



FASHION FOUNDER
ROSITA
MISSONI
EXTENDS HER STYLE
EMPIRE TO THE
MIDDLE EAST

talks about a life spent in the style limelight and her excitement at breaking into the Middle East's luxury hotel market.

You have been married to your husband Ottavio, also known as Tai, the co-founder of Missoni, for over 58 years. Was it love at first sight?

"It was cupid's doing. I was in college studying English and the president of Tai's sports club was my best friend's father. One day we all went out for a Sunday meal and then I asked my friend to invite him to my 17th birthday party... it all built from there."

Have you always had a love of design? Were you a follower of fashion as a little girl?

"Yes, absolutely. I grew up in this factory of fabrics and I was fascinated by them. I used to make dresses for my dolls using small pieces of material."

Do you think growing up around fabrics fed your ambition?

"I always had the pleasure of feeling the materials and, without knowing, I was absorbing lots of very important things that would be precious in my life. This was my schooling in a way."

Bold patterns engulf Missoni's collections. What is the essence of Missoni's style?

"In 1970, after 15 years as an established designer, I had the idea to mix everything together – stripes, zigzags, prints, flowers, checks, dots and patterns. The American press called it the 'put together collection' and we were considered a fashion power. We identified our style in that moment."

Missoni has become a family enterprise. Was it something your children wanted to take on, or were they just following in your footsteps?

"Angela always loved clothes, and for all three children the factory was their playground after school. It was a fascinating place and they loved to draw and play there."

Angela is now the head of design at Missoni. Do you both have a similar fashion focus?

"I think being from different generations, she is much more bold and outrageous. We might have different opinions, but very often we tend to buy the same things. I recently bought four chairs for my Paris apartment, and when I showed her pictures of them she said: 'I bought two of exactly the same chairs on eBay!'"

What has been the main difference for you since stepping down as fashion designer for Missoni?

"Before it was Rosita not sleeping before the collection, and now it's Angela not sleeping before the collection!"

You lost interest in fashion in the 90s. Had it just run its due course for you, or was there a reason?

"The reason is age. As a designer you have to go to the right places to see how young people

Rosita Missoni, like her designs, has all the qualities of an Italian goddess. But once the 79-year-old style queen gets talking, it is clear there is much more than an exquisite eye to this designer-turned-hotelier. Within a few minutes spent in her company, HELLO! can see exactly why her family-run fashion house has remained at the core of haute couture for half a century.

Rosita grew up around her grandparents' fabric factory in Sumirago, Italy, where she amused herself with materials and constantly cut out articles from fashion magazines. From there she worked in the family business and went on to become the co-creator of the Missoni knitting empire, along with her ex-athlete husband Ottavio, now 90.

Despite worldwide success and a host of Hollywood A-listers, including Halle Berry, Cameron Diaz and Kim Kardashian, declaring

themselves dedicated fans, Missoni is a high-end label that has never lost sight of its core values. Rosita beams a warm smile as she tells stories of how the factory became a second home to all who worked there, and how she turned a couple of sewing machines borrowed from a friend into a global fashion powerhouse.

The 1990s saw Rosita hand the designer reins to her daughter, Angela, while she took a step back to enjoy life outside the fashion circuit. To her surprise, she took an instant dislike to a life of leisure, missing the satisfaction of working to deadline most. Rosita returned to work and achieved amazing success with her company's home collection.

Decked out in Missoni, complete with a colourful scarf, Rosita sits down with HELLO! during a whirlwind day, following on from her glamorous hotel Missoni Kuwait City in March this year and



Choco-café in Hotel Missoni Kuwait City oozes playful, bright elegance and epitomises Missoni style, as does this citrus sweet suite (below) complete with futuristic and fashion-forward bathroom (bottom)

are dressed and go to all of the boutiques. How can you live in a world you nearly hate because you've done it for so long? I decided I'd had enough of boutiques and fashion crowds, and would rather spend more time at home taking care of my garden and having relaxed weekends with friends."

How did Angela officially step into the world of Missoni?

"I knew she had the talent to do it and she wanted to make her own collection, Angela Missoni – which she did for four editions. Her designs were solid, leaving patterns aside, but with nice shapes and the press wrote good things. At that point I said: 'Angela, I would rather like to dress in the things you make.' Then she felt mature enough to handle the collection."

How did you feel when the collection was no longer your responsibility?

"At the time it was a great relief and for a few months I felt free to take my granddaughters to school. But then I started missing it."

Is that when you decided to take on Missoni's home collection?

"In the 90s I felt the home was becoming stylish and I could work with the same speed and thinking of a fashion collection. I took over the home collection in 1993. It was doing very well but it was commercial, because none of us were really working on it."

The hotel business then followed. What was it about Scotland and Edinburgh that attracted you to open up the first Missoni Hotel there in June 2009?

"I love Scotland and I love Edinburgh because it has a great history. It's beautiful and very cultural with lots of festivals, music and paintings. The hotel won Best Italian Restaurant of the Year at the Scottish Restaurant Awards 2011 just recently and Europe's Leading New Hotel at the World Travel Awards a few months ago."

Who has been your favourite guest at the hotel?

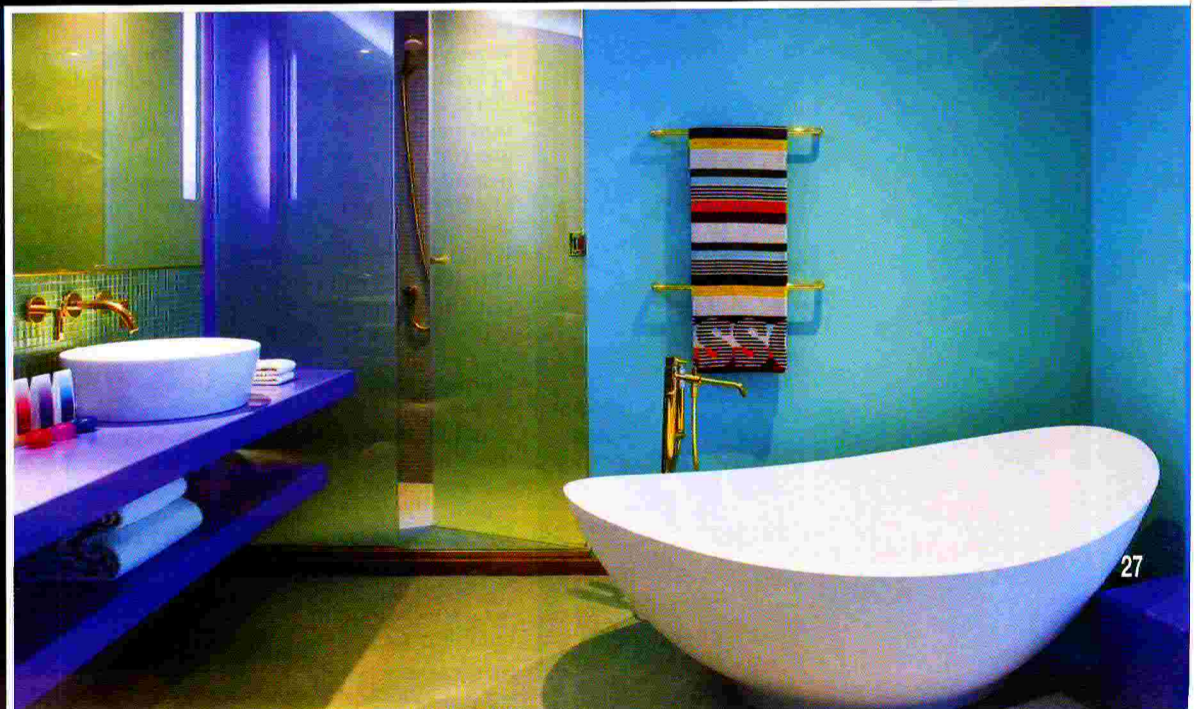
"I know that Queen Rania of Jordan was there and she loved it. She is so beautiful and fashionable."

Was it an easy transition going from designing clothes to hotels?

"All the rooms are Missoni themed. Going into the hotel business made us focus on products which are fireproof and waterproof so we were able to expand our knowledge."

The Missoni Kuwait City hotel opened just last month in the Middle East – how is this designed differently to the Missoni Edinburgh property?

"They are absolutely different. Kuwait is ▶





Left: Rosita and husband Ottavio attend the Missoni Home cocktail party in Milan last year. Above: The label has many celebrity fans including Cameron Diaz, pictured sporting a more subtle, golden-toned Missoni creation. Below left: Rosita has handed the design reins over to her daughter Angela (right), whose own daughter Margherita (left) is a Missoni ambassador and model



a resort and every single room and restaurant there overlooks the sea. Ladies love to have tea parties every afternoon and it is just a more relaxed, enjoyable kind of life, whereas Edinburgh is a cultural city and so the hotel is more active."

Where will the next Missoni hotel be opening?

"The next one will be in Oman, scheduled for 2013, which has a beautiful sea. It's a country that has a lot of natural quality and the people are very nice, so I hope we can do something beautiful to match. Brazil is also on the map - I like Brazilian people, they have such an outgoing style of life."

Was Dubai not an option for you?

"There had been some requests, but too much was already decided by designers and architects. If it is to be a Missoni hotel, it has to reflect the Missoni style."

You were in Dubai a few years ago. How has it changed since then?

"I have seen enormous changes. Four years ago the huge airport wasn't there, Burj Khalifa was just coming out of the ground. Everything has grown; it's a very fast city."

You're only in the city for a day. What has caught your eye in terms of fashion?

"I have seen young and beautiful girls wearing Missoni around the malls, which is a compliment."

The promotion for your S/S11 collection featured casual photos of you and your family. What was the intended message behind the campaign?

"My daughter said we needed to control the expenses so let's just use our place. We had Tai, who is now 90 and wears Missoni perfectly, along with our grandchildren. While the photographer was at our house for dinner, he loved it so much that he decided to shoot right there and then."

You worked with *Gossip Girl* star Leighton Meester for one of your campaigns. What was she like?

"My granddaughter, Jennifer, is an actress and she has starred in a couple of *Gossip Girl* episodes with Leighton and asked her 'would you like to come over with me?' They both did the pictures, but she is a star. She is very, very friendly and was just like the other girls."

Who is the Missoni woman?

"A woman who is multifaceted, active, and has lots of interests. My eldest granddaughter, Margherita, is testimony to this. She is a girl who lives all over the world - New York, Barcelona, Rome and Milan."

What do you consider to be your biggest life accomplishment?

"My family, absolutely."



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