



Fashion Insiders

Behind the glitz and glamour of the fashion world are the pros putting in the hard graft. From designing next season's star collections to shooting the stories that showcase them and orchestrating dazzling catwalk shows, these are the people making fashion happen...

By Hannah Bass



THE DESIGNER

AMANDA NAVAİ

I always wanted to be an entrepreneur and have a business of my own. When I first moved to Dubai, I thought about opening a coffee shop or a sandwich delivery service, but I never worked up the confidence to do it. After I graduated I ended up working for the Chalhoub Group as a marketing executive launching beauty products and learning about business. The turning point came when I met Sahar Hashemi, who founded Coffee Republic in the UK. She came from a similar background to me—Iranian but brought up in Europe—and she really inspired me with her message that anyone can do it: You don't have to reinvent the wheel, you just have to improve it. I thought about what I knew best—shoes and handbags! Then I thought about how I could improve them. I remembered a pair of jeans I'd had for years, which were reversible, and wondered if I could do that with bags. So my first collection was a range of reversible clutches, with a classic colour on the outside and something crazy on the inside. I still had a day job but

one day I was carrying one of my bags at an event and it was spotted by a woman with fashion connections. My bags ended up selling out at the first trunk show she set up for me, and I realised I was on to something but wouldn't be as successful as I could be unless I put all my effort into it. So I quit my job and started educating myself, taking courses at Central Saint Martins. One of a designer's most important skills is to have a sense of what's happening in society—four seasons ago I launched my Ramona handbag [above], inspired by 70s architecture in Beirut, where I live on and off, and now triangles are a huge trend. I'll think of my story, put together mood boards, do some simple line drawings and then develop them into patterns on the computer—a handbag can have up to 40 different parts—before taking them to my factory. There's a lot of rejection in the industry as buyers will see 200 brands at a time, and it can be hard to shrug it off, but the 'wow' moment when people react to my designs makes it worth it.



THE MODEL

JESSICKA CHUDASMA

I never thought I'd end up a model. My plan was to finish school and head to university, but I was discovered by an Indian designer and started modelling in Mumbai. I wasn't sure at the time whether the

industry would like me or, indeed, whether I'd like the industry, but luckily it worked out and I've been worked for some amazing people and brands such as Carolina Herrera, Sonia Rykiel and Valentino. Meeting and spending time with Olivier Rousteing, the creative director for Balmain, was a real career highlight—he's such an inspiration, and a kind man. And seeing myself on a huge

billboard on Sheikh Zayed Road was amazing! I've since used my industry knowledge to found The agenC, a talent agency that provides everyone from models to photographers. Working with truly creative geniuses—whether that's designers, hair and makeup artists or photographers—has got to be the best part of the job, and I've learnt so much from all of them. The worst part? The rejection. When you

go to a casting and you aren't selected, it's hard not to start thinking of all the reasons why. The days can be long, too—just hair and makeup can take up to three hours if it's an elaborate look! But after all that, walking out on stage at the shows is an incredible feeling. To anyone trying to get into modelling, the best advice I can give is to stay healthy, sleep well, work hard, be professional and never give up.



THE MAKEUP ARTIST

LORNA BUTLER

Initially, I wanted to be a fashion designer. From the age of ten I was sewing clothes and I always loved art and jewellery. While I was still at school I took an evening job in a salon and that's where I fell in love with the hair and makeup world. I started entering hairdressing competitions and winning prizes and took it from there—I went on to study hair and makeup, then moved to London where I took a course in fashion makeup with Ruby Hammer. So it was a bit of a mistake, but one that's sent me around the world doing loads of cool stuff, like doing Yohji Yamamoto's Paris Fashion Week show or going on tour with Emeli Sandé. The fashion is really tough, however—it's definitely not as glamorous as people think! You need to be focused and driven and try not to lose yourself. Hair and makeup, in particular, is also a very intimate job and you need to be good at feeling people out—you end up being a therapist as well as a makeup artist, as your job is to give your subject confidence. The work is really varied, which I love—I couldn't be locked into a 9-5. If I'm working with a celebrity, I'll research their style and personality so I can create looks that work for them. If it's a high-end fashion shoot, I need to make sure I have everything in my kit, from hairpieces to special eyelashes, so that I'm prepared for anything and the day will run smoothly. Constantly meeting new people and visiting new locations keeps me fired up, but the days can be very long! As much as it's an exciting job, finding myself working on a commercial in the hot, sweaty desert for 18 hours straight is far from glamorous!



THE STYLIST

GEMMA JONES

I studied fashion and textiles at school and was determined to become a fashion buyer. My first job after university was as a buyer for a ladies fashion catalogue and I soon realised it wasn't for me—I hated the maths! But having to shoot everything for the catalogue introduced me to styling and I decided to study for a fashion styling and then colour training diploma. I also started building up my work experience by assisting stylists on shoots all over the UK, which proved invaluable for getting my first job in a team that conducted styling workshops in malls across the UK. I've since been lucky enough to work on some great projects such as London Fashion Week and styling VIPs like Isabeli Fontana. More personal highlights have included holding styling workshops for people suffering from illnesses that changed them visually, for people in remission from cancer or who had colostomy bags fitted. Watching them regain confidence when they saw they could still look fabulous was incredibly rewarding. You need a lot of energy to work as a stylist—the hardest part of the job is the leg work! I can be shopping and prepping for a shoot for 12 hours or more straight, carrying heavy bags between the stores and shoot, running around all day dressing the model... Your relationships are also paramount, whether that's being able to communicate with the client about the brief or getting to know the PRs for the brands you want to borrow from. The best part is seeing everything come together—when you've brought a story from your imagination to life and there's one shot that just looks incredible.

THE SNAPPER

JULIET DUNNE

I actually wanted to be a marine biologist because my dad was a diver so I was brought up diving, and that's where I got my love of photography—my dad always took underwater shots. But it would have taken seven years of training, so I decided to study the other thing I've always loved, graphic design and photography. My first job was in a small studio in Dubai doing family and baby portraits, just to get my foot in the door. Degrees help, but experience tops degrees any day. You need to get out there with your camera and practise. I'm still learning to this day—photography is never something you can just be excellent at; you're always learning and progressing. You have to challenge yourself—that's why I've started doing underwater photography now, which I'd always wanted to try. When you're doing fashion shoots, you know what the end result should be because you've got the storyboard and the client has told you what they want, but underwater anything can happen! Every day in this job is different—it just depends on the client. Once I've got the brief I'll research other shoots, looking at themes and colours to make up a storyboard. Shoot days are very physically demanding—it can feel like an intense yoga class, standing on a table to get a shot from above one minute, lying flat on the floor the next. Good people skills are number one: Anyone can hold a camera but if you can't connect with the person you're shooting, life will be very difficult for both of you! After a shoot I'll have to edit about 800 shots down to a final few, which is tough, but nothing beats opening a magazine and seeing the final result printed.



THE FASHION FORWARD FOUNDER

BONG GUERRERO

I'm not a designer by training but back in 1991, I opened a Dubai boutique that became a major fashion house for the region at the time, selling couture clothing to local royals. I had dreams that it could become like the Versace of the Gulf, but my partners didn't have the same vision and I ended up changing course in 1997 and going into events management. But the fashion bug was still there—my designer friends would call on me to organise their shows, and I remember thinking what a great opportunity it would be to organise a kind of Dubai fashion week. I knew I would call it Fashion Forward—because fashion should be avant garde, always moving forward and never back—so seven or eight years ago I tucked that name away in the back of my mind. Then the fashion platform at the time fell through and I had the chance to step into the void. It took two years and a lot of hard work pinpointing the best people for the team and finding funding and sponsorship to get it off the ground. We're still in our infancy and want to keep growing stronger—my dream is to see global brands evolve from the platform—but I love my job, and not many people can say that. I'm hardly ever in the office—I'll be out meeting clients and designers and checking out venues most days. I believe Fashion Forward is really important for Dubai—it's the retail capital for the region and the world's top brands come here for commercial success, so we need a platform to let regional stars shine. We're helping to build the soul of the city.

