

Adler and Doonan: a Life in Fashion and Design

Azzurra Giorgi (April 07, 2013)



At Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò, the two visionaries talk about their lives, works and passion in a long discussion with Grazia d'Annunzio, US Special Projects Editor of Vogue Italia, and Eugenia Paulicelli, co-Director of the Concentration in Fashion Studies at the Graduate Center at CUNY.

“Through their works, they can always deliver a universe full of creativity, joy, irony and sometimes irreverence.” With these words Grazia d'Annunzio, US Special Projects Editor of Vogue Italia, introduced [Jonathan Adler](#) [2] and [Simon Doonan](#) [3] at the Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò on April 3rd.

Adler, interior designer and author of three books, and Doonan, columnist and Creative Ambassador-at-Large at Barney's, discussed interior design, window dressing and many other arguments related to their lives and working experiences with d'Annunzio and Eugenia Paulicelli, co-Director of the Concentration in Fashion Studies at the Graduate Center at CUNY.



"My breakthrough moment was when one of my professors in college told me that I had no talent. Having a mean professor was my breakthrough moment," admitted Adler, talking about the moment in which he started his career as a designer, starting from his love for clay. This was the first material he used for his pieces and one that he keeps using even after all these years.

On the other hand, Doonan talked about the first steps in his career, when he was working for a demolition company until he moved to London. There he obtained his first job in the display field. "I had this display job and after a while I had interested in it, and I started to do some freelance jobs. I got a job with Tommy Nutter, who was famous because he made Mike Jagger's wedding suit, and I thought 'I can do subversive and fun windows,' and I experimented doing provocative, cheeky, attention-getting windows. I could experiment." After that, Doonan moved to Los Angeles before eventually getting his first job at Barney's.

Thinking of himself as an engineer, Adler expanded his work to include the design of more various home elements and also launched a children's line. "My design work is minimalist but my decorating is maximalist," said Adler, while reading some points of the manifesto he wrote eighteen years ago in order to present his works. "I believe that design can make your life memorable," and this is also why he wrote books about his aesthetic and his ideas on interior design - so that everyone could make their own environment healthy for their souls.

Explaining the different Christmas windows that charm tourists and New Yorkers each year, Doonan admitted: "At Barney's I was in charge of P.R., advertising, marketing, so the windows were my fun. I would think about them in the evening and on the weekend." During his career, he specialized in different displays that renovated the world of windows, choosing messy and chaotic elements that no one had ever used before, as well as series of characters, like Shakespeare, Cleopatra and Queen Elizabeth, made with various objects to attract and intrigue people.

In one night, Adler and Doonan put together design and fashion, underlining the communal points that these two fields share, especially when young artists try to approach the audience for the first time. "The main due is do not care about other people's opinions. Focus on your job and ignore everybody else," said Adler, following the same note as Doonan, who said, "In fashion it's pretty much the same thing, it is about self expression, so it is silly to care about what other people think."

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