Whether celebrities receive money incentive to attend the shows or not, there is certainly no denying that the front-row seats are the most sought after at a catwalk show, which leads us to question who is entitled to be there and who isn’t?

Self-styled and seven feet tall, conceptual artist and personality Pandemonia is certainly making a stir in the fashion industry. Once a gate-crasher of fashion week parties and exhibitions, Pandemonia is now very much an established front-row figure and is frequently snapped with other front-row icons such as Hilary Alexander, Jameela Jamil, Pam Hogg and Zoe Griffin. When asked why she secures so many front-row seats, Pandemonia answers: “I get offered front-row tickets because people are intrigued by my work and it attracts media attention; it creates those extra column inches.” Despite Pandemonia becoming a well-known fashion personality through the amount of fashion events she attends, there still seems to be a feeling of mystery surrounding her and what she represents. When asked what she is ultimately trying to achieve through the way she dresses and portrays herself, she states: “I am a visual artist exploring ideas and observations of daily life.”
Pandemonia Panacea isn’t the first conceptual artist to dress in such a manner and in some ways she can be related to the exhibitionism through appearance and clothing in the work of the late Leigh Bowery. He was a conceptual performance artist, clothing designer and club creature in London in the 1980s and 1990s, and if you compare the two, it is possible to draw distinct similarities in some of their full-length latex outfits. Pandemonia is the creation of an anonymous art graduate who was born in 2008, after graduating from an MA Fine Art course at Chelsea College of Art. In the four years since then, not only has Pandemonia made herself known as an established fine artist, but she has also created a lifestyle which she lives daily through her art and image as Pandemonia Panacea. Dressed head-to-toe in latex, the cartoon-style conceptual figure aims to challenge the perception of the ideal woman in the twenty-first century. Each creation and art piece takes months to create, but the impact and reaction which each outfit attracts is phenomenal. The self-made PR machine first became noticed by the fashion industry when she was featured in an interview in the Flesh and Blood issue of i-D magazine with Holly Shackleton, and since then, Pandemonia’s image has grown from strength to strength; with over 4,000 followers on Twitter, frequent mentions on blogs and features in magazines such as Vogue and The Independent, it seems Pandemonia’s message is being heard loud and clear.

The unconventional and impractical way that Pandemonia chooses to dress makes you question why she has chosen to live this way. When asked if she dresses as Pandemonia each time she leaves the house, she answers: “Of course, it is a full time job!” Pandemonia takes inspiration from the superficial world of fame and the celebrity culture that fills our magazines, and when asked what else inspires her style of dress, Pandemonia states: “For me, it’s about exclusivity. It’s about expressing yourself; what you wear is what you are and what you buy into. I’m buying into the modern dream, into fashion and the idea of beauty. I get my ideas from people I see, adverts and things I like in magazines.” It is evident that Pandemonia remains a larger-than-life unique portrayal of beauty, and will continue to cause mayhem at fashion events and grace front rows alongside fashion insiders at many catwalks in the future.

“I GET OFFERED FRONT ROW TICKETS BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE INTRIGUED BY MY WORK AND IT ATTRACTS MEDIA ATTENTION; IT CREATES THOSE EXTRA COLUMN INCHES.”

Words by Katie Handy-Beith
For womenswear designer Nikita Karizma the relationship between political and social issues act as huge inspiration for her work.

Womenswear designer Nikita Karizma stands out amongst other young, up and coming designers as she designs with a cause, portraying messages of social and political value throughout her work. Nikita's understanding of the clothing cycle was almost innate as she was born into a household of designers: her parents are the third generation of the family-owned Asian boutique, Variety Silk House. Despite coming from a traditional Asian fashion background, she has managed to successfully distinguish her own rebellious style, drawing on punk references with a hard-edged aesthetic for her design inspiration, which is in complete contrast to the luxurious and glamorous designs that have typically been associated with Variety Silk House. Nikita graduated from London College of Fashion's Fashion Design and Development course in 2011 with first class honours degree. Her graduate collection played with the idea of domestic violence and has been shot by Saga Sig and David Motta for VOLT magazine and has also featured in Schön!, Vision China and Grazia Daily, to mention just a few. Nikita is currently concentrating on her 'Collection Riot' range and enjoying regular celebrity commissions, such as the 'X Factor' and more recently costumes for the JLS tour.

Nikita's work often portrays powerful statements in relation to current social issues and her strong views on women's rights are often depicted through her use of fashion design: "There is no point in creating clothes without having a meaning or purpose behind them. I want to create collections that provoke emotion and get people to think further than the material–verbal–internal dialogue that is running through ourselves in the way we live in this social world." One of Nikita's strongest statements to date was her previously mentioned graduate collection 'Fashion vs Abuse', which set out to illustrate what a huge problem domestic violence is. The collection incorporated protective elements such as buckles, animalistic feathers and rebellious spikes, all stripped back with a nude colour.
Nikita discusses the ideas behind the collection: "One in three women in the UK experience a form of domestic violence, which is an alarming rate." Through her work, Nikita hopes to create awareness and to illustrate what a huge problem domestic violence represents for her. During the research stage of the collection,

Nikita interviewed a policeman about the vulnerability of women and his views on how important it is for them to stand up confidently acted as a key influence on her designs: "My armoured crap jacket shows that women must stand up straight with confident shoulders." Nikita also collaborated with filmmaker Marta Tucci on a fashion film entitled 'Fashion vs Abuse' which highlights the issues further.

Another social issue that inspired Nikita's designs was the onset of the London riots that took place in August 2011. Her latest collection, 'Collection Riot', took inspiration from these terrifying events and the devastation caused mainly in the city of London last Summer. "It was very shocking for me to see the youth of our own city rebelling in such an awful manner on London property."

Although descending from a background of traditional Asian fashion design, Nikita continues to go against the grain and push boundaries with her design aesthetic, and has developed a distinct style of work. "I love using rivets, hammering seams together and using untraditional methods of garment construction." The collection is indeed beautifully crafted and contains a lot of spikes, harsh shoulders and bold structures.

As a new designer trying to establish herself in a difficult economic climate, Nikita has faced difficulties and obstacles during her endeavor to break into the fashion industry. "It is a very cut-throat industry. Minimum orders with manufacturers and finding the balance of press and commercial pieces is always a pickle for young designers, as essentially we are entering a market that is saturated."

Nikita’s resilience in the materials she uses in her work is a hugely important factor. Her designs contain hardwearing aspects such as leather, metal buckles and harnesses, and for her, the durability and longevity of a garment is vital. "I want my garments to be of good quality and to last. I have used leather in the past but I am trying to find vegetarian alternatives wherever possible. I am a vegetarian and believe in karma heavily." When asked where she draws the line between practicality and creativity, Nikita says: "I often ponder between the two. It makes a better designer to be able to design a beautiful creative product that can also be worn."

It has been an extremely busy year for the talented Nikita, and when asked where she aspires to be this time next year, she replies: "I want to start collections for the catwalk and aim towards a few select stockists. I will continue to take on commissions for celebrities and performances, as I love my work in 3D formats as well as in print. I want to keep collaborating as well as travel in the world of fashion films."

Following her 'Collection Riot' range, Nikita's next collection will again pose a strong message and serve to remind people just how important it is to nurture young talent in the right manner, to encourage our youth to represent themselves in the professional community and avoid further confrontational action.

Interview by Emma Rehling
Words and Photography by Katie Handy-Beith
A kaleidoscopic view towards a hedonistic future, a chaotic constellation of intense make up with decadent connotations.
The current state of the world economy is hardly a secret. Constant media attention is focused on demonstrating the potential collapse of the worldwide financial market. However, despite the inherent misery businesses have endured since the credit crunch began in 2007, what has surprised economists and governments worldwide is the continued demand for luxury goods. When the recession began, it would have seemed almost impossible that there would be a three-year waiting list for a handbag costing over £4,000. With unemployment at its highest for 15 years and with 2.67 million people in the United Kingdom without a job, according to The Guardian, who is buying this bag? The bag in question is the Hermes BIRKIN; prices for the basic leather style start at £4,200 and rise to £80,000 for the ‘Silver Himalaya’ bag, which comes complete with a three-carat diamond. Even for a celebrity, that is a high price tag for a handbag and yet this bag type has been coveted by so many consumers that some will have to wait three years before they can purchase it. Is it possible that this can almost be deemed some form of ‘rebellion’ against the current economic climate, or are some consumers simply protesting ignorance? Proceeding to shop as they were before, or in an even fiercer manner? Either way, the attitudes of the consumer in 2012 are following a previously observed chain reaction to varying economic changes throughout history.

The infamous ‘Hemline Index’ theory presented by economist George Taylor in 1926 is an example of response to economic changes, as it suggests that the hemlines of women’s dresses rise along with stock prices. His theory suggests that this was demonstrated by the introduction of the ‘miniskirt’ in the 1960s, when the economy had just about recovered from the Second World War. He suggests that it also works the other way, implying that it is likely that hemlines will be lower when the economy is poor, as shown by the 1929 Wall Street Crash, where hemlines dropped considerably at a fast pace. This reaction by the fashion industry received an outstanding consumer response, with a range of stereotypical consumers from these eras sporting the relevant hemlines. However, the reaction of the consumer in the current recession could be seen to be more significant than the reaction of the fashion industry, as although the varieties collect cultural and social changes, they are also a designer’s personal response and so therefore not necessarily reflective of a collective opinion. The 2012 consumer, however, has seemingly adopted a state of defiance in the face of the economic crisis, and so an era of purchasing ‘investment pieces’ began to appear in 2008; movements were introduced encouraging the consumer to buy for longevity rather than just for trend. Could this then possibly explain the three-year waiting list for a handbag which costs the same amount as a small car? Or is it simply taking ‘investment’ to the extreme? Either way, the popularity of this bag evidently cannot be doubted, and it is not the only extravagant luxury piece which is causing a stir.

When looking at the price points of some luxury pieces on the market (some also with year-long waiting lists), it is almost possible to question whether or not this economic crisis is simply aploy devised by governments across the globe to encourage more careful spending. Of course unemployment rates and bankruptcy are a serious matter, but it is astonishing to monitor spending habits across the luxury market when the world is in so much debt. Where is the demand for an 8,995 crocodile-skin bag by Victoria Beckham? There are people all around the world who question the extravagance and relevance of the fashion industry, and its ‘tricks’ to make the consumer buy things they don’t need: is this spending habit supporting those cynics? Or is it in fact possible that the excessive spending of some of these consumers is signalling a sense of hope? The Chinese demonstrate some of the greatest demand for luxury products with the current observed economic growth in China, but with a 10 per cent increase in the global sales of luxury goods, there is some indication of potential signs of relief. This demonstrates that although a large proportion of consumers are remaining cautious with their spending, there is also a proportion following in the footsteps of the anarchists from the 1970s, refusing to slow down and determined to show the authorities that they have got it wrong.

In a society where so much media attention is focused on the negative, and we are constantly made aware of how critical the current economic situation is, can it not be argued that fashion is a valid release for those sufocating underneath the facts and figures? From the catwalks of Spring/Summer 2012, it would be difficult to believe that we are in the midst of such a bleak economic situation, with a colour palette that resembles a sweet shop sweeping through the collections, a strong sense of childhood nostalgia indicating that designers may have been hyped up on sugar when planning their shows, and a potent feminist trend throughout womenswear, suggesting unity in the face of adversity. Following the ‘Hemline Index’, the hemlines for Spring/Summer 2012 are particularly focused on asymmetrical dresses, jackets and skirts, which again could be seen as a look of defiance against conforming to this particular theory. It could suggest that designers do not again could be seen as a look of defiance against conforming to this particular theory. It could suggest that designers do not want to acknowledge the correlation between the economy and fashion, which is supported by the lazy nostalgic trend that was evident at shows such as Meadham Kirchhoff and Louis Vuitton. The fashion industry has the power to help direct the mood of a consumer, dark, desolate colours enforce a stern, depressed atmosphere, but the high-spirited collections of Spring/Summer 2012 demonstrate a positive outlook and a determination to overcome this extremely difcult period, a perfect example of resilience.

Words by Sarah Morris.

Consumer shopping habits in the UK have changed beyond recognition. The way we shop has evolved to become about one of two things: convenience or experience. Leading busy lives means we are more selective about how we spend our precious time. Technology has responded to the need for convenience by installing a virtual store in Seoul subway station. Busy commuters scan the products they wish to buy from the virtual displays on their journey to work in the morning, and they are delivered that evening (Tesco 2011), all through the use of QR codes.

The technology developed in the 1990s, but which has only taken off in the past three years with the growth of smartphones, is increasingly everywhere. Luxury brand Ralph Lauren have invested heavily in mobile technology, with numerous apps and strong QR code campaigns in their advertising and store windows to attract interest and customers in store and encourage them to scan the code to be taken to the Ralph Lauren mobile site. Rather than the standard mixture of shapes which make up QR codes, the Ralph Lauren code was customised with the famous polo player logo, a creative move to further increase the brand awareness.

Back on the high street, Oxfam are using QR codes to tell the story of the products they sell in their charity shops. Originally inspired by The Tale of Things, a concept that encourages creating memories for products through attaching QR codes to them, Oxfam have launched Shellife. The free app reads QR codes to allow shoppers to discover the story of a second-hand product they find for sale on Oxfam’s shelves, and donors to share the stories of the products they donate. The aim is to create a more interesting charity shop experience and engage consumers. Oxfam’s Sarah Farquhar, Head of Retail Brand said: “Every item has a story to tell and Oxfam Shellife enables people to share these stories. We’ve found that items with an interesting story behind them are instantly more appealing to our customers so we hope Oxfam Shellife will encourage people to love items for longer. This commitment to sustainability is an important part of what Oxfam shops bring to the high street.” (Oxfam 2012).

By allowing brands and retailers to send large amounts of information to consumer’s smartphones, they can communicate their brand messages quicker and easier than before. QR codes make previously passive advertisements interactive; the consumer engages with the brand and actively communicates their brand messages to sustainability is an important part of what Oxfam shops bring to the high street.” (Oxfam 2012).

Whilst the developments in technology have aided retailers in offering a convenience service to customers, it somewhat counteracts the goal of drawing customers into the stores. Retailers need to recognise the value in attracting customers to the stores by creating new interactive experiences with new technology. Such action involves planning strategically for long term resilience on the high street, but implementing short term action by generating buzz and attracting footfall, creating an interactive experience for customers they cannot achieve at home on their own computers, tablets or smartphones.

Marks & Spencer are already leading the way on some high streets having launched Style Online to some of their stores. Style Online is an interactive and online multimedia area featuring a 70” screen where customers can view key looks and products, search the latest trends, watch catwalk videos and create looks using an outfit builder (WGSN 2012).

Customers benefit from the personal customer service of style advisors and can order products not available in stores.
store via the touch screen ordering point or with a style advisor who will process the order together with the customer on an iPad. Style Online achieves linking the Marks & Spencer online environment with their bricks and mortar stores, giving high levels of customer service and customers the chance to see products and sub-brands that may not usually be stocked in their local store. The new concept also allows time-poor shoppers to enjoy the benefits of both convenience and an in store experience.

On a larger scale, London’s Shoreditch is the current home of the world’s first ‘pop up’ mall, Boxpark. The temporary ‘mall’ is made up of shipping containers housing retail spaces for fashion and lifestyle brands as well as galleries and cafes all on an invitation only basis. Boxpark’s concept is one of community, “a community of brands packed with talent, innovation and attitude that puts creativity and fashion back where they belong - on the street” (Boxpark 2012). The sense of community Boxpark communicates is complimented by their offering of shipping containers, or ‘box-shops’, to local organisations and creative industries. High street retailers can take inspiration from the overall Boxpark concept of not only being where you shop, but “a place to drop in and hang out. It’s what a real brand experience should be all about” (Boxpark 2012).

Retailers are faced with the challenge of stepping up or losing out in the battle to survive. Brands outside of the fashion industry are realising this and re-evaluating the service and experience customers want to receive in store. Coffee chain Starbucks have begun asking customers their name for it to be written on the cup and called when the drink is ready in aim of introducing a more personal service in store and creating a friendlier atmosphere. The chain is also introducing concept stores across Europe, the Middle East and Africa to give customers a more memorable visit with unique store interiors inspired by and reflective of the city and country where they are located, with locally sourced second-hand furniture and features (Reuters 2012).

In the future, consumers will expect the higher levels of customer service we are currently beginning to catch a glimpse of. Awareness of the luxury brands and retailers and the services and experiences they offer are now so readily available online, high street consumers are wanting a piece of it. Their shopping expectations have grown to higher levels as a result. It isn’t a new concept, but one that has been forgotten on the high street as the value retailers took hold in the era of the ‘Pound shops’ which promoted a sense of quantity rather than quality.

London’s luxury boutique LN-CC takes innovation in customer service and experiential retailing to the next level as an appointment only concept store where customers are taken on a guided tour through the stores different zones. Alongside the product mix of women’s and menswear, music and books, the USP of the store is the concept space home to a library, photography studio, installations and a club space, all aimed to give the customer a memorable experience: “we don’t care if you come here but don’t actually buy anything - we are happy for you to take whatever you want from this, whether it be product, information or just the experience” (LN-CC 2012). The first of its kind, LN-CC is a true lifestyle store with an incomparable attention to detail and design. The future of the high street lies with the retailers’ ability to recognise the changes in the ways consumers shop and to give them reason to return to the high street. Never before have consumers had such choice in how they shop, but this does not have to spell the end of bricks and mortar fashion retail spaces. In her report, The Portas Review (2011), Mary Portas makes a number of recommendations which are all ultimately based round the idea of creating a high street which is a hub for the local community. The sheer size of the fashion industry, worth an estimated £32billion in 2009 (Office for National Statistics) and its history on the high street strongly suggests that fashion retailers should be at the forefront of leading new strategies to save the British high street and re-invent the traditional brick and mortar store.

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White decorative photo frame, skull money box from Urban Outfitters; White beaded necklace and pearl earrings Stylist’s Own; White studded bracelet from Forever 21; White studded earrings from Topshop; Jewelled White Ring from Accessorize; White rectangle ring, white chunky bracelet from H&M; Photography by Katie Handy-Beith; Styling by Emma Rehling.
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resilience

n. elastic, springing back; buoyant;
(person) capable of carrying on after suffering hardship. —resilient adj—resiliently adv