March 19, 2018 -

As told to T. Cole Rachel, 1760 words.

Tags: Fashion, Multi-tasking, Inspiration, Process.

# On never having time to be stuck

An interview with designer Christelle Kocher

**When you're working on a variety of projects at the same time—multiple lines for Koché, your work for Chanel—how do you structure your life in a way that you don't go crazy?**

When you go into this kind of work, at least for me, it's really constant. I'm pretty organized and I keep to my schedule and meet my deadlines, but I'm also really curious and I try to always be aware and open. I want to catch every possible moment to enrich my imagination and feed my ideas.

This means paying attention. It could be something I see on the street, something I read, something I see at the theater or in a movie, something I read in a book, or some kind of contemporary art. I'm always thinking about what I can learn and how I can inject that into what I do. I'm quite lucky because fashion is obviously very creative; there are lots of places that these ideas can go and they can many different forms.



So my work is many things: I'm draping, I'm drawing, I'm working with a team to make the clothes, to make specific embroidery and things like that. I work with people who are amazing at their craft. I get to work in the world of couture, but also with things like streetwear. And then when you are putting together the shows, it's other kinds of work—lots of email and social media, putting together the look books, collecting images.

For the show I'm also working with people doing the sound and collaborating with people who come from the theater and people from the electronic music scene. I work with photographers that come from the world of contemporary art. I'm always trying to feed more from things outside the world of fashion…and then figuring out how to inject that into my work. I'm always trying to improve my skills and explore new techniques, things that are more contemporary, more young, things that feel more like contemporary art.

**After you finished school you had over a decade of experience in the fashion world before launching your own label. I know some students want to leave school and launch their own line right away, but how important was it to have real world experience before launching Koché?**

I've been lucky to experience quite a few different roles. I didn't launch my brand until I felt I was

ready. Having your brand is like the vision of your true identity, a name that can bring you to an international audience. You want it to be unique and personal and stand out, but you also need to have a product at a good price and that's right for the market and has all of the funding it needs. You need to be able to run a team and lead the operation all the way from creation to production. You need to have a really good idea of the business, of finance, of production, and creativity. There are a lot lot of things you need to understand about the whole process to be able able to master it. For me, being able to work in that world in a lot of different positions was really the best school.
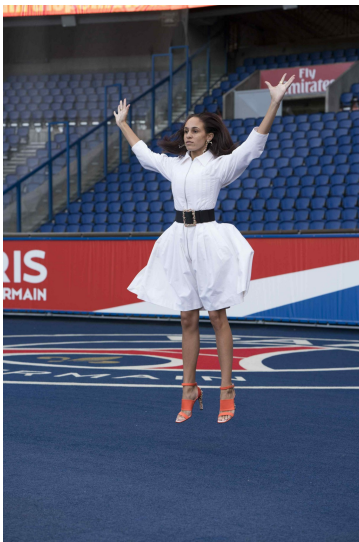




I worked for Armani. I worked for Chloe. I worked for Bottega Veneta and I used to spend one week a month in New York, which was super good. I was doing lots of work in Paris and traveling a lot. Now I'm always working on many different projects at the same time and sometimes people will say, "Oh, that's crazy!" But for me, it's actually really good to be able to jump from project to project in your mind. And it is something where often you just need to focus and do things really fast and then put them out so you can move on to the next thing.

**People often have a funny misconception about what a fashion designer does, but if you're running your own label it requires you to be a true multi-tasker. You're not only designing things, but you're also thinking about fabrication and price points and sales. Whether you want to be or not, you really have to be a business person.**

You really need to plan ahead in every kind of aspect. If you're doing a collection you have to plan

everything in advance and you will need, of course, some money. All of the planning and scheduling is really dictated by your financial needs and these days you really need to understand those things.

I'm really interested in creativity. That's my strongest attribute, I think. I'm trying to deliver a project that is fantastic and personal and singular and that is, first and foremost, based on my own creativity. Still, I have to pay attention to my resources, and the economics do make a difference. But creativity is the motivation… it is the vision that you act from.



**At the most basic level, when it comes to designing clothes, what does your creative process look like? How do you start?**

It often starts with the fabrics and by draping things on a dummy. I drape a lot and create my own patterns, but the impulse behind it and the general idea depends on what is inspiring me. I always want to challenge myself and challenge expectations. At the beginning sometimes it's just about a mood, or like I was saying, I go for a walk, I see a movie or read a book and that sparks a place to start, provides ideas that seem to go well together. Sometimes it's just about a silhouette or the fabrics. With each collection, I really like to start over at the very beginning. I like to create a situation that feels new and that is sometimes a little destabilizing for me. Sometimes a situation where I feel I'm not really in control inspires creativity.

**Putting together a collection is a complicated process. There must be moments in the process when it feels very chaotic or when it seems like things maybe aren't coming together or don't make sense. When you're right in the middle of that process, how do you keep from panicking?**

I never do that. I just keep working. Last year, I was working on multiple collections at the same time. Because I'm always doing fittings and things, I don't have time to think about being stuck or panicked. I'm really not someone who gets stuck.

Also, because I'm leading a team, I cannot show that I'm not sure of something. I'm always just like, "You need to advance things and keep moving, keep working." Of course, you have things that come up, but ultimately those things are mostly trivial. I always have a bit of faith that, at the end of the day, things are going to work out. Then you move on to the next thing. I'm super optimistic about things, always. I'm also super happy to be doing what I'm doing and I feel truly lucky. I don't really understand people who say, "Oh, I don't have an idea or this thing doesn't work." I just try to enjoy the work and take care of my team and trust my instincts and always move forward.

**I like that attitude. I mean, making things can be hard, but it's also amazing. At the end of the day, maybe it's about not making things harder than they need to be.**

I try to avoid work problems and whenever there *is* something I'm usually like, "Okay what's the challenge of the day? Let's try to solve it!" These problems don't need to be so tragic, you know? When something happens it's like, "Okay, let me know. How are we gonna creatively solve it?" Sometimes you just need to think differently. You need to be able to think differently sometimes, even about product issues, or about the fabric issues, technical things, about financial issues. Sometimes it's just about how you can step back and look at these things in a different way. Mostly, I don't like to waste time on drama. You just solve the problem and move on. The great thing about being so busy is that you no longer have time for negativity. You don't have time to be stuck.

**What advice do you have for young designers just coming out of school?**

You know, it's different for everybody and it's all really personal, but I think more than anything you have to follow your instincts. I would never say to anyone just out of school, "Oh, don't do your own brand yet." If you have the conviction to do it, just do it. If you feel like gaining some experience first would be good, then do that. I think you need to do what what you like and be honest with yourself. You have to believe in your project and your vision. You also need to be prepared to learn all the mandatory skills, no matter what.

**Fashion always feels like this tug-of-war between refinement and reinvention—between trying to come up with something totally new and trying to make the perfect version of some classic form. How do you feel about that?**

Both of those challenges are quite interesting. When you're student, at least for me, you dream about creating your own thing, something totally new. But I think you first have to establish your own vocabulary and really understand your craft before you can worry about reinventing. I think the two ideas really go together, actually. You develop your own sensibility, your own vocabulary, and then you refine it and refine it and refine it. Along the way, you figure out what feels essential and pure. What feels like it can only come from you.
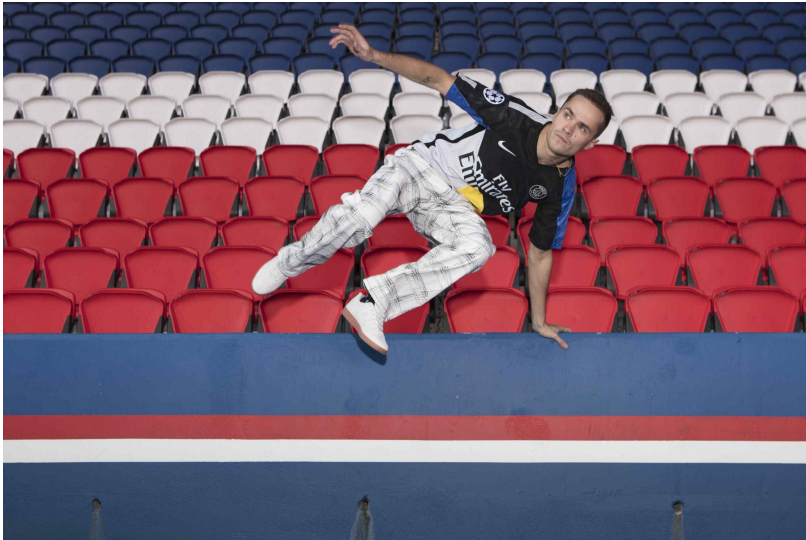
Christelle Kocher recommends:

Always: Walk very early in the Buttes Chaumont Parc in the east of Paris when the city starts to wake up.

Lately: Good Time from the Safdie Brothers, the last scene moved me very intensively.

Always: Any paintings of Bernard Frize, where colors make me want to create.

Lately: The raw energy of Shake070

Always: Opening a book and losing the measure of time

Name
Christelle Kocher

Vocation
Designer

Fact

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