

THE RAG TRADE

By Delima Shanti / Photography by Josh Robenstone

The fashion industry is made up of countless professionals, each with intrinsically different roles. While some are in front of a camera, most are on the other side, working closely on their individual task – be it the pattern, make-up or photograph – to bring together the finished product in its best light. We spoke to an array of Melburnians whose jobs keep the well-oiled fashion machine turning, from the cutting board to the runway.



PATTERN MAKER:
Nyssa Marrow of Above

What is patternmaking? Patternmaking is done by hand. There are computer illustrators available now, but I think the hand is always better. Many people tend to start by hand and then use rulers and computers to improve your drawings. The subtleties of the paneling is something that is difficult to achieve on computers.

What does your job as a patternmaker involve? For Above, I do a lot of the material sampling and twilling. When I do some freelance work for other designers, people would come with a sketch or a reference garment for me to construct into garments. Sometimes, when they don't have a lot of hands-on experience with making garments, the connection between the drawing and what you expect to be produced don't always match up. My job is to turn these ideas into reality.

What's the difference between patternmaking and designing? The experience is a bit different with Above because I am the designer and the patternmaker. I can't separate the two aspects. I tend to approach the design aspect from a patternmaking point of view and my ideas come together when I start making the patterns and not at the drawing stage. Sometimes clients who come in and present their designs can get frustrated as I think about the possible patterns for the garment and I know something won't work.



PHOTOGRAPHER:
Jo Duck

Do you do your work by hand? Everything is done by hand. There are computer illustrators available now, but I think the hand is always better. Many people tend to start by hand and then use rulers and computers to improve your drawings. The subtleties of the paneling is something that is difficult to achieve on computers.

What makes fashion photography different to your other work? My fashion work differs from my work with performers and musicians because, in most cases, it is less about promoting an act or individual and more about creating a story and a mood, and in some cases, making things more abstract. I like to consider an audience, to create a sense of the familiar or the surreal.

*Do photographers need to think about how the public will react to their work? I want people to see my work in magazines and look at it more than once. When I lived with my parents, my walls were covered with images from *Wallpaper*, *Black Book*, *i-D* and *Rolling Stone*.*

I would love for someone to see my work in a magazine and respond to it in the way I responded to those images – to find something within the colour, concept or composition that you feel compelled to rip out and keep with you.

*What amount of your work is fashion based? I would say 70 per cent of my work is fashion. My fashion work ranges from commissions from magazines like *Fallen*, *Vice* and *Frankie* to more commercial clients like Wrangler, Mossimo and Novo shoes.*

What makes a good fashion shot? To me there is no difference between a good fashion shot, fine art shot, documentary shot, or a good still life shot. A great image sticks with you; it makes you feel involved, drawn into another world, or makes you recognise something similar to your own. A great image makes me think: 'Why didn't I think of that?'

As a fashion photographer, what is your main focus when doing a shoot? The model, the fashion, the location or the technical aspects of photography? My focus is to get the shot. To get the best out of a model, stylist, make-up artist or assistant, you need to make them feel welcome and involved. Then my focus shifts to the technical side of things. I love wandering around a location to see where the light works best.

Many photographers have a different approach to fashion. What is yours? I would say my approach to fashion differs with every shoot. I will usually work with a stylist on a concept, where I'm thinking mainly about story, lighting and locations, and the stylist will be thinking about which clothes will enhance the idea. I trust the stylist to interpret the idea and make it better than the little triangles on stick figures I draw in my notebook.



SHOPGIRL:
Penny Welsh of Obus

What does the role of a store manager entail? Generally just representing the brand that you're working for. You need to be looking after customers and building relationships with regular customers, and then you've got the visual merchandising aspect with how the clothes are set out in the store. There are jobs that aren't necessarily glamorous like stock taking, but working with the beautiful products and being able to wear them is definitely a perk of the job.

Are these roles that you have to learn on the job? I'm always dealing with many types of personalities on a daily basis, and different people prefer to be sold to in different ways. It's something you can't really learn until you're working on the floor and develop a way to look after the customers in a personal way.

What is it like being at the end of the fashion production line, so to speak? I think it's really interesting to see all these ideas translated and how they work in terms of how customers respond to them. Working with a label that's designed and made in Melbourne means I learn a lot about the products, and through this I've developed a pretty close relationship with Obus.

What attracted you to the fashion industry? Basically, I have a love of fashion and when you work with a brand that you admire, you meet a lot of likeminded people, so the social aspect of it is really good as well.

Does your job double as a stylist too? Definitely, there's a lot of trust involved from the customers. Sometimes people will come in and they'll want a massive amount of help and they'll ask me, 'What goes with this?' Some people also buy garments for events, say a dress for a wedding, so I have to help them decide the appropriateness of the garment.



STYLIST:
Connel Chiang

What does your job as a stylist involve? My job is about using clothing as a means of communication, but the brief and what you want to communicate determines who you're dressing, the aesthetics and labels you use, so it changes every single day. It isn't just about garments and dressing people. Sometimes, if a job requires me to get fresh flowers or fresh bread from the bakery, I will have to pick up those things first thing in the morning.

People think that being a stylist is a glamorous job but it's actually a lot of hard work and running around right? It's not glamorous at all. A typical day can involve doing a lot of pickups, so I'm always in the car. I rarely focus solely on one job, quite often I have to control and manage assistants and different aesthetics and vibes across several different clients and jobs going on at the same time.

Describe your own style? What do you wear to work? My style can be a bit silly. I try not to take myself too seriously, and I definitely like to incorporate my own style into my work. My favourite pieces in my closet at the moment have to be a pair of baby pink suede shoes and a Pauric Sweeney bag I bought as a gift to myself.

Do you agree that the way people dress acts as a window to their personality? In a lot of cases, yes. There are times when I'm pleasantly surprised when that isn't the case. I think what I want to be able to do myself is to communicate a sense of play using fashion.

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HAIR AND MAKE-UP ARTIST:
Christine Gaunt

How much is your work based around fashion? I'd say about 90 per cent of my work is fashion-related. I would say 70 per cent of my work is photographic and there rest is event work like fashion shows. These aren't just big shows like the I'Oreal Melbourne Fashion Festival, but also collection showings and small charity shows.

What does a typical day working in hair and make-up involve? I am usually the first on set, ready to do the model's hair and make-up. I'll be briefed by the client or if I know the brand well, I'll just get straight into it. So I'll do full-body make-up, which is nails, hair and face. In a day we may change hair and make-up four or five times, so I also have to manage that.

If we peeked into your make-up kit, what would we find? Good skincare is important, so the tools of my trade are my skincare and my foundations to prep the skin with. I also love creamy products like cream blushes and eye shadows. I absolutely have to use eyelash curlers and eyelashes on everybody, even for natural looks.



MODEL:
Anneliese Smith

Is it important to have a signature look to stand out as a model? I think it's important to be versatile and to not just have one look. But I think what helped me stand out was the fact that I am abnormally tall.

How is the environment backstage at a runway show different to the environment at a shoot? There are so many more girls in shows, so you can talk to other people who are also in your position. But with editorials you can be more creative with presenting your outfits, whereas in runway shows all the preparation leads up to just one walk.

How important is it for the model to relate to everyone else on a fashion set such as hair and make-up artists and photographers? Very, because sometimes you end up working with the same people over

Do you see hair and make up as a tool for the fashion industry or an art form, or both? There's a lot of creativity when it comes to the catwalk, where the style is more theatrical. On the other hand, a lot of advertising work can be quite safe; it's all about being pretty and appealing to the general market. But sometimes you get a creative melting-pot of people and come up with fashion stories to pitch to a magazine to take things above and beyond. This is the kind of work I like to do because there's no client, no director. It's all about the creative melting-pot and creating something new and exciting.

How important is the hair and make-up artist in fashion shoot or show? Nothing gets started without it! I'm definitely there early to get everything ready before the model arrives. Without the designer, client or the photographer being completely happy with hair and make-up, the shoot or show doesn't start.

and over again. So if you kick up a fuss over little things, I doubt you'd be booked again.

How is working overseas in Europe and the USA different to working in Australia? It's definitely more laidback here, and overseas there's a bit more pressure because there are more castings and shows. It gets very busy and hectic, especially during fashion weeks.

What is the most important thing about presenting outfits on the runway? You would obviously have to walk differently if you're doing bridal compared to if you're walking for an up-and-coming trendy designer. It depends on the music as well, but if you're doing bridal, you have to pretty much glide across the runway with a pleasant look on your face.