

Camp It Up

For legendary costume designer PATRICIA FIELD, bolder is always better
as told to JENNIFER FERRISE

When I'm watching TV and I scan across a show where the characters are wearing boring, ordinary things, I'm always stumped. As a costume designer, I feel that we're in the business of entertaining.

And when it comes to fashion, I *live* to entertain.

Onscreen or off, good style should be two things: personal and interesting. When you put on a boring look, you generally look bored. So why not go for something a little more eye-opening? Dressing unique is always going to be more memorable than dressing trendy. And if a TV show is going to be successful and last for years and years, the audience needs to remember it. That's why originality is the most important ingredient in my work.

For me, everything starts with a script and a character, then an actor who brings it all to life. My job is to show exactly who this person is through every single thing that they wear. I begin with the classics, then twist them into a different dimension. On top of that, I look for happy, colorful, optimistic pieces—clothes that make you *feel something*. And then interesting accessories take it all to another level.

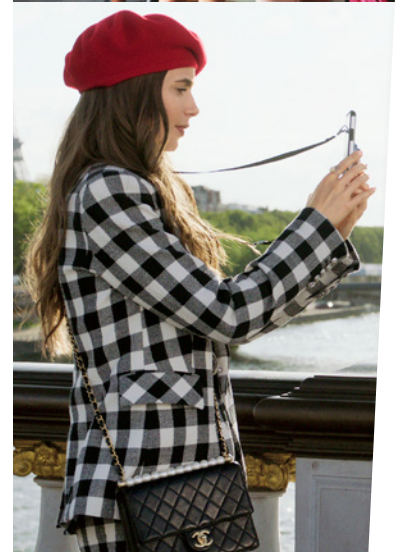
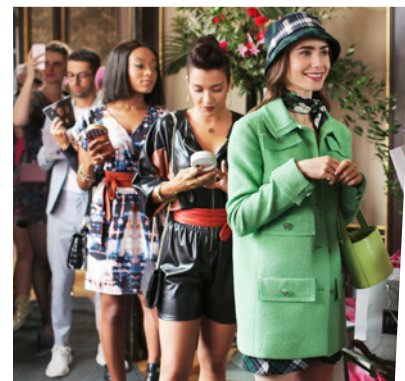
The characters that let me push my creativity are always my favorites. On *Sex and the City*, Carrie Bradshaw [Sarah Jessica Parker] was at the top of that list, probably because her style was the most similar to my own. She was eclectic and could handle pretty much any look I threw at her. It helped, of course, that Sarah Jessica was so fashion-savvy. Samantha Jones [Kim Cattrall] was also a dream because

she was so comedic, flashy, and sexy.

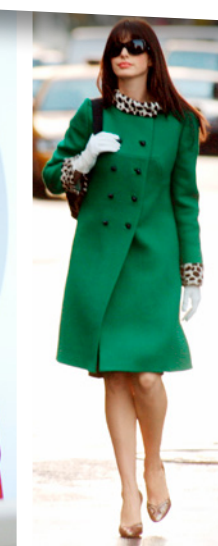
People always ask me about the Manolos and the naked dress and all of those iconic over-the-top looks. But the real fun of *Sex and the City* was the freedom I had to play. Truthfully, there was only one time where I had to fight for a fashion choice. [The show's creator] Darren Star and I were trying to decide what Carrie should wear in the show's opening credits. And right around that time, I found what is now known as the world-famous tutu in a little sale basket on a showroom floor. I knew Sarah Jessica would love it, especially because she's ballet-trained, but if you're not in fashion, it's a little hard to understand the appeal of a tutu. So I had to do some convincing. I said to Darren, "If this show is a hit and she wears this in the credits, it will never, ever get stale." And it worked, thank God. [laughs] Really, I just love a tutu. I put a big tulle skirt on Lily Collins in the first season of *Emily in Paris* last year, and now I'm seeing them everywhere again, from designer collections to Forever 21.

Creating a simple expression of joy through fashion is what I do best. And that happy, comic, misfit attitude that we leaned into with *Emily in Paris* is something that people really connect to. I was brought up in New York, so when I first got the script, I thought, "I don't really know what a Midwestern girl from Chicago would wear in Paris, to tell you the truth." But what I did know was that Emily is an optimist, and she would be very excited to be an American in Paris. So to me, it just made sense that she would put on a blouse that had the Eiffel Tower on it or carry a Mona Lisa bag or throw on a beret. Yes, her style was intentionally clichéd, but it was also cheerful and whimsical and allowed her

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Some of Field's memorable looks, including Carrie Bradshaw's iconic tutu. Clockwise from top left: *Sex and the City*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, *The Devil Wears Prada*, *Ugly Betty*, and *Emily in Paris*.



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to fully express her enthusiasm for being there. I also loved taking something traditionally Parisian like an oversize Chanel jacket and pairing it with a patchwork dress by a local artist. Thankfully, Lily gets my head trip, which makes it fun for all of us.

I think eccentric, expressive, campy style can always work if it fits the person or the character. The only time it ever feels like too much is if it's missing intelligence. But if it's original, it's usually worth a second look. On *Younger*, I loved working with Miriam Shor on her character, Diana Trout, because her personality was big and her necklaces were bigger. With *Ugly Betty*, it was a thrill to dress someone so intentionally campy, and America Ferrera fully embraced it. When she was in her signature red poncho, she decided that Betty should wear glasses and pulled the red cat eyes I was wearing right off my face. [laughs] She enjoyed the comedic part of it, and that encouraged me to run with it. In *The Devil Wears Prada*, I was able to design a transformative fashion arc for Andy [Anne Hathaway]. Everyone still talks about the makeover montage that took her from a lumpy cerulean blue sweater to fabulous head-to-toe Chanel. For the first time, she allowed herself to recognize the power of fashion, and the audience recognized it too.

To be honest, I'm shocked sometimes that people are still talking about the looks I created all those years ago. Every time I go online, I see something about the new *Sex and the City* reboot [*And Just Like That...*] or the old *Sex and the City* style. Women come up to me regularly and say that when they have a rotten day, they cheer themselves up by pulling out their DVD sets and plopping themselves in front of the TV to watch a few episodes. And if I've been able to inspire or entertain them even a little bit with a dress or a tutu? It's the highest fashion compliment of all.

Field is an Emmy-winning costume designer who is currently the consulting costume director on Emily in Paris Season 2, streaming on Netflix December 22.