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Fashion styling

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Mastering

Fashion styling

Jo Dingemans

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Special thanks to my husband Alan, my daughter Julia
and in memory of my son Fred

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Subject areas and career paths for which this book might prove useful

Advertising
Architecture
Artificial Intelligence
Beauty Therapy
Communication/Marketing
Costume Design
Criminology
Fashion Design
Graphic Design
Hairdressing
History of Art
Journalism
Make-up
Media Studies
Music Management
Photography
Product Design and Development
Public Relations
Retail Management
Sociology
Visual Studies

Introduction to the book

In the 1960s every pretty girl said she was a **model**. In the 1990s the word **stylist** trips off those same pretty lips, but the difference is that this time the boys almost outnumber the girls. 'Stylist' is the ambiguous key career word of the '90s.

So what does this highly desirable occupation really involve and how do you become a stylist or is it even worth attempting it?

Many people who work in the fashion and media industry shudder at the thought of courses for stylists. They know just what a tough world it can be. They quite rightly fear that many students will commit themselves to a course that can only theorise about a profession which is highly practical and highly skilled.

I have to state my wariness of pure styling courses. I would never recommend anyone to study only styling; as I would not recommend anyone to study only media, advertising or marketing. Any college course should give you options to open up your mind, by educating you in a variety of academic disciplines while developing your practical skills. No university or college course can guarantee you a job, but it can certainly make you employable, as well as give you a chance to experiment with ideas and concepts, and maybe point you in a direction you had never even considered.

Styling is now a growing element in many fashion and media related courses throughout the UK. As one of the first people to have developed a course in this area I felt that a handbook of what works and what doesn't, used as an introduction to the subject, would be a useful addition to the college library. It may also be a useful tool for those people who have always been interested in the subject but didn't know where to start.

Researching this book I have discovered that very few people, outside the fashion world, really know what a stylist does and how it could even be considered as a valid career move. Even those who teach on well developed courses in design, journalism and media studies feel confused at the best approach to take in developing such curricula.

Make rules, define parameters and you can be sure someone will come along and upset the apple cart. But allowing for the exceptions, there are techniques, skills and methodology that can be taught in a structured format which will offer students the chance to gain a good grounding in this field.

I believe very sincerely in education and learning, but I also believe that students must be given a wide range of practical skills, so that they have a real chance of employment when they leave college. Employers want specialists, but they also require multi-skilled people who can adapt and are not afraid to change direction.

The approach I have taken in this book reflects the successes and failures I have had in this area. My premise is, that students learn as much from failure as from success. Not all projects work, but the learning curve they experience, in

trying to complete them, coping with the problems they throw up and devising ways around these, allows them to develop fresh, innovative approaches, which is surely part and parcel of anyone's education.

This is not an academic textbook, this is a practical handbook for teaching and learning a very professional and highly skilled subject area. It should be used as a beginning. Remember it will take a lot more than reading this book to develop the skills necessary to follow styling as a profession.

What's covered?

There are no pictures in this book – strange approach for a book on Styling you may think. Good current fashion images are easily sourced from magazines and I have concentrated on current styling. I would have loved to include pictures past and present, to illustrate great styling, but it would have made this book too expensive, so I have listed where to source some of these pictures in the bibliography. If I were reviewing this book I would regret that there is not a chapter on the History of Styling, but I must defend this exclusion by saying that a History of Styling would be a book in itself, and for students to source back issues and historical fashion images would be difficult. One day maybe one of the people who read this book will bring out the definitive guide to 20th century styling. It's an area crying out for more academic research. Until then I hope this book will whet your appetite, and give you some insight into the role of the stylist.

The first chapters give you an insight into the different types of styling. Each specialist area is defined and the professional practices used within them explained. Each chapter should stand on its own, but make sure you read editorial styling, commercial styling, show production, testing and technical tips before you to start on the introductory programme and project chapters. These two chapters offer students the chance to experiment with ideas and simulate some of the likely experiences they will have in the industry.

The final chapters offer a glossary of technical terms and a basic source directory including the names and addresses of magazines and newspapers for you to contact for work experience, as well as some helpful names and addresses for further research.

The bibliography gives you some reference points for further study, but please note that new books and videos come out all the time so check out what is available currently in the specialist stores listed in the source directory.

Why me?

In the 1960s while studying in Paris I was 'discovered' as a model. Unfortunately, at that time I preferred burning the candle at both ends, rather than getting out of bed for castings and despite the myth of this hedonistic period, you did have to turn up on time for shoots. I also managed to get rather fat, which was a definite no-no for modelling.

After a short period working for Manpower Employment Agency, where I learnt a lot about communicating with a wide range of people, I was given a job

at the fashion store Biba by Barbara Hulaniki and her husband Stephen FitzSimon.

Barbara was my first fashion mentor and taught me how to put clothes together into a 'Look'. Biba at that time was a haven for anyone interested in style. Wearing blue hair, blue eyes and blue lips to match my blue dress, I watched people queue hours and hours for suede boots as they came in from the factory. I saw the rugby scrum of customers at the T-shirt counter as they were unpacked from boxes: but the most important lesson I learnt was, if you dressed pretty girls in clothes, people would buy them. It was my first experience of the power of styling.

Clothes at Biba were displayed on hat-stands with matching accessories alongside. You could buy a dress, hat, tights and shoes that matched. Nowadays that seems pretty normal practice but Barbara was the first to think of it. It was brilliant marketing. When attractive girls or boys are dressed in attractive clothes, in the right location, people aspire to that lifestyle. It may be a fantasy life, but it is still a powerful one.

In 1971 the Fashion Editor of *19* magazine, Norma Moriceau asked Biba to put on a charity fashion show. I was sent along to help, and within hours I was hooked.

While Barbara was the champion of matching subtle colours, Norma was the one who broke every rule. Blue and green should never be seen – 'Rubbish. Try them'. Checks and stripes just don't work – 'Great. Let's do it'. Watching Norma go through a rail of clothes and put them together was a mind-blowing experience. Her 'eye' was incomparable. When she offered me a job as her assistant I didn't think twice.

My first day was a nightmare. Norma was ill and I arrived to be sent off on appointments. I didn't like to tell anyone that I wasn't sure why I was going on appointments, I just went along to Great Portland Street, London.

Met by the PR of Stirling Cooper I walked into the showroom. I looked at the rails of clothes and wondered what I was meant to do next. She walked me over to the rails and I picked out the garments and 'oohed' and 'aahed'. Having gone through about six rails of clothes, I turned to her and smiled. At this, she burst out laughing and ordered a cup of coffee. The conversation went along these lines: 'Are you going to take notes?' 'Was I meant to take notes?' 'Yes, I was.' Apparently I was meant to edit these clothes into fashion stories, so that in future months I could call them in for shoot. 'Was I meant to sketch them all?' 'No, only those I liked.'

By the end of the day I had a notebook full of very bad sketches, style numbers and prices. I got home and went through them: I had probably seen about 500 garments. What was I meant to do with these? All my badly drawn sketches looked the same. No one had mentioned drawing. No one had mentioned note-taking.

By the end of that month I had learnt how to take notes I could understand. I had learnt to go through a rail of clothes, thinking ahead. I was learning to edit. The PR of Stirling Cooper never let me forget that first day, that's one of the reasons I wanted to write this book. You couldn't be that unprofessional today.

I eventually became the Fashion Editor of *19* and worked with some of the best photographers, models, make-up artists and hair stylists in the world. When

my son was born, I left to become a freelance stylist. For the last 25 years I have worked as an editorial, commercial and show stylist.

In 1989 the London College of Fashion asked me to lecture students on their HND Fashion Writing course. I discovered that teaching was a very exciting profession and I learnt that if you know your subject and tell it how it is, students respond accordingly. Fashion Styling, which had been a minimal part of the course before, became an integral subject area and developing teaching methods and suitable projects made it one of the most fascinating periods of my life.

When I was appointed as Principal Lecturer in Fashion Journalism and Promotion, we decided to develop this HND course, incorporating a broader curriculum which would offer students the cutting edge to all areas of Fashion Promotion. The course has now become a highly successful BA (Hons) Fashion Promotion.

Developing the curriculum of this subject – so dependent on access to good sources, a good team and professional expertise – is full of pitfalls and frustrations. If you are based in Central London you have a definite edge, but there is no reason why those without the capital's facilities on the doorstep, can't experience and learn a good deal of the professional practices necessary to work within this area.

Many of the students I have taught, now work on magazines and newspapers as stylists and writers; others have gone into public relations and television. Some developed a more academic interest in the subject and chose to develop their interest in History of Costume or Sociology. The clever ones today will make sure they become computer literate. No one knows where technology will take us, but anyone working in creative imagery in any form, should be aware of the amazing possibilities that computer graphics, the internet and visual imaging is having, and will have, on the fashion industry.

I promised myself, and my students, that I would write this book. They've been waiting a long time. I hope it works for anyone reading it, and even if you don't become stylists, that you learn something from it.

My thanks to London College of Fashion for access to their wonderful Fashion Library; to Elspeth Norden, Lesley Goring, Marcia Brackett and Su Nicholson for reading relevant chapters; to my sister Jenny Peel who is a former fashion editor and who sparked my interest in the area and made me the most fashionable girl at school; to former students who have encouraged me to write the book and to all those in the industry who have helped me.