

Missoni: The Influential and Everlasting Power of Pattern

Emily Vartanian

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Abstract

Since 1953, the Italian fashion brand Missoni has pioneered innovative knitwear design. Color, pattern and the finest materials launched the brand into the forefront of Italian fashion design, and the company's extensive use of computer technology made Missoni the standard by which today's knitwear is measured. Missoni's influence on American knitwear is undeniable, and the company's impact is found today at both high-end ready-to-wear brands like Diane von Furstenberg and at mass market retailers like Forever 21. The company continues to stretch the capabilities for knitwear and will, without doubt, influence American design for generations to come.

Meet Missoni

There is no doubt that the Missoni Italian fashion house has influenced ready-to-wear designs in America. Since its inception in the 1950s, Missoni has revolutionized knitwear and inspired American designers to use the medium creatively ("Missoni History"). Not only has Missoni's originality influenced today's designers graphically, but they are also pioneers in Computer Aided Design (Ganem). In particular, it is evident that Missoni has had an impact on American designers such as Diane von Furstenberg and even on budget-friendly mass retailers like "Forever 21."

The most obvious impact that Missoni has made on contemporary design is the fact that it brought a new sense of imagination to knits. Bernadine Morris of the *New York Times* (26 March 1979) wrote that Missoni "elevated knitted clothes to a form of art" ("Missoni History"). That is exactly what the Missoni designers have strived to do. The original members of the Missoni family, who founded the brand, were inspired by a diverse array of art, ethnicities and cultural interests. They employed this strong sense of craft and heritage to create their wool, silk, cotton, linen, and viscose garments (Taylor 15). For the first time, knits became more associated with timeless pieces of expression and fine art rather than ancient heirlooms and handmade cast-offs. This was due in part to the superior quality, vivid colors, fluid knits and iconic zigzag pattern incorporated into Missoni items. In addition, each Missoni garment was tailored to fit the body perfectly, so there were no awkward distractions when viewing the design and pattern. The range of color and its unique layout was something that had never been executed before in the world of high fashion, so it was only natural that others would draw upon this aesthetic for years to come (da Cruz).

Missoni has pioneered the use of various aesthetics over the years, and in that sense, have been given the chance to create a wave of impact through their unique approach. After Coco Chanel, they were the next to introduce knitwear into the fashion arena. Yet, despite the tastefulness and high quality of the garments, practicality has never been entirely forsaken. Missoni has always strived to apply its aesthetic vision to a contemporary lifestyle (Taylor 32). By establishing that beauty never has to be sacrificed, they have inspired American sportswear companies to play with color and line in their products and elevate their practical garments to a form of art. Likewise, Missoni broke new ground in couture and costume within the industry.

From the start, their fashion shows were often artistic and over-the-top. They drew upon the traditional dress of other cultures from the past and present. Today, theatrical shows are commonplace in the world of American design (Taylor 51). Missoni was also an integral part of a very American movement that began in the 1960s and has reemerged throughout the years in the fashion world, the psychedelic movement - characterized by bright colors, mesmerizing patterns and free flowing garments. Missoni provided a sort of high fashion exemplar for American companies to emulate during the sporadic popularity of the psychedelic craze. As is evident, Missoni has been at the forefront of fashion because of its varied list of influences and its superior quality that is an aesthetic delight in any one of its ever-changing forms.

Computer-Aided Fashion Innovation

Those that covet Missoni's designs do not do so because of the meticulous handwork, but for the unquestionable superiority attained through the machine. In fact, they were one of the first companies to use space dyeing and computer-aided design (CAD) in the regular pattern creating process. The designers used their computer design systems to program the knitting machines for complex, multicolored jacquards and for designing printed wovens. In 1988, *Women's Wear Daily* reported that, "Though computer-aided design has yet to find many followers in the fashion industry, Missoni has found it perfectly adapted - even essential - in the creation of its colorful signature knitwear" (Ganem). Now, nearly 20 years later, the National Knitwear Association of the U.S. reported that of 228 apparel manufacturers, 65% use CAD to create colorways, 60% use it to create printed fabric design, and 41% use it to create knitwear designs ("Computers"). Missoni began using CAD well before many of the industry's major players and undoubtedly helped to spur its widespread use in textile design throughout the U.S.

American Designers Love Missoni

Missoni's substantial influence can be seen throughout the world of contemporary American design both in the high and low end. One high fashion designer that seems to have taken Missoni's philosophies to heart is Diane von Furstenberg of New York, who arrived in the fashion world in 1972. By 1976, she had sold millions of her signature wrap dress, an elegant garment relying on the flexible nature of knits. In 1997, she reemerged on the New York fashion scene with the relaunch of the wrap dress

("Biography"). Much like Missoni before her, von Furstenberg not only focuses her energy on the superior construction and form of her knits, but also on the art of pattern.

Budget-friendly mass retailers such as Forever 21 also offer versions of the Missoni look. Even without the superior knit quality that can only be attained by using more pricey fabrics and construction methods, Forever 21 sells items that draw inspiration from the signature colors and patterns made famous by Missoni.

The Italian designs of the Missoni fashion house are now iconic symbols that have shaped the American ready-to-wear industry. It was this label that brought imagination and creativity to an otherwise out-of-date knitwear industry and mastered a number of visual arenas. Their unique style has made them highly coveted. Now, more and more U.S. designers are following Missoni's lead and using computer aided design to create bolder and more intricate patterns in their textiles (Ganem). Among those inspired by Missoni's quality and artfulness are designer Diane von Furstenberg and apparel brand Forever 21. Both have recognized that Missoni's formula has the power of longevity. This fashion house will undoubtedly continue to revolutionize and inspire. After all, nothing says immortality quite like a daring pattern.

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