

ITS: Revealing the Secrets to Design Success

Want to be the next Ralph Lauren or Giorgio Armani? Here's what it takes.

And the winners are...

Winnowed from 772 entries, the 11 collections that walked down the runway at the ITS Fashion Show and Competition Saturday night, July 14, in Trieste, Italy, revealed in their innovation, thoughtfulness and craftsmanship the key elements of winning designs that judges thought reflected the ideal combination of creativity and marketability.

ITS (pronounced "its," not "I-T-S"), or International Talent Support, is a creative platform founded by director Barbara

Franchin in 2002 to support and provide visibility, internships and job opportunities to young talent from around the globe. Although the big spotlight shines once a year on the competition, ITS is a year-round endeavor. "We are always in contact with different brands around the world, and with our past finalists, and we publish news about their new projects and new collections every day," says Franchin. Although it began as a fashion design competition, ITS has since expanded to include accessories, jewelry and photography.



Fashion Collection of the Year
Ichiro Suzuki (Japanese)



Diesel Award and D-La Repubblica Award
Marius Janusauskus (Lithuanian)



Fashion Special Prize
Luke Brooks (British)



Avery Dennison Brand Innovation Award and Vogue Talents Award
Mark Goldenberg (Israeli)

SAMPLE

Standing out from the crowd

The 11 fantastic collections that made it to the finals this year vied for seven different awards and faced a 14-member jury (see below), and although not all collections could snag a prize, none disappointed the audience as they made their way up and down the runway in a beautiful and majestic old building on the waterfront of the Adriatic Sea.

To make it that far is quite an accomplishment itself, but even award winners don't find themselves on easy street after the competition. The world of fashion is cutthroat, and — as is the case in many things — advances in technology have been both a savior and a detriment to young designers, giving them greater opportunities to design easily and quickly and to share their work with others, but also widening the gap with already established and continually expanding large fashion houses, which can ramp up tech-

nology to create immensely powerful supply chains that pose a big challenge to the little guy.

Another influence wrought by improved technology is its effect relative to bringing the world closer together, and enabling trends that previously might have been seen only by a few wandering scouts to be viewed on a stream of YouTube videos, tweets and Facebook posts. This is a boon when it comes to keeping tabs on trends, but as several judges noted, it also carries the danger of watering down differences, so that everything begins to look alike.

Even top designers who avoid trendbooks and services, preferring to process and filter trends with their own eyes, "have the same type of experiences, because fashion is a tiny world. You see similar things," says Tim Voegele-Downing, global creative director of Avery Dennison/Retail Branding and Information Solutions, which was a first-time partner of ITS, sponsor-

ing a Brand Innovation Award of 3,000 Euros and a two-week-paid commission to design new concepts for its Branding Solution Portfolio.

Indeed, last year's winner of the ITS Fashion Collection of the Year, Shaun Samson, says he chooses not to look at trends. "I don't want to be influenced by them. Once I see someone doing something, I don't want to do it."

Other previous winners echoed the sentiment and like Samson have taken their own very unique paths to fashion. Aithor Throup, the ITS#FIVE winner, started by re-appropriating vintage machines to construct garments in new ways, and developed one particular machine to stitch clothing without seam allowances, which he says enables a "purity of conception" in design that complements his "geometrical" thought processes. "When you have to think about seam allowance, it stymies thought. Seam



**La Febbre de Sabato Sera
(Saturday Night
Fever) Award**
Isabel Vollrath (German)

Modateca Award
Shengwei Wang (Chinese)

THE JUDGES

RENZO ROSSO

Diesel Owner and
Only The Brave President

BARBARA FRANCHIN

EVE/ITS Founder and
Director

MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ

Performance Artist

CARLO BACH

Art Director, Illy

SUSIE BUBBLE

Fashion Blogger

MARK FAST

Fashion Designer and
ITS#SEVEN Winner

DEANNA FERRETTI

Maglificio Miss Deanna,
Modateca

SARA MAINO

Senior Fashion Editor,
Vogue Italia and Vogue.it

CATERINA SALVADOR

COIN Group, Fashion
Coordinator

SHAUN SAMSON

ITS#TEN Winner

ROBBIE SPENCER

Senior Fashion Editor,
Dazed & Confused

LETIZIA SCHATZINGER

Fashion Director, D-La
Repubblica

AITHOR THROUP

Fashion Designer and
ITS#FIVE Winner

TIM VOEGELE-DOWNING

Global Creative Director,
Avery Dennison, Retail
Branding and Information
Solutions

allowance always got in the way for me. It seemed like a kind of medieval problem," he said.

ITS#SEVEN winner Mark Fast, who specializes in women's knitwear and likes to work with textural items such as fringes and feathers, says he finds his inspiration in music. He believes quickly moving global trends have created a fast-paced culture of cheap, disposable clothing that is antithetical to true fashion, which should be about "clothes that are classic and that make you feel good about your body and look good for a lifetime.

"Clothes shouldn't be as disposable as they are — you wear a trend for a year and then it's over. I want to create clothes that you pass to your daughter and she wears 20 years later. There's a way of doing it and still creating a mass-market appeal," he says.

Coin's Caterina Salvador couldn't agree more. The designer, who started her career with Giorgio Armani, moved from there to Calvin Klein and was head of the Dolce & Gabbana Style office until last year, says that while increased communication enables more people to have a "total view" of trends, each country and each designer is different, and must impose a personal interpretation of the culture. "Ultimately, good taste is objective, requiring balance, proportion and color matching. It cannot just be invented. ... There must be a culture behind it. Maybe street fashion is [popular] but in reality it's not fashion," she says.

Balancing virtuosity of design with mass appeal

Grabbing the fashion world's brass ring by displaying virtuosic design, craftsmanship and originality while also achieving wide appeal is an accomplishment achieved by few. Designers who are committed to their own vision but unable to translate that to a large audience may struggle to find success; on the flip side, some large apparel retailers and brands are voluminous producers but their garments don't get high marks for fashion.



Mark Goldenberg (third from left) accepts the Avery Dennison Brand Innovation Award from Avery's global creative director Tim Voegelé-Downing (first from left) for branding designs he created (below) to accompany his unique and beautiful bird-inspired collection of dresses.



Deanna Ferretti, who started her career more than 30 years ago in Reggio Emilia, Italy, and has since worked with some of the most important designers of the past century, sees high fashion gaining ground as developments in technology enable both sides of the design-marketing coin — designers have tools to sketch faster and have greater access to libraries of images, marketers have greater real-time visibility into design development — but says technology gains have nonetheless tipped the scales further in favor of the big brands. "Now, everything is faster, but, in the end the problems are all the same. Technology has made the big brands even more powerful. But the young designers are always in the same position."

Still, she happily sees a resurgence of artisanship in fashion design, and says that designers can achieve greatness with the well-rounded combination of 1) creativity; 2) the ability to translate this creativity into complete product; 3) high quality; 4) appropriate pricing; and 5) good distribution. "If you don't have the power that the big brands do, then that's what you need," she says.

Designers such as Throup have had to confront this reality head on. A self-described artist who was drawn to fashion because of the allure of the technology around it and his quest to figure out its limitations and needs, Throup pushed back against the pre-defined rules and even the language of the industry. "My conceptual thinking was hermetically sealed, and I wanted to use product language that was mine. I struggled with seasonal themes. I struggled with standardized solutions to clothing. For example, everything is either a set-in sleeve or a raglan sleeve. Even when you're learning fashion, it's like, 'Which of these two armholes do you want?'" says Throup. "I want my own armhole.

"But when you launch product into the market, it becomes product. You lose control in a way. But if you're going to do it, your baby needs to be ready for the market."

Bringing it all together

Bridging the gap is possible, and technology may make it easier. "This is a defining moment where design and technology are converging," says Avery's Voegelé-Downing, who, prior to his current position held creative roles at firms including Burberry Japan, Gucci, Christian Dior, Sonia Rykiel and Onward Kashiyama.

"[The fashion industry] used to have defined areas of expertise, with [task-specific] tools and separate responsibilities. And then we'd try to pull it together in some way, and it ended up being a mixed bag."

Now, there is much more overlap and visibility into the tasks and goals of other members of the supply chain. So much more is involved, says Voegelé-Downing, and designers must confront a larger number of considerations from the get-go:

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"You're trying to design for delivery and shipping methods, so you can get 'x' amount into a shipping container. You're designing for the footprint of your shipping containers, and of the retail shelf. So packaging and logistics and sustainability are all having a major impact on what you design and how you can design and what you want to design," he says.

Yet at its core, branding is still "all about telling stories. At very top end, the designer's purpose is to tell the most effective story that will connect with the customer. On the low end, the designer's job is to translate that story into physical product," he says.

Whatever the 'level' of the designer, the shift underway in the industry from supply chain to supply web is having the effect of eliminating the linearity of various job positions and conflating the continuum of the process so that more parties are involved in multiple aspects of getting product to market in ways that they never were before — while at the same time many of these processes now occur simultaneously, speeding up the entire concept-to-delivery cycle while also eliminating waste, and allowing companies to focus more on the core business areas that provide more value to the consumer.

The developing environment where design has become more centralized should make it easier for great designers to make the leap to world-class brands, which, says Voegele-Downing, requires three things: great product and great branding, underpinned by a great story. "Until you can tell that story effectively, you can't connect with the customer," he says, which is in part where Avery Dennison comes in, and why the company became involved with the fashion competition this year, offering an award to the finalist who developed the most new and innovative way of integrating the company's branding solutions into their collections. "Branding, clothing, distribution — everything is filtered through design," says Voegele-Downing.

Yet very few designers truly have both the design talent and the vision to translate it into a lifestyle concept with the staying power of a Ralph Lauren or Giorgio Armani. "Our purpose here is to help people tell the most effective story," he says. ■

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Editor's Note: For more information about ITS and the Fashion Prizes visit www.itsweb.org.