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FORT GANSEVOORT

Aprons and Heels: What Fashion's Chicest Confectioner Wears to Work

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“Ever since I started this job and anyone asks how I’m doing, I always say, ‘I’m great!’ ” Maayan Zilberman excitedly explains. And why shouldn’t she? The former Lake & Stars lingerie designer, who has since founded confections line Sweet Saba, happens to have the sweetest career around. Concocting a literal visual feast out of her Park Slope, Brooklyn, kitchen and Fort Gansevoort Meatpacking pop-up shop, the Israeli-born polymath uses her background in sculpture and a biting sense of humor to create her vibrant, indulgent delicacies. Think sugarfied tubes of lipstick, rap mixtapes, and Rolex watches—with their raw handiwork and dead-on wit, these in-demand pieces match Zilberman’s equally enticing wardrobe. Hardly barefoot in the kitchen, Zilberman teeters about in her workspace in vintage Betsey Johnson Mary Janes, while throwing on a customized Adam Selman pearl-laced apron to protect her Prada skirts and

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her plans on taking Sweet Saba herbal.

From Jerusalem to Vancouver

I was born on a kibbutz, where the first clothing I had was a mix of unisex hand-me-downs, so I was given a pretty blank slate. When I lived in Jerusalem we were surrounded by several sects of Orthodox communities, and the fabrics associated with each group were inspiring to me. During those years, designer brands were becoming popular, and the only place I was seeing this was in the *shuk* [market] where one could find imitation Calvin Klein and United Colors of Benetton next to tzitzit and shawls. I think it was in the early '90s that I first understood how to mix my ethnicity with fashion and food.

Also, one of the most influential books of my childhood was *Color Me Beautiful*, which the women in my family took very seriously. I learned at the age of 6 that I was a “Winter” and haven't veered off course since. I still have the book and love to pull it out at parties. Later in high school in Vancouver, grunge was the big trend and there wasn't much room for my sensibilities in that environment—even when I wore my Revlon Blackberry lipstick and grunged out with irony. I was always far more En Vogue and Versace than the Pacific Northwest could handle.





maayan zilberman
Photographed by Jason Lewis



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Diane von Furstenberg Marnie top

Photo: (Clockwise from top left) Courtesy of matchesfashion.com; Courtesy of Nordstrom; Courtesy of makeupforever.com; Courtesy of farfetch.com; Courtesy of Sears



Taking Cues From '90s New York City Street Style

When I first got to New York, when I was 15, one of the first things I discovered was all the music I could get on Canal Street. I used to buy mix CDs from girls in monochrome outfits and big name-plate earrings. They pointed me to Fulton Mall in Brooklyn, and that's where I finally got pants that fit right and jewelry that reflected my personality a departure from the stuff I'd received for my bat mitzvah.

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teaching me about how to dress and how to feel feminine. I had a Versace quilted skirt that I wore a lot—it made me feel like the supermodels in the ad campaigns: Cindy, Claudia, Stephanie, et cetera. I also had a Jean Paul Gaultier double-breasted pinstripe suit that I'd wear casually. In fact, I'm still wearing most of my clothes from those days: Betsey Johnson floral dresses, Donna Karan bodysuits, a metallic Byblos pouf skirt, and a grommeted Pelle Pelle jacket.

Lingerie Beginnings

I studied sculpture at the School of Visual Arts, and for a year at the San Francisco Art Institute my major was “new genres,” a very '90s thing. Right after I graduated from SVA, I did an artist residency with Ilya Kabakov at the Fondazione Antonio Ratti in Como, where they also manufactured some of the world's most beautiful silks. A tour of their factory opened my eyes to a potential dip into fashion, but it wasn't until I met a pair of women in New York City that same year looking to start a lingerie brand that I took a chance on garment design. I bought a bunch of bras and took them apart and figured out how they were put back together. I cofounded The Lake & Stars in 2007 with the desire to make a brand that was in line with the story I wanted to tell as an artist. Lingerie was a tool, a structure that gave me rules so I could tell a sci-fi tale while inherently delivering romance and sex appeal.



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Gucci High-Gloss Lacquer

Photo: (From left) Courtesy of Journelle; Courtesy of Gucci



Moving Into the Kitchen

I missed making art and having a studio to make sculpture. When I still had my lingerie brand, after work it was easy to make art in the kitchen, and it made the most sense to bake. I transitioned into confections with Sweet Saba in 2013. I enjoy that the work I'm working can be ingested and then becomes a part of you—it's like the lingerie, but inside. I'm still working on another lingerie concept, but it's more of a sex-positive brand and it's in development. Doing one career full time isn't so much the answer: I look at it as

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girls were in a jockstrap, now they're chewing gum, but they're all saying the same thing.

Work Life Is Sweet!

I have a handful of businesses I'm working on, so my days range from meeting up with clients to staying in the kitchen all day developing new products or popping in on contractors and engineers. I experiment with new ingredients I collect on my travels, and spend a lot of time with my sketchbooks and computer, developing packaging, website design, and general art direction. Branding and story have just as much to do with the vision of these projects as the product. I also split my time between New York City and Los Angeles, where another one of my businesses—Nonsense Medicinals—is being launched. I'm developing a few high-end lines of medical marijuana edibles and I'm partnering with some of the top players in the industry to debut our line this year.

When I meet with clients, it's to hear first about what they envision for their orders. I'll have them come to my showroom at Fort Gansevoort, the third floor of a Meatpacking District townhouse that houses my shop and sometimes studio. We do taste tests and I draw on a pad while we discuss ideas. Most often we get to talking about common interests and YouTube, and that leads to hours of discussion, which more often than not benefits the creative outcome.



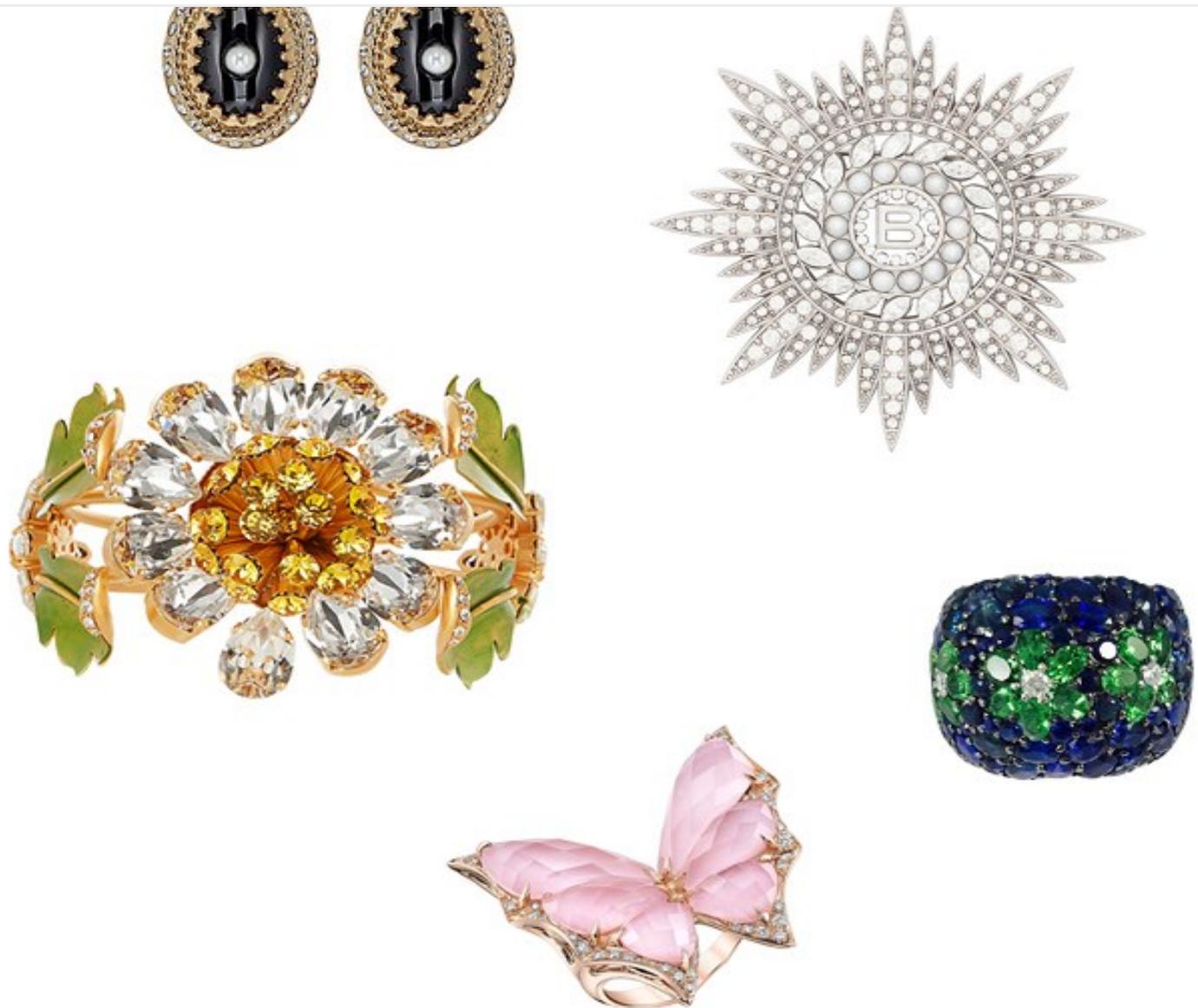
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Givenchy double-sided stud earrings

Photo: (Clockwise from top left) Courtesy of Barneys New York; Courtesy of Balenciaga; Courtesy of 1stdibs.com; Courtesy of stephanwebster.com; Courtesy of net-a-porter.com



Hey, Good-Looking, What You Got Cooking?

My grandmother always told the rest of us in our family that you should keep a mirror in the kitchen. To me this means you always have to remember to look your best—that it reflects how you feel inside. In the kitchen or studio I always wear an apron. For Sweet Saba my good friend Adam Selman custom-designed one based on my requests so it could double as a dress. The straps have pearls on them, so I could be wearing anything underneath and it's instantly a chic look. I'll wear red lipstick and stockings in the kitchen, even if I'm alone all day. Because my apron is so much like a dress, I can wear

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it on its own, or with a white shirt underneath, and it's a look ready for going out. I'll usually switch into fresh tights or special nettings and put on some jewelry before heading to meetings, but I like to wear what I want in and out of the kitchen.



maayan zilberman
Photographed by Jason Lewis



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Williams-Sonoma personalized stripe apron

Photo: (Clockwise from top left) Courtesy of Domino; Courtesy of amara.com; Courtesy of Williams-Sonoma



Essential Style Ingredients

I love Prada secretary skirts or Miu Miu cowgirl-style pouf skirts. It's important for fabrics to be tough, like nylon or taffeta or wool for winter. All of my basics for the kitchen are from Proenza Schouler: lightweight knit tank tops, vests with pockets, jacquard skirts. I just love the great fabrics mixed with future. I also like to wear waterproof shoes in the kitchen. If only I could customize the Dior latex boots to be a bit more comfy for baking! Other rules for kitchen dressing? I don't like having sleeves—they get in stuff. Nipped waists help me remember not to eat all the ingredients as I'm using them, and a tight, high ponytail keeps me awake when I'm working on deadlines.

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When I'm working on lingerie projects, I always wear a robe with a belt so it looks like a dress, but I can change in and out of it for fittings.

It's Getting Hot in Here

When I first built my kitchen, I made the countertop too high, so out of necessity I got in the habit of wearing my 4-inch-heeled creepers as my work shoe so I was at the right height to make candy. Since then I've grown accustomed to being on my toes and feel more alert when working in heels. I've learned tough lessons pouring hot sugar in open-toe sandals—let that be a cautionary tale! I also like classic shoe styles—as a rule when I'm shopping, I ask myself if Barbie would wear it. My favorite heels are all Prada; I think she knows how to design for a woman on her feet. For fun I'll wear my sky-high Mary Janes from Betsey Johnson—the ones I saved from the early '90s—or white patent slingback Manolos.





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Prada light gray leather dual strap Mary Jane pumps

Photo: (Clockwise from top left) Courtesy of modesens.com; Courtesy of Paul Smith; Courtesy of Topshop; Courtesy of modaoperandi.com



Style With Legs

I do love my underpinnings, and I have several thousand sets, but my ensemble starts with hosiery. I've always worn skirts and dresses. I don't own a pair of jeans and seldom wear pants, unless they are dressy. In New York City I discovered all the sex shops where I could get every color and texture to go with my outfits. Bobby socks, thigh-highs, and tights are what set the tone for each day. Now I work with a hosiery manufacturer in Italy called Iluna and I get all my tights from them. They make custom designs and patterns, so I rarely shop for hosiery anymore. When I do buy, it's with the

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most support for circulation or for glitz from Wolford.



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