

The Timeless Style of Anna Sammarone

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We meet Anna Sammarone, a young designer and entrepreneur who has shown her creations in New York every season since 2009. From Larino, a small town in the Molise region, Anna presents her collection made with passion and creativity. The clothes are destined to have staying power: “I want my clothes to last. I create designs that are not limited by time or season.”

There are Italian treasures that can never be paralleled in terms of simplicity, creativity, combining both tradition and innovation. There are those objects—from design to fashion and beyond—that have an unmistakable quality. At times they are part of a niche, other times not. Distinctive, always timeless, they are not passing trends. Some people use them—perhaps every day—unaware that these objects are on display in museums worldwide. This creativity is an asset that we Italians should appreciate, especially in times of crisis.

But there’s more to this attribute of Italian genius; it often hides ordinary stories, those of small entrepreneurs, fashion designers, artisans, creative enterprises, both on cooperative and individual

levels.

It so happens that in a suite at The Setai, an imposing skyscraper on Fifth Avenue, I meet one of these artists. She hails from Larino, a small town in Molise. Her story, both big and small, is emblematic.

Anna Sammarone. Thirty years old with an intense gaze that always seems to be searching for details. It examines and explores. Gentle, but firm at the same time. You can tell by her manner, even before seeing her designs, that her sensibility is completely modern: carefree and whimsical yet measured.

Entering her apartment at The Setai—one she rented to sell her designs—a quick look at her clothes makes me realize that they are truly unique. Beautiful, simple. Ageless. Colorful.

For years I played among scraps of cloth and spools of thread. I immediately recognize the details of a garment made by expert hands and I am taken in. It is important to remember that when someone has an affinity for an object, he or she is also responding to emotions, sensations.

The noise of sewing machines comes to mind, the sun filtering through the blinds in a courtyard in the south near the seaside, fingers that guide a needle, sketches of new creations, tailor's chalk, tissue paper patterns.

Anna's story is an important one from the south, of an Italy that is real and alive, young, and still unknown in the world. And the credit for introducing her to me goes to her friend, Marisa Falcone, who is a manager in the U.S. "She's a niche designer," she tells me in advance, "a crazy entrepreneur. I decided to give her a hand and I'm thinking of doing that for other people like her. We need them."

Between sips of coffee and advice to customers who try on her clothes, Anna tells me her story. She was born and raised in a well-off family in Molise. After high school, she decided to study law: she wanted to become an honest judge with integrity. This is in spite of the bewilderment of her father, who saw her as an artist. And so after graduation and her first few days in court, Anna realized that she was on the wrong path. She experienced an overwhelming sense of oppression: she needed to make a change. Dad was right.

So she decided to make blouses, a childhood passion. Aided by her friends, she started a business. She opened her first shop in Molise. From there her ascent begins: trade shows, Rome, Milan, the rest of Italy. This is thanks, in part, to several interactions that have benefited her sunny disposition.

"Larino is a fantastic place, everything is small, attainable. The tailors are nearby and the people are all special. They believed in me. They gave their hearts. Without them I could not have done anything. But the same thing happened in Milan, where my shop is on Via Monteleone...."

The colors and details of an industrious South permeate Anna's story. There are certainly difficulties for a small business owner, but at the same time her dedication and desire to succeed are paramount. She focuses on quality, the area where she's from, expert tailoring, pure fabrics and colors. Finally, but most important, she employs a team of women, all from Molise.

The search for details and refined combinations, original designs that go beyond passing trends, vitality, even a bit of irony—these are some of the features of her clothing. And then there are the fabrics, soft, precious, and sought after. The joy of creation shines through every inch of her garments.

She's a self-taught designer. "I've never designed a proper sketch. Just one design, sitting down at a desk. Inspiration always comes suddenly, perhaps during a trip, in a café, or on a plane. I sketch wherever, even on paper napkins. I follow my feelings, and you can see, from the first collection up until now, it's authentic. There is joy but also suffering; new experiences have made me grow."

She's a woman who understands other women. It's apparent in how she treats her New York clients.



She advises them but without being intrusive; she adapts her clothes to fit their bodies. Her clothes are worn without canceling out one's personality with unnecessary excesses or forced appearances. They are all extremely wearable.

The garments are hung up, almost waiting to be taken off the hanger and given a soul.

"I want the product to speak for itself; its vitality must come out—it should be enough to just try it on," Anna tells me. And here her voice confirms an intention that I had noticed, making her creations truly unique and timeless.

"I try to design clothes that are very wearable. For me, certainly, the details are fundamental, but the design must take the form, the history of the wearer. It's important that the wearer interprets it as she pleases. You should be able to wear it for two, three years. My clients are still wearing clothing from different collections and they do so on important occasions." Her words reflect an appreciation for value that goes beyond today's consumerism and that dates back to an older Italy, poorer perhaps, but healthier and saner than today. An outfit was valuable, it was treasured, and it often remained in the family.

"And then if a garment must be altered," Anna adds, "I don't take it as an offense. Shortening a neckline, making it longer. It's great. I can adapt."

She then describes a typical day of work: "I wake up and have coffee at my favorite café. I get to my office and I do everything. I mainly supervise the production, and wearing four-inch heels I load bolts of fabric into my Fiat 500 with a mouse on the antenna and go to the tailors. I encourage them, motivate them, discuss their choices."

The designer from Molise now aims to bring her work to the United States. She's taking small steps, but her clothes are gaining recognition with women in New York. She's been presenting her work here since 2009 and her clientele continues to grow.

Word of mouth works. "I'm very happy. The goal is to create a trusted and serious brand. I walk the path. I'm aware that I have a niche product; I want to follow that with all of my might. There are no filters here. They judge you without bias. They evaluate the product. Yesterday, a store representative tried on one of my coats and said, 'Bless you.'"

In September she will participate in the American shows and present her winter collection. And New York awaits this young designer and entrepreneur who, with her feet planted firmly on the ground, expands her inimitable creations.

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