

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Designer movements do not put creative director role at risk: Peter Copping

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Oscar de la Renta resort 2017 runway show

By SARAH JONES

SAN FRANCISCO Designing for an established brand requires a balancing act of pleasing existing loyal clientele while also reaching out to new audiences, according to the creative director of Oscar de la Renta.

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Speaking at the Financial Times' Business of Luxury Summit on May 24, Peter Copping likened it to not throwing the baby out with the bathwater, bringing a level of newness to the brand while not straying too far from the pillars established by the label's eponymous founder. For Mr. Copping, Oscar de la Renta is a natural fit, which allows him to express his feminine aesthetic.

"It's very much about building up on those foundations," said Mr. Copping. "In some ways it just dictates the pace that you can do.

"There is such a loyal clientele, and we have to keep those," he said. "I've been out on the road attending trunk shows and I've met a lot of the women who are these passionate, loyal clients and they're fantastic people. They love clothes, they love the house. And I see it as my job is keeping them happy...and to attract a new client as well."

Career path

Mr. Copping started his career after graduating from the undergraduate program at Central St. Martins in London followed by the master's program at the Royal College of Art. Recognizing at the time that the opportunities he wanted, specifically the chance to work at an established label, were not available in the United Kingdom, he planned to go to Paris for work.

A chance meeting with Christian Lacroix led to an internship at the design house, during which Mr. Copping did everything from observe fittings to sketch looks. After coming back for four consecutive seasons, the prospect of being hired by the brand dimmed with the invasion of Kuwait, which dampened the Christian Lacroix business.

He instead took jobs at houses including Sonya Riekel, Nina Ricci and Louis Vuitton, where he spent 12 years. At Vuitton, Mr. Copping was part of the team that established its ready-to-wear arm, working with Marc Jacobs from day one.

Looking back on the Louis Vuitton calendar, the pace of fashion has sped up dramatically.



Look from Oscar de la Renta's fall/winter 2016 collection

While only producing two collections a year, there was ample time for inspirational trips and exploration. Today, with six collections annually for Oscar de la Renta, Mr. Copping is often juggling three or four seasons at a time, leaving little room for idea generation.

It is this frantic treadmill of fashion seasons that has been blamed for many of the recent resignations from fashion houses, including Raf Simons' exit from Dior. Commenting on the departures, Mr. Copping called those who decided to leave brave for leaving a situation making them unhappy.

Creative freedom is also an important part of the design process, but Mr. Copping self identifies as someone who likes to learn from marketing and sales team, consulting them for insights.

When he arrived at Oscar de la Renta in 2014, he inherited an established Twitter presence. Even though a lot of the label's clients may not be on social media, it is still a plus to be able to provide that lens into the brand.

Lasting legacy

Mr. Copping believes that he was chosen by Mr. de la Renta to lead the label due to the similarities between his aesthetic and shared passions, including home interiors and gardening. The late brand founder's lifestyle was a driving force behind the collections, with his friends becoming many of his clients.

This lifestyle also extended into varied product categories.

Oscar de la Renta offered products beyond fashion to transition to a lifestyle brand and create a bond with millennials.

The fashion house known for its apparel, accessories and beauty lines is expanding to new categories with its first in-house home collection launched in 2013 and a new line of paper products sold through online stationery brand Paperless Post. Fashion marketers must work to remain relevant to their evolving target audience so that the longevity of their brand is not at risk and one way to do so is through new product categories ([see story](#)).

Reaching a potentially new audience, Oscar de la Renta unveiled something blue for brides to be.

The brand has partnered with Mattel's Barbie to create a collectible Gold Label doll for consumers of all ages to covet. During his lifetime, Mr. de la Renta designed a number of wedding gowns for celebrities and cultural figures,

cementing his place in the bridal arena, making this collaboration with Barbie fitting ([see story](#)).

"As the brand moves forward, we can encompass different aspects and start to offer some new, different looking products for the house," Mr. Copping said. "That's probably something that can resonate with some of these younger clients.

"But when you do look on Instagram, there's a lot of young people looking at that and saying, I love this, this is an amazing dress.' So I guess it's different then to move that on, to them actually being clients," he said.

"And I think one of the ways we can do that is through the bridal collection. Because I think that it's very much about designing a dream, but I think for the most part, these are quite young women that are buying the dresses, and I think it's their first entry into the house."

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