



Life in Color

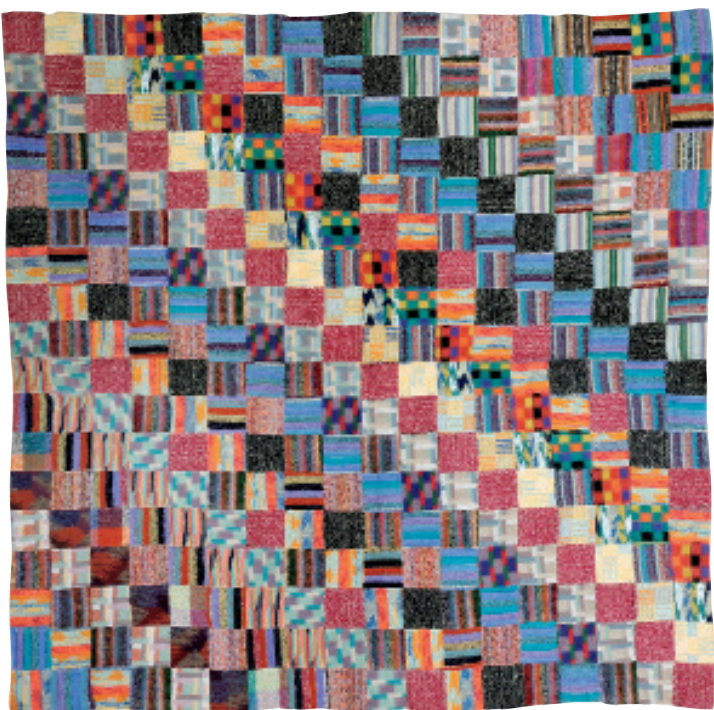
Angela Missoni celebrates 20 years at the helm of her family's label and continues to weave magic into each collection, season after season

Angela Missoni needs sorbet. Stat. “I feel, you know, when you’re *uhhh*,” Missoni tells the waiter at the lobby bar of the New York Edition, back of the wrist to forehead in the universal gesture for feeling faint. As he scurries off to save the day, Missoni smiles, acknowledging that the dramatics were in jest.

A sense of humor is essential, given the demands of overseeing an international fashion empire. This year Missoni, 58, celebrates 20 years as the creative director of the legendary Italian knitwear brand that her parents, Rosita and Ottavio “Tai” Missoni, started in 1953. But in an industry dotted with practiced talking points, she exudes an unrehearsed attitude. Her dark brown eyes, set deep within an oval face framed by thick, wavy hair, quickly dart from introspective to mischievous, often accompanied by a voluptuous laugh.

Despite her easygoing nature, Missoni is serious when it comes to keeping her brand at the forefront of the fashion conversation. She’s done just that season after season by designing clothes that garner rave reviews. (“Surely, there can be no greater satisfaction than watching someone excel at what they were born to do,” *Vogue* declared after her fall 2016 runway show.) Missoni patterns her maximalist approach on the foundation of the ‘60s haute-hippie appeal that her parents revolutionized, bringing a psychedelic trip of color and texture. The pieces evoke far-flung locales and an “endless summer” state-of-mind. It’s bohemian, with an edge.

“My parents invented a style, which is rare,” says Missoni, who on this November day is dressed in a black, white, and red ensemble accented with a multistring necklace that she constantly



From left: a tapestry made by Tai Missoni; looks from the spring 2017 collection



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twists around her fingers. “It’s like they created a language, and I’m proud that I updated the vocabulary to make this language more contemporary.”

With Missoni—the brand and designer—it always circles back to *famiglia*. The privately held and still family-run brand operates 40 stores worldwide. Rosita oversees the vigorous home division; Angela’s brother Luca heads the archives and events; her eldest daughter, Margherita, 33, designs accessories as well as a children’s line; and her youngest child, Teresa, 28, is developing her own line of womenswear under the brand umbrella. (Angela’s oldest brother, Vittorio, who was company CEO, died in an airplane crash in 2013.)

The origin of the business dates back to the 1948 Olympics, where Tai Missoni met Rosita Jelmini. She was the daughter of an Italian family that made women’s clothing; he was competing in the 400-meter hurdle and also designed the tracksuits for the Italian team. They married in 1953 and started producing knits in a small workshop by experimenting with a sewing machine used to make shawls, giving birth to the trademark parti-colored zigzag pattern. Five years later, they presented their first Missoni collection.

As a child, Angela played backstage at fashion shows, chatting with the models, smearing her face with makeup. In her 20s, she designed jewelry for the brand, but then took time off to raise her family. She returned to fashion in the early ’90s and launched the Angela Missoni Collection. Her mother, then in

charge of the main collection, noted her daughter’s success and proposed handing her the reins.

As creative director, Missoni says she took her parents’ vision and “cleaned it a little.” Her respect for their signature style hasn’t hindered the development of her own eye. She finds inspiration everywhere, at times alluding to artworks such as the colorful chameleons by New York-based artist Caitlyn Carlisle that made an appearance in the spring 2015 collection. (Missoni recently turned the Madison Avenue flagship store into a

boutique-cum-gallery that hosts rotating exhibits. She inherited her love of art from Tai, who threaded the clothing with influences from his Modernist art collection.) The relatively pared-down minimalism of this spring’s collection was a response to a hectic summer vacation that drove her to simplify, resulting in uncomplicated column dresses and flowing jumpsuits.

Missoni says her design philosophy “always looks forward,” although she references the archives when she recalls a similar knit or color while preparing a mood board. (She uses the iconic zigzag sparsely, given that it’s been endlessly copied.) Once a collection leaves the door, she may still do quality control. She admits that she walked around the sales floor at Bergdorf Goodman’s last night, checking the stitching on Missoni garments. And though the duties of a creative director are myriad, whenever she’s at the factory in Sumirago, she makes sure to stop by her mother’s for lunch. Does talk of business seep into the conversation during family meals? “It can happen, but we don’t think it’s business,” Missoni says with a smile. “That’s a part of our life, right?”

When the sorbet finally arrives, Missoni gleefully thanks the waiter. “If you don’t give it to me now, I die under the table,” she says, pointing to the floor. She unleashes that laugh and gestures at her table companions to share the dessert. “Take, take!” This down-to-earth persona may be what makes Missoni’s glamour-dripping clothing so irresistibly charming. ❶

