



January 2014

## East meets west

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### Recommended Citation

(2014) "East meets west," *SIGNED: The Magazine of The Hong Kong Design Institute*: , 40-43.

Available at: <https://repository.vtc.edu.hk/ive-de-signed/vol8/iss8/12>

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# EAST MEETS WEST

A unique fashion shoot involving young designers from Hong Kong and Belgium took place at HKDI in February. **LINDA VAN WAESBERGE** directed the shoot and shared her insights into the contemporary fashion industry with **DAISY ZHONG**.



**L**inda van Waesberge finds it impossible to identify herself with any single, conventional job title. She started out in the music industry, yet this advertising, production, fashion, lifestyle and retail consultant has also become an event organiser, exhibition curator, a showroom manager, radio reporter, stylist, personal shopper, and to round things off, an expert tour guide to Brussels.

"In the East, people like to be clear with their job titles. I tried to think of a title that accurately describes everything I do and, in the end, I settled on 'Creative

Consultant'. That's because the system is the same across the industries in which I work - it's about people who create. I give advice on anything creative, it might be fashion, but it could equally be a flower shop, a sofa or a chair."

This multi-faceted Belgian creative expert helped Charles Kaisin set up the *Dress Code* exhibition at HKDI in March 2014. And for the last exhibition event in February, she led a styling and photography workshop for students from the Fashion and Image Design Department (FID). They were invited to mix and match

their fashion designs with work created by young Belgian designers and brought to Hong Kong by van Waesberge. "For example, I spotted a really beautiful floral skirt made by one of the FID students, and I thought I could combine this with a top from a young Belgian designer to create a really nice effect."

The workshop ran for three days, culminating in a fashion shoot by Frank Pinckers, a Belgian photographer who has been based in Singapore for 15 years. Students from the FID acted as stylists and models, with the HKDI campus building as the backdrop. "It's a truly



# « CREATIVITY IS ONLY PART OF THE JOB »

amazing building, so I want to make full use of its roof and gardens, its amazing view and its architecture. I want to do the fashion shoots everywhere that's interesting."

Van Waesberge sees a wild sense of creativity which connects young designers from the opposite ends of the Eurasian continent. "It's interesting to see the similarities in the work, imagination and creativity shared by students from Europe and those here. Actually, there's no difference. At this stage of their careers, young designers all focus on creativity. It is about standing out from the crowd and forming personalities."

But she adds that later, when they join the industry, it will be a different story. "Creativity is only a part of the job. The things

you don't learn at school are all about real life: price tags and business plans, knowing about what to do, when and why. You must be realistic. There is intense competition because nowadays there is too much everywhere – not only luxury fashion, but also high street fashion and everything in between. Collections are raining down all over the place and it's too much for customers and buyers alike. A designer dress can be half-price within three months – things quickly lose their value."

For this reason, Van Waesberge believes "it's very important to define new possibilities in terms of how to present your work". She cited Belgian fashion designer Bruno Pieters, whose brand "Honest By" is created without reference to seasons and is transparently priced. Every product on his website displays detailed information about the materials, manufacturing, price calculations and carbon footprint. "I think this is a pioneering approach because the current system of fashion weeks,

where new collections are launched twice a year at tremendous cost, cannot be sustainable."

Van Waesberge stresses that the Internet and social media have created a platform where newcomers can present their work in a creative way. "Communication is easy and free. You can find out information and work out where to compete. You can interact with corporations all over the world. My mother may not buy online but everyone else does. All the other customers, young girls, their friends - they order loads of stuff and track brands down. I'm not talking about the future: it's today, happening right now. Shops that don't think like this will definitely lose out."

Within worldwide trends, there are regional variations, too. As a creative veteran with 15 years experience in the major fashion and design capitals, Van Waesberge eloquently identifies the difference between the working environments of East and West: "Here (in Hong Kong) everything is neat and clear and very well-organised. (In Europe) we can change our mind and adjust

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRANK PINCKERS, ASSISTANT JOHANNA VLAEMINCK; STYLING & PRODUCTION BY LINDA VAN WAESBERGE; MAKE-UP BY IP OTTUNG; ROSTA YEUNG, PO WING, ANGUS, LI SHUK YIN, UNA, KING PATRICK, BRYAN, TANG HAYTUNG, OSCAR, CHAN KA KUI, TAM TSI IN INGRID, YAN WING, SZE RAINE, NG TSZYAN MINI, SETO KIYAN REBECCA; DESIGNS FROM CHAN SIN YING, CANDY LAW, WING YAN, WONG PO CHU, CHEUNG WING SHAN, YEUNG CHING YEE, TSOI KAM NAAU, DEVALUX, DORIANE VAN OVEREEM, EDDY ANEMAN, FILLES A PAPA, KATRIEN VAN HECKE, KRIST LOUISE LÉCONTE, MARINE SERRÉ, MATTIA VAN SEVEREN, OLMA HAINAUT, WIM BRUYNOOGHE, YEUNG TSI WING, MA HAK YUI GLORIA, AND YUNG HOI YAN



ABOVE PHOTOGRAPHER FRANK PINCKERS TAKING A PHOTO OF STUDENTS  
BELOW FROM LEFT PINCKERS, LINDA VAN WAESBERGE AND PINCKERS' ASSISTANT JOHANNA VLAEMINCK



quickly, but here, it takes longer. People here are more hesitant about unforeseen change, but it's nice – they like to be organised and safe, it's a different way of thinking.

"But the main difference for young designers is that here you feel more stimulated. What I admire here is the positive energy. In Europe, we're overwhelmed with frightening daily reports about the economic crisis. But when you come here there is more dynamism. People work hard, very hard, but I don't hear them complaining. Yesterday, I made a note of our business hours – 10am to 10:30pm. No problem! But in Belgium if people had to work after 6 or during weekends, they would go on strike.

"Especially today, if you want to go on, you need to work hard because the competition is enormous. If you like what you do, you don't even think in terms of working hours. For designers, the creative process is always ongoing – it never stops. The mentality of working hard and not complaining is going to really make a difference here."