

A CONVERSATION WITH FLAVIA LA ROCCA

If you google Flavia La Rocca, you can find 1.380.000 results about her. First is her [official website](#), of course. Second is an interview posted by [Cosmopolitan.it](#) last November, that inserts Flavia in the strong group of Italian emerging designers. Then the third search result is obviously signed by Vogue.it: in fact, the roman designer, born in 1985, became known thanks to *The Talents Night - Buy Talents in One Night*, the contest organized by Visa in collaboration with Vogue Italian that Flavia won in 2013. She took part to the last phase of Workshop Project – the result a collaboration between ZoneModa, Vogue Talents and Future Concept Lab – and she told us her professional experience and her concept of sustainable fashion, blurting which fabrics and materials she will probably use for her next creations.

Q. Let's start from the beginning: you graduated at La Sapienza, in Science of Fashion and Costume, has a fashion career always been your goal, or, in the past, did you have other inspirations?

A. It's been my ambition since I was a child; in my home, fashion was in the air: my aunts were professional seamstresses and my mother had always the hobby of sewing. I often repeated "When I will grow-up I will be a fashion designer", but when I started to study Fashion and Costume, I didn't have the courage to choose the design course and I preferred the economic and management sector. However I got what I dreamed, so...(she smile, editor's note).

Q. When you finished the study, you decided to move to Milan in 2007. Was the capital of Italian fashion your first choice or did you considered also other international centers of fashion, like Paris, London o New York?

A. No, the choice of Milan was quite natural, also probably for its vicinity: even if I didn't want studying there, I was sure that one day I will move to. In Milan I started my first stage, telling myself "Ok, I'll stay six month in Milan and then I'll come back to Rome", but I've been living there for 7 years. Now, maybe, I could think to move to Paris or London: growing up I have known them better; there is another kind of ferment and vitality, so maybe in the future, who knows... But for now Milan is fine!

Q. Before creating your brand, you worked for the press office of important fashion brands like Valentino, Vivienne Westwood, Prada, Blumarine. Was it difficult for you to switch from communication to design and business management?

A. It wasn't particularly difficult. Working in very large and structured companies helped me to have a complete business vision. I was part of Prada's press office for two years, where I managed the contacts with celebrities and testimonials: here I dealt not only with communication, but also with style office, production and logistic, different and multiple aspects that taught me to work tirelessly like a real "war machine". Concretely I didn't study to become a fashion designer, so my design skills aren't very high, but I can interface well with the manufacture. In addition to drawing the collection, I personally deal with the communication – sales campaigns, contacts with stores – and my project is increasingly structured.

Q. How did you meet Vogue Talents team?

A. During a press day, I met Sara Maino, she saw my collection and so we kept in touch: she appreciated so much my product to insert me in the talents' selection from Vogue Italia; then I won a competition organized by Vogue Talents and Visa and I participated with them at Talents Store of [Fidenza Village](#). I have to admit the Vogue team really support the emerging designers and for this it deserves great credit: they want always to be updated on my projects and when they can, they share always news and publications about it.

Q. Your collection is totally made in Italy. Do you believe that is important for new designers to support it?

A. Yes, I've specialized in ethical fashion and sustainability for two seasons, using recycling and regenerated fabrics. Made in Italy needs to be supported by all of us; it is synonymous of high-

quality and transparency, because you can always know what is the standard and the conditions of your workers. Sure, the costs are more expensive, because the care of details increases the value. This thing doesn't allow us to be competitive with the big names of mass market like Zara, or rather with a lower price range, but I think probably nobody between emerging designers would have this. And so yes, Made in Italy must be supported absolutely, specially starting from the materials.

Q. Your brand has a concept very decided, a modular and convertible look that you can adapt to different daily situations. What is the ideal model of woman for your clothes?

A. A travelling woman, a lawyer, a student, a teacher: the prerogative is that she is dynamic. It's a question of attitude: I wish my customers could have the possibility of changing the initial dresses' function, transforming them, maybe wearing a skirt like a dress or changing the lengths as you like. The ideal woman for my clothes – that have clean and minimal lines – have to play with garments and have fun doing it. This is the attitude that I like, always united to a serious attention to the ethical issues.

Q. You usually use very different materials, from classic cotton fabric to more innovative elements, like terry cloth or eel leather. How is important for you to experiment? And how do you research new materials for your creations?

A. The eel leather was a initial parenthesis, but now I'm working in a different way with sustainable fabrics; an example, I used the recycling polyester, obtained from plastic bottles and then I pierced it; processing techniques transform the bottles into a yarn, which allows to create different types of fabrics; they seem to be like a satin, because they are pleasing to touch and nice to see. Also I worked with carded regenerated fabric, a wool produced in Prato and created by the treatment of old fabrics. Today I have to admit I research more materials than before, because I'm trying to bring innovation in a sector already highly specialized. Therefore the research is always in progress: just recently I found a kind of cork-lace, that I didn't know, and I'm studying to use it for the next collection. I'm working on sustainable fashion because this type of materials could be ecological and beautiful at the same time, and this is the main objective to achieve. Sustainable fashion is usually stereotyped, referred to a untidy or sloppy look, but it is wrong, because you can get really surprising and cool results, as Stella McCartney teaches us.

Q. Sustainable is the word of the day and the way for a better future. Do you believe there is still a lot of work to do? Or is there sufficient awareness about?

A. Yes, I believe there is still much to do. Just last Thursday (21 march 2014, Day of Forests) I was present at the event Forest For Fashion, organized at the Palais des Nations in Genève, where I talked on the side of the representatives of Gucci's sustainable department: fortunately I discovered that also in Italy it starts to exist more awareness about a sustainable development, but probably the really problem is the final consumer. Recently, during the London Fashion Week, I took part to Estethica, the section opened from British Fashion Council in 2006 and dedicated to last eco-fashion news. Press and buyers directed to me a lot of attention: many articles told about my work and my sustainable concept: to get more of a dress in the same one. I particularly care about this topic: if I can bring also only ten people to buy recycling clothes, it's already a little achievement for me.

Q. Recently you have taken part to a crowdfunding project, collaborating with the known platform WOW/CRACY: is it an instrument that you suggest?

A. Yes, absolutely. I was lucky, my first project was successful and now we are working on a second one. Next winter collection is already on platform: the same day I presented it at the London Fashion Week, a selection of pre-order items was directly loaded on-line, with a 50% off for the first ten customers. It's an excellent way to involve the end consumer purchaser and to amortize the production costs: the designer proposes a project, that will be product only if it's already ordered, so sold. For a young designer who wants to launch his ideas but he can't open a stock, I think crowdfunding is the best way to start. The important is to be very present, to work

a lot in communication on-line, between updating and sharing, because everyone knows the potential of the web. I was very fine with the WOW/CRACY team, they really supported me.

Q. In conclusion, what do you suggest to who is moving his first professional step in this sector?

R. I suggest to have many experiences before starting a personal project autonomously – for example an own brand. Working for other companies and in different roles helps to understand how the fashion world really works and what is the possible way to undertake. Immediately after studies, starting something autonomous is very dangerous: learning sufficient notions is so different than putting them into practice. So, I repeat, I certainly advice to have many experiences and then, when you will start your brand, you will have to focus on the direction taken, because today the competition is ruthless and doesn't save anyone. I have focused on the idea of modular and interchangeable clothes and this will come with me until I will go on with my brand. You must be very decided on your proposal, before fashion is like a sea full of sharks. Experience and determination are the most important thing to make it.

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