

StudentsAlumni

Stepping out

BELINDA SMART TALKS TO A CURRENT AND FORMER STUDENT FROM THE **MELBOURNE SCHOOL OF FASHION** (MSF) ABOUT THEIR CONTRASTING REASONS FOR CLINCHING A FASHION EDUCATION.

ZEP ARCANUM IS IN HIS FINAL YEAR OF MSF'S Advanced Diploma of Fashion Design, with only weeks left until school finishes and the end-of-year parade kicks off.

Arcanum says his zeal for getting on with his career was one reason why he wanted to study at MSF.

"I chose MSF initially as they were willing to work around my timetable, I was undertaking study and working part time for the first two years. I also researched most of the colleges in Australia and found that while most offered the Advanced Diploma of Fashion Design full time over four years, MSF achieves this in three by making you work a little harder."

Clearly no stranger to pressure, he still allows himself to bask in the glory of taking out the knitwear prize at the recent Hamilton Sheepvention – a forum for Victorian farmers which includes a fashion show and competition based around the innovative use of wool – and largely attributes his success to the course. The most beneficial aspect about his time at MSF has been the fact that his teachers all have an industry background, he says.

"This has helped a lot over the past three years. I have learnt how to create my visions and understand the full fashion process from inspiration to completion."

The brief for the Hamilton Sheepvention prize was that each garment should be at least 60 per cent wool to enter, with the category prizes covering knitwear, theatrical, menswear, womenswear and eveningwear.

Arcanum's piece – a jacket inspired by Chinese quilting, crop circles and Samurai plated armour – won him a cash prize and five metres of superfine merino knitted jersey, which "feels beautiful".

While a cash prize might be useful, Arcanum has other reasons to be pleased with his win.

"It is always a great feeling to get recognition for something that you have created. I already felt as though I had won when I tied my last quilting knot on the jacket. The main prize I won was reinforcement and self belief that I have chosen the right career path."

Plans after leaving MSF include pursuing his passion for menswear, although he's keeping an open mind.

"If the opportunity arises in womenswear I will also accept. A good designer can design for both and that is where the real talent and art lies. As long as I am working in the industry and able to maintain my creativity, I will be happy. As for the distant future, I am open-minded. I don't believe in having only one direct path to take, it's the little side tracks that make life exciting." ■

THAT MAY WELL BE THE CASE, BUT FOR CRISTIAN Gasparini, his attendance at MSF was always part of a master plan. Unlike the stereotypical fashion school alumnus Gasparini, who left MSF a couple of years ago, attended with a distinctly business related plan in mind.

Unusually, Gasparini signed up to study fashion not to become a designer, but to hone his business and fashion marketing skills as part of a strategy to become a standout fashion retailer.

He and his business partner now run Tzar boutique – which operates one Melbourne and one Sydney outlet, specialising in high end menswear, in particular exclusive Italian brands.

He says he took his fashion design studies at MSF very seriously in order to enhance his knowledge of quality garment construction.

"More than anything else I also gained a really in depth understanding of materials and fabrications which is helpful in the buying process. The course also contained components in which I learned a lot about how to utilise store layout and visual merchandising to drive sales."

Using his honed retailing skills, Gasparini has become something of a marketing impresario. Recent brand partnership coups include a team-up with Italian beer brand Peroni, which entailed complex window display constructions made from innumerable Peroni bottles and a successful Peroni inspired instore event.

In terms of the Tzar business overall, future plans include expansion into womenswear and an online store.

Hailing from garment producing stock – "my Dad has been making clothes in Italy for 40 years" – fashion is clearly in Gasparini's blood, but he's decided to apply his skills in a different way.

"I had already got a business degree, but I decided to attend MSF because I really wanted some hands on fashion education. It has definitely helped me become a better fashion retailer." ■



The winning piece: MSF nurtured the Zep Arcanum's creativity.



Tzar boutique: Cristian Gasparini honed his retail skills at MSF.