

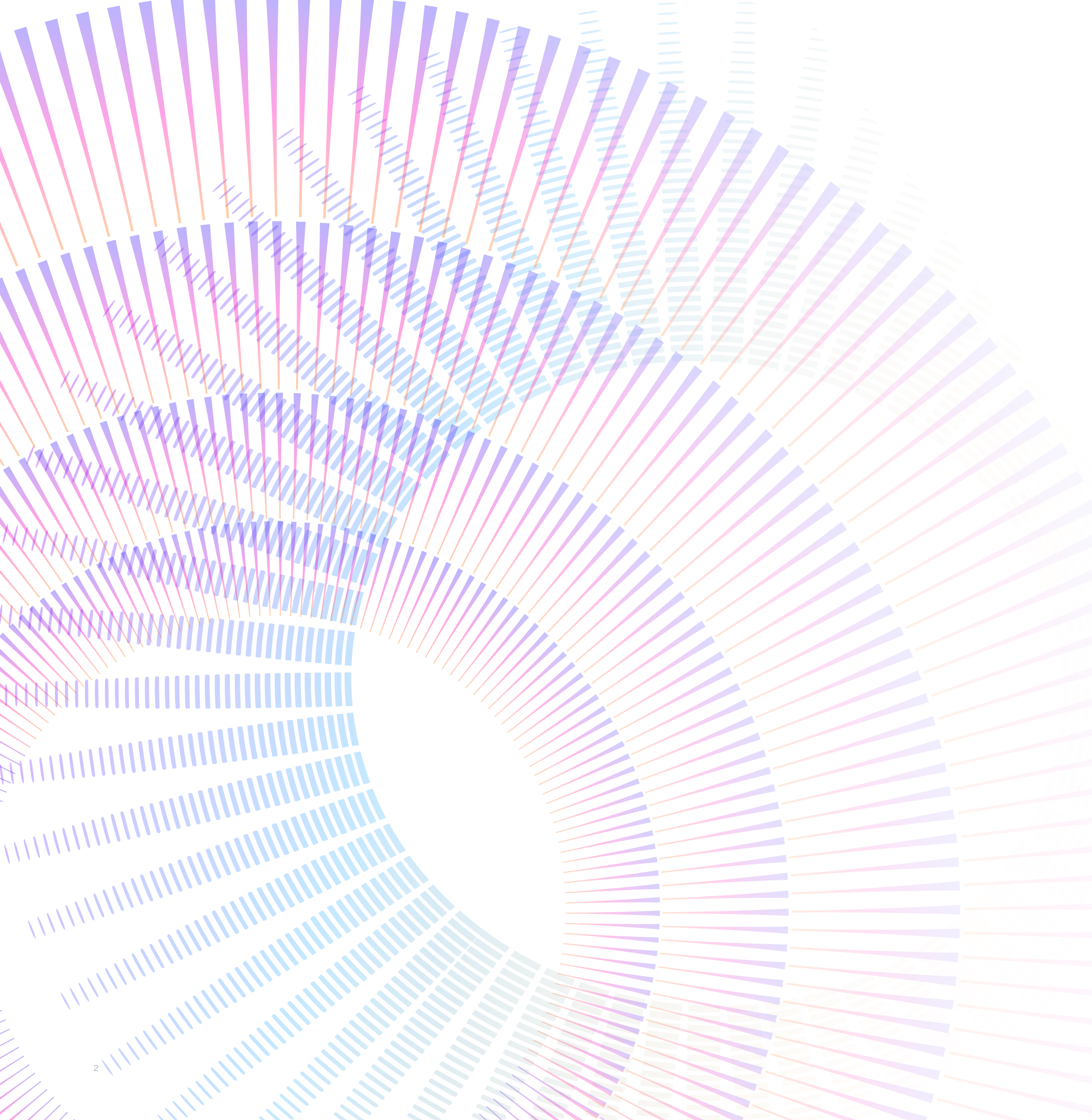
blazing their own trail

MEET 11 ALUMNI ENTREPRENEURS



State University
of New York

2022-23 annual report



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Letter from the President

Dr. Joyce F. Brown



FIT was founded in 1944 to prepare men and women for work in the fashion industry. Back then, not enough people were learning how to sew or aspired to be tailors. Factories in New York City and elsewhere needed skilled laborers to meet the projected demand.

Needless to say, the fashion industry has changed drastically over the last almost 80 years. Skilled laborers are still essential, but companies no longer need to fill factories with hundreds of people cutting patterns. Instead, they are looking for innovators, chemists, designers, inventors, marketers, and business experts—people who can work across all our creative industries and infuse new talent and ideas into that work.

Ever since technology showed us that we hold the power to design and create in the palm of our hands—to capitalize on the synergies that can connect individuals with innovators, producers, and entrepreneurs around the world—the creative industries have forever changed. I am proud to say that FIT has changed with them. And, while many of our graduates still go on to work for established companies, the landscape and the timing encourages and rewards many of our talented students and alums who venture out on their own.

FIT offers students the tools they need to become successful. Entrepreneurship stands at the intersection of all our college’s key goals, and we encourage flexible and dynamic learning, prioritize innovation, partner with creative industries to create new digital tools and platforms, and always value risk-taking, unconventional thinking, and lifelong learning.

Eighty years on, entrepreneurship is sewn into the very fabric of FIT. We are incredibly proud of our record and of preparing students to succeed—not only on the well-worn paths of others, but blazing paths of their own.

This year’s annual report features profiles of 11 FIT alumni who have brought the skills they learned here to bear on their own ventures, branching out in new, exciting, and unexpected ways. From marketing wine to making hats, designing laundry bottles to couture fashions, FIT prepares its students to succeed in a range of creative endeavors, within and beyond fashion.

It has been said that a ship is always safe at shore, but that does not fulfill its purpose—our students can tell a similar story. Here at FIT, we build pipelines and create pathways so that our graduates leave our shores, explore new ways of producing and creating beautiful things, and in the process, change the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joyce F. Brown".

What does it take to launch a successful business? Passion, perseverance, versatility, grit—and a big idea. **In short, entrepreneurship.**

This quality—this core value—infuses the FIT approach to education, whether students plan on rising within established companies or striking out on their own. Our ever-evolving curriculum blends creative ideation with practical business skills, equipping students with all the tools they need for success. Renowned faculty, who made their mark in industry, empower students with hands-on education using sophisticated equipment in intimate learning environments. And our location in the heart of Manhattan provides unparalleled access to industry mentors and a vibrant ecosystem of founders and investors. With a world-class education from FIT, alumni entrepreneurs are disrupting the status quo and shaping not only the creative economy, but also the broader global culture.

In the following pages, you'll meet 11 FIT-trained entrepreneurs in a range of fields, from the art market to eyewear to textile design. These innovators jumped into the deep end—and are now making waves.

Entrepreneurship, the FIT Way

Grace Chen

Fashion Design AAS '96
Chief Designer and Founder, Grace Chen Couture

Grace Chen doesn't dream small. Dubbed the go-to couturier for China's business and political elites, Grace Chen Couture blends sumptuous fabrics, classic design, clean lines, and expert craftsmanship. And Chen's journey embodies the willingness to pursue a goal without hesitation or second-guessing to the point of excellence.

Chen throws herself wholeheartedly into her work—a habit she picked up young. "Fashion is about life," she says. "You can't limit yourself to just learning things, you have to experience life—then you can become a good designer."

Chen already had degrees from the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology when she arrived on campus in September 1995. Upon realizing it was the middle of Fashion Week, she proceeded to "volunteer for nearly every show."

She also applied herself to her studies. "At FIT, you learn every field of this whole industry, not just design," she says. "If you want to have your own label, your own brand, you have to know everything. You have to know about production, marketing, menswear, everything."

After graduating, she spent 15 years in the U.S., working for Halston and later Tadashi Shoji, where she built up a clientele including Sarah Jessica Parker, Catherine Zeta Jones, and Oprah Winfrey. Today, Grace Chen Couture's A-listers, in addition to models and actors, are CEOs, financiers, and diplomats: She has dressed Olympic volleyball medalist Lang Ping, actress and model Lin Chi-ling, and, reportedly, China's first lady Peng Liyuan.

Chen's approach is "soft, with strength"—something that applies as much to red-carpet gowns as to pantsuits, and, with the label's latest expansion, menswear. That translates to a devotion from her clients, who frequently praise Chen's garments for giving them confidence. (To this, Chen replied, "if you can be true to yourself, you're powerful.")

She retains a cinematic approach to her work. "It's still about creating a person's life story—it's really not about designing a piece of clothing," she says. "What I'm doing is making clothing, but my work, my result, is you."

Chen returned to Shanghai in 2009, a time when China's business classes were ready for self-actualization. The economy was booming, millionaires were being made daily, and business leaders had been wearing European luxury brands like Chanel for a decade. "A lot of them wanted to have new things—they wanted something that relates to themselves and relates to their Chinese background," Chen recalls.

Her first step was to analyze Chinese women's body type and develop a unique set of proportions for her line—drawing extensively on her FIT work to do so. ("I learned all my draping from my FIT professor," she recalls.) Today, each of Chen's couture clients has their own mannequin—essential for a comfortable and flattering fit.

Her aesthetics draw from material as diverse as the fairy tales her father read to her when she was a young girl to classical Chinese literature to ancient Egypt. Even today, Chen does two things daily: Read and practice calligraphy. She remains an iconoclast in her approach. "If I know something is really in fashion already, I don't want to have it," she says.

Her gowns, which take hundreds of hours to make, retail between \$2,000 and \$6,000 with the rare special-occasion item going for \$10,000; at one point, it was the most expensive brand in China. The Shanghai-based company now has about 100 employees and annual sales between \$5 and \$6 million. The next step, Chen says, is to start a ready-to-wear line, which she introduced at New York Fashion Week this fall.

"My goal is to transform every day for everyone in the street. I want everyone to look beautiful, and then the whole city and the whole country look beautiful, and then change people's attitude," she says. "That's what I want to do."





Ogé (left) in her studio with her assistant

Stephanie Ogé

**Fashion Design BFA '06
Founder, Sogé Studio**

Stephanie Ogé likes to call herself the unsung hero of design—as a maker of fabric prints, her Brooklyn-based company, Sogé Studio, has created work for clients including Prabal Gurung, DKNY, Fila, Guess, BCBG Max Azria, and others.

“People just see the garment and never stop to question what was the process,” she says. “There’s a team who busted out watercolors, put everything in a system, added repetition, printed it onto the fabric, and then there’s this garment.” One memorable garment—actor Gabrielle Union wore a custom Sogé print to a pre-Met Gala appearance.

Ogé’s own journey started in fashion design. As young girls in Brooklyn, Ogé and her sister grew up with a father who painted and a mother who sewed clothes for the girls, taking them around fabric stores in Brooklyn when they were young. (One of Ogé’s favorites to this day is an off-the-shoulder communion dress her mother created from a Liberty pattern.) Ogé started taking Saturday classes at FIT in high school and continued even when the family moved to New Jersey. “FIT was the end-all, be-all result for me.”

Ogé treated her Fashion Design program “like a job,” routinely staying in the sewing lab past midnight—juggling school work with a job at a sneaker store and a two-hour commute, with her only break a semester at Polimoda in Florence. “If you had a draping class that started at nine o’clock, I was at the bus stop at seven,” she recalls.

After graduating in 2006, Ogé worked as a junior designer for a fashion company until the Great Recession created layoffs across the board. For five years after, she freelanced as a designer and printmaker. The most exciting days in the design studio were when prints came in for evaluation and the designers chose their fabric for the following year.

“They would take out all these prints on fabric, and we would just pick—we like this one, this one, this one. I was like, ‘well, I could do what these guys are doing,’” Ogé recalls. She started Sogé Studio in 2016.

“I said, let me just take the chance, and throw a Hail Mary, and start the studio. And I had no clue what I was doing,” she laughs.

It was a hard lift, despite having a relationship with previous clients she designed for who let her show her prints. Ogé initially couldn’t afford to print on fabric, so she printed on paper. She put the first trade show she attended on her credit card—a \$3,500 expense that made itself back when she landed a client who ordered \$8,000 worth of work. When it was time to make her first hire, a salesperson, “I literally went to Chase bank and applied for a line of credit, so I could pay him his salary,” she recalls.

These days, Ogé fields daily emails from hopeful interns from the West Coast and Europe while she and her four employees put out around 2,400 prints every year. Sogé Studio’s work is digital as well as manual; every day Ogé asks her designers, “What’s your mood today—do you want to express with your hands? Do you feel like you want to be digital and tight?”

Ogé takes inspiration from everywhere; a print can come from a gallery visit, a museum, or a person walking down the street. The first time Ogé saw one of her own prints on a customer it was a revelation.

The woman was “walking down the street, in downtown Brooklyn, about to get on the train,” and Ogé stopped her to say, “I just want you to know, I drew that art.”

“I take great pride in being an unsung hero,” she says. “We don’t need the fame or anything like that. But the beauty is I can walk down the street and say, ‘That came from Sogé Studio.’”

Adam Cottrell

Advertising Design BFA '06
Managing Partner and Co-Founder, Blake Fox Interiors

Starting your own business calls for some non-negotiable qualities—an unfailing work ethic, a self-directed vision, and confidence. The first, staging professional Adam Cottrell has cultivated since childhood. Growing up on a small flower farm in northern New Jersey, Cottrell spent his weekends tending the flower stand along with his two younger brothers. Working on the farm was “something you did until you had a job in the ‘real world,’” he recalls. “You work every weekend for at least a few hours, and then you do your homework.”

The vision and confidence came from FIT, where his love of creating concepts drew him to advertising design. “FIT gave me a great base to want to make my own aesthetic,” he says. “Some of my favorite moments at FIT were students and professors all critiquing each other’s projects ... It’s something that gave me a lot more confidence in my life.”

Post-graduation, he pivoted to retail where he worked as a floor merchandiser, rising up the ranks to Ann Taylor’s head office by 2015.

Staging retail, it turns out, is a lot like staging houses—you have to convey a brand’s feeling and grab shoppers’ interest within the constraints of the space you’re given, which, in Manhattan, can be enormous.

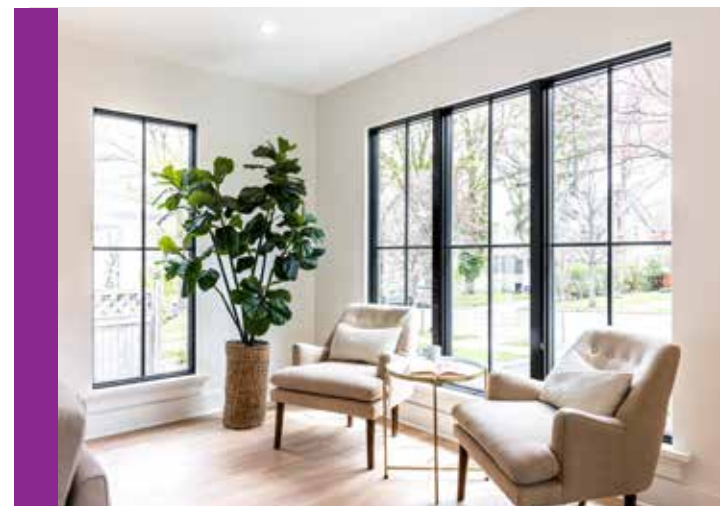
“You could work in Times Square, which is like a vast storage warehouse of space, or a little store down in NoHo and have to go figure it out and be flexible,” Cottrell recalls. This experience gave him the skills to transition in 2015 into his first real estate staging job, which he secured from Craigslist. After four years of work, Cottrell and colleague Tara Thompson joined forces to start Blake Fox Interiors (a combination of his partner’s middle name and Cottrell’s childhood nickname, “Fox.”) They launched at the start of 2020—a few months before the pandemic shut down most in-person work in the U.S. Still, the experience made his work more efficient—and by the end of the first year, Blake Fox had worked on 88 houses, “which felt really great for being a no-name business the year before.” These days, a typical year involves staging about 120 houses.

The task is to bring out the best in a building using minimal furniture and décor—taking away elements as often as adding. The goal is to make it feel “like a very welcoming space, no matter the style of home.” Prices start at \$2,800 for a mid-sized home, and go up from there according to how much work is needed. The homeowner benefits by selling the property faster and sometimes for tens of thousands of dollars more than it would have fetched bare.

“Design is maybe about 20 to 30% of the business,” Cottrell says. The rest is logistics and expecting the unexpected. One year, a home he had staged was burgled two weeks after he had set it up. “We got a call from the agent one Sunday, like two weeks after, and he’s like, everything’s gone,” Cottrell recalls. Someone apparently broke into the house in the middle of the night, and took all the staging furniture, the appliances, and even cabinet pulls. (The thieves left the fake TV.) Another year, a summer thunderstorm wiped out power in northern New Jersey for a few days and Cottrell found his team moving heavy furniture into a home without power or air conditioning. “It was late July and just very exhausting and tiring—but you’re the business owner, so you have to kind of chew it up and handle it, because you know you have a schedule that’s got to happen the following week.”

The reward is the transformation. “Hearing people’s positive feedback feels really great—to come home after a stage and get a great text from a seller saying how thrilled they are with the home—especially because I’ve been on that journey with them from the initial walkthrough.”

“I love having that control, but I got that way because of being at FIT,” Cottrell says.





Florence Shin

**International Trade and Marketing '13 (East Asian Studies Minor)
Co-Founder, Covry**

Business was in Florence Shin's blood from an early age—she was helping out in her parents' New Jersey department store before she could even reach the counter.

"I would go with them on the weekends to help out and would stand on a ladder and check people out as my dad supervised me," she recalls. "Because that was so normal in my life, I had always seen myself owning my own business at some point—I just didn't exactly know what it was."

Studying at FIT allowed her to find out: Shin moved from the merchandising track to international trade and East Asian studies and interned at fashion label Phillip Lim, luggage company Jane Marvel, Elite Model Management, and communications firm Lividini and Co.

"I really wanted to try different areas, and I love that hands-on experience," she says. "Everything is a learning opportunity."

Shin landed on the opportunity for her business two years out of college, commiserating on fashion pain points with her childhood friend Athina Wang. Both wear glasses and "we always wanted the cute stylish ones," Shin recalls. "But they never really fit us—we were always compromising comfort for style."

Most standard glasses were too large for their faces, constantly slid down the nose, left indents on cheeks, or fogged up because of how close-fit they were. "It had just been so normalized and accepted that eyewear is uncomfortable," Shin recalls. The duo soon came up with a prototype that suited them better—reducing the curvature on the frame and putting in longer nose pads for better support. Once there, they put friends and family through extensive testing: "You smile really, really big, as big as you can, and you check—are the frames resting on your cheeks? Are they moving around? Are they sliding down when you shake your head?"

After positive feedback, the duo put up a Kickstarter campaign with a modest goal: raising \$19,000 for three different sunglass frames. Shin was shocked to see the campaign blow past that mark to triple its goal.

"That was huge for us, especially at that time when we were thinking, 'Is this even going to work?'" she recalls. "Not only did we have zero direct experience in the

eyewear or optical industry, but we were also trying to do something different."

Soon, customers were writing in with pictures of Covry sunglasses they had swapped out for clear prescription lenses at an optician's. Others directly asked for a clear-lens option.

"All of our new styles, or new product lines, typically come from customer feedback," Shin says—one benefit of being a direct-to-consumer brand. "We get to really have that one-on-one experience with the customer," Shin says.

That approach also lets the company offer an elevated online shopping experience. In addition to digital try-ons, shoppers actually receive a selection of frames to try on in their home before choosing one to keep, and can consult with on-staff stylists via email.

For Covry, there's an added business bonus to having bootstrapped the company since its founding. While it's a slower form of growth, "we've been profitable since day one," Shin says.

Covry's styles, which now number 60, routinely appear on best-glasses lists from the likes of *Vogue*, *Women's Wear Daily*, and *Business Insider*. Remarkably, one of the three initial models—the Vega—remains the company's top seller today. While Covry's styles are especially popular with wearers from Asian backgrounds, Shin doesn't think of them as an exclusively "Asian fit." They work for a wide range of people under-served by traditional eyewear—people with smaller faces, small or thin noses, high cheekbones or long eyelashes.

The company is constantly expanding its reach through pop-up locations and online partnerships—a recent collaboration with Sanzo, an Asian-inspired sparkling water line, yielded three new fruit-inspired sunglass styles. "That was a really fun one," Shin says. After determining the company's top market was in Southern California, Covry also opened its first retail location last year in Costa Mesa, allowing it to do in-person style consultations and community events.

"When we see what an impact something small like eyewear can have on people, that's our mission, that's always our driving force, and that's what keeps us going," she says.

Garrett Klein

Fine Arts BFA '06

Co-Founder / Director, Massey Klein Gallery

If there is a career path to becoming a fine art gallery owner, Garrett Klein didn't follow it.

A Long Island kid who "was always coloring, always drawing," Klein built a relationship with FIT beginning in high school—taking weekend Precollege classes to try out illustration and comic art before enrolling in the Fine Arts program as an undergraduate. There, a congenitally honest professor pushed him to develop his own taste while group projects in New York and Miami's Art Basel in Miami introduced him to the commercial side of fine art and the skills of creating public installations.

Knowing he wanted to be in fine arts but unsure of his precise role, Klein approached his career with a mantra his mother told him in high school: There's no such thing as a bad job. "There's always something you can learn," Klein recalls. "I never felt like I wasn't doing something worthwhile; even if I was doing dishes at a place, I developed interpersonal skills."

An undergraduate internship with the Central Park Conservancy led to Klein's first job after graduation, at a plaster company in Brooklyn where he rose to become the lead mold-maker. Another job through an FIT classmate had Klein working at a high-end suiting store in Manhattan. "That job got me comfortable with clients and selling," he recalls. That, in turn, led to a sales consultant role at a gallery in Chelsea, where "I discovered I was pretty good at selling art."

"Every experience I had, every opportunity I was afforded at FIT, daisy-chained to the next thing," he says.

Along the way, Klein met the woman he would marry, Ryan Massey. Both worked in galleries and had the urge to open their own. By the time Massey Klein Gallery opened on Manhattan's Lower East Side in 2018, "we had client relationships as well as artist relationships already in place. We had fairly extensive client lists, and we had worked with both emerging and mid-career artists."

The gallery has supported emerging American painters Lydia Baker, Bethany Czarnecki, Elise Ferguson, and Nick McPhail; it also serves as a New York foothold for nationally exhibiting artists such as Chrissy Angliker. As a smaller venue, Massey Klein is "able to take chances,

and find these artists that larger galleries aren't seeing," Klein says. "We've had the opportunity to give artists their first solo shows, or their first New York shows. It's very rewarding when it works."

Still, Klein had some close calls. "When we started the gallery, we had enough money to secure the space and maybe we had next month's rent. Maybe. There was no cushion," he recalls. "It was either you make it work or don't. I would not advise anyone to follow that path," he laughs.

They lucked out. "When we first opened, a client came in during our first month and bought a huge piece—that got us through that second month. Then another client purchased "two very high-ticket bronze sculptures—that was an amazing stroke of luck."

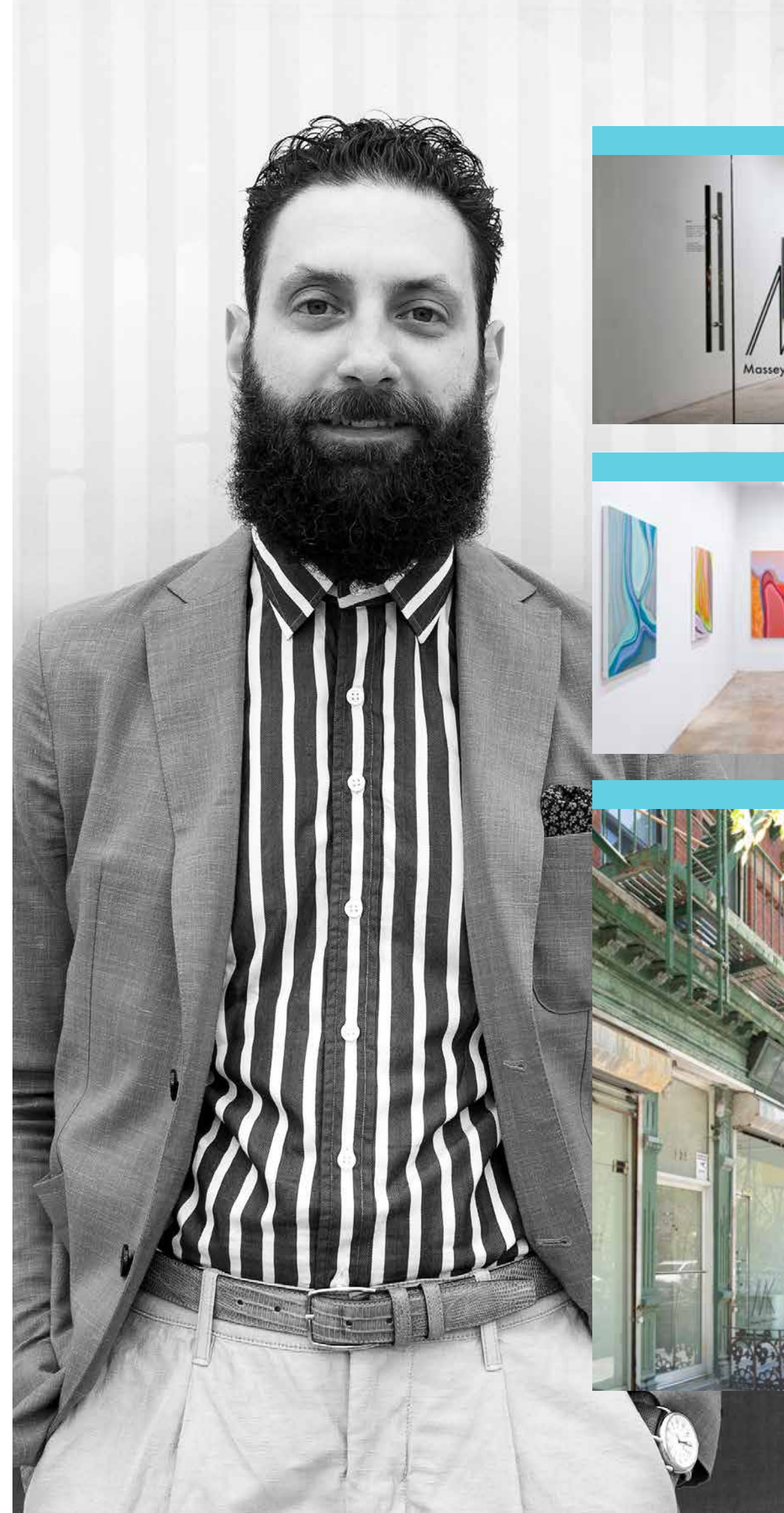
These days, Klein has to navigate the extremely volatile nature of the art world, where leads vacillate between one a day in the busy season to potentially a single one in the slow month of August. He prides himself on having an approachable gallery—a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere is key for attracting first-time buyers and others new to the art world. Still, he fights against the misconception that gallerists are "hanging out drinking wine waiting for collectors to walk in the door."

Work on a show starts up to two years before an artist's paintings see the gallery space, with Klein paying visits to the artist's studio while keeping in touch with potential buyers.

For art to actually sell, Klein and Massey have learned, it must be shown three times or more. "Sometimes we introduce a single piece by an artist to our mailing list several months before the show opens," he says. A press preview of the show and full images—all taken by Klein—must go out at least a month before it displays. When a gallery show opens its doors to the public, it's the third time potential buyers are seeing it.

And then there are logistics: "Who's going to transport the work? Who's going to wrap it? How far in advance do we need to get the work? Sometimes it gets held in customs for a week or two," Klein says.

"It takes everything, it takes every experience from every job I've ever had to do this job."





Lorna Macleod

Marketing: Fashion and Related Industries '84
Founder and Executive Director, Huru and AmericaShare

Lorna Macleod's memory of FIT is "they encouraged creativity in whatever way that meant to you." For Macleod, what it meant was business. A self-described "ad kid" who graduated with a marketing degree, Macleod worked at an advertising agency and started a corporate communications video studio with a classmate before a chance encounter sent her on a trip that would reshape her life.

Macleod shared her office with a family-run safari company and took her first trip outside Europe in 1988. In the parking lot of the airport in Nairobi, Kenya, she saw something she had never encountered before—a young boy, six or seven, going from car to car asking for money. The boy was an orphan, his parents having died of AIDS, and he was asking for funds to pay for his school fees.

Macleod gave him the equivalent of \$15, to his great surprise and overflowing gratitude, then watched him run away. "I said, 'Oh my god, I think everything just changed'—because I couldn't stop crying."

When she returned to New York two weeks later, Macleod had a new mission: to help alleviate the poverty she had witnessed. The philanthropy project started simply; her nonprofit, AmericaShare, asked safari guests to donate to the cause. And whether a guest gave or not, the company sponsored a child for every trip booked. The sometimes-delicate act of asking well-off foreigners on vacation to help alleviate poverty in the host country quickly yielded results.

"We have so many supporters, Americans that support AmericaShare, and they build these relationships with these kids that they sponsor and put through school," Macleod says.

Along the way, Macleod slowly staffed up the organization, building relationships with organizations in Kenya working with AIDS orphans and hiring locals for jobs like outreach and fundraising—including youth who the program once sponsored.

Some years later, she saw another unmet need—a lack of menstrual-care products, which, as much as unaffordable school fees, was keeping many girls out of school for days at a time.

Disposable products like pads and tampons are pricey and often unaffordable for Nairobi's poorest families, who make about a dollar a day and are often headed by a single mother. When she needs to choose between buying pads or food, "it's not going to be the menstrual product—it'd be food for the family first," Macleod says. "The girl is staying home five days a week, sometimes"—which not only affects her education but, as an unattended child, often can leave her vulnerable to assault.

Through tenacious networking in New York, Macleod secured an early \$20,000 grant from Johnson & Johnson, the Elton John AIDS Foundation, and PEPFAR. The team used the funds to develop a reusable menstrual pad. The multi-year process, carried out with the help of a local textile company and local women hired for their sewing skills, led to a kit that a girl can use for the entirety of her period over two years.

The new organization was named Huru, Swahili for "freedom," symbolizing the empowerment it gives girls who are able to continue their education. To date, Huru has given out 300,000 menstrual kits with 2.2 million pads in the region.

"It's life-saving for these girls—they get to stay in school, they get to get a high school degree, then, hopefully, go to college," she says. It's a virtuous cycle: Huru is not only providing a product but, by training women in sewing, allowing them to get higher-paying work in local textile factories that can support a family.

Having the bulk of Huru's staff on the ground allows the nonprofit to pivot in times of crisis—including during the COVID-19 pandemic. When masking was mandatory in public but residents of Nairobi's poorest neighborhood, where the average income is \$3 a day, couldn't afford it, the factory pivoted to sewing masks and coordinating food donations for families.

"What FIT really did give me was encouragement to go for it, even if you don't know what that is. Just see what happens."



Evetta Petty reached the international stage this year when she became the second American and first African American to be invited to join the Royal Ascot Millinery Collective—the hat world’s equivalent of an Oscar. But the self-taught milliner has been in her craft for 35 years, putting out a steady stream of one-of-a-kind hats for events ranging from the Kentucky Derby to a Sunday Church outing.

Petty started young. As a little girl growing up in the South, “I spent a lot of time just in my room and sewing and making things,” she says. Instead of dolls and toys, her gifts were fabric or jewelry-making kits. By 10, she had a business creating earrings from cowrie shells and beads that she sold to her aunt’s sorority sisters.

The aunt, who lived in New York, encouraged Petty’s creativity and, along with a godfather who owned a high-end menswear store, was instrumental in her attending FIT.

After graduating in 1983, Petty took a series of behind-the-scenes jobs, working in a jewelry showroom, in a showroom for a sculptor who designed belt buckles, and at Brylane as an assistant buyer. All the while, “I made these fun little hats, just for myself.” They got so much attention from friends that one weekend, Petty and her aunt set up a pop-up shop in Soho.

“Boy, did they sell out quick,” Petty recalls. After a few such sales, “I said, ‘I’m quitting my corporate fashion job, because I can make more money on the weekends,’” Petty recalls. After a few years in the Soho Emporium on West Broadway, Petty found a space in Harlem, banking on the plentiful churches in the area to provide steady customers.

Being self-taught and drawn to unusual materials helped Petty’s case. “Those women love exclusivity—they don’t want to walk into a church and see someone with the same hat on,” she says. “I’ll see something odd and say, oh, my God, I could cut that up and make a killer hat. I see almost everything as if it were a hat.”

Her weirdest hat involved a copper coil from a refrigerator; the creation is now in a museum collection. Petty’s work has also been shown at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She counts Patti LaBelle and Marcus Samuelsson among her devoted clientele.

After turning her living room into a mini hat-design studio during the pandemic, Petty still works every single day, making everything from casual summer hats to creations for the Kentucky Derby and her masterpiece for the Royal Ascot collection—a straw powder-blue hat with white fabric flowers.

Petty’s hats have also appeared on the covers of *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, in the pages of *The New York Times*, and on *Cake Boss*, *The Equalizer*, and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*. Her story has been picked up by newspapers in the U.S. and the U.K., as well as all the major television networks. Still, she says, her biggest joy is to connect with new customers. Thirty years after starting her business, she still meets people who are visiting for the first time despite living down the block.

“I am so proud to have my business in Harlem. It’s a community of very, very fashionable people,” she says. “We love getting dressed up, and, more important, we just love hats.”

Evetta Petty

**Marketing: Fashion and Related Industries '83
Founder,
Harlem’s Heaven Hats**



Micah Clasper-Torch

**Fashion Design BFA '09
Fiber Artist and Founder,
Punch Needle World**

Micah Clasper-Torch loves working with her hands above all, and that truth has guided her throughout her entire career—from schooling to starting multiple businesses. Knowing she wanted a creative education, Clasper-Torch chose FIT over other New York art schools because of its emphasis on understanding all aspects of garment construction.

“I liked that practicality of it,” she says, “more than just the theory of design or dictating to others ideas that they actually executed.”

After graduating, a job at a fine furniture gallery gave Clasper-Torch a new perspective on functional art—that a project can have a purpose while retaining craftsmanship and quality. Working as a designer with Coach handbags and consultant for several technology startups further broadened her approach to the work world; all the while, she was making her own garments.

In 2018, Clasper-Torch came across punch-needle techniques—a way of looping threads through a fabric backing to create a plush, fluffy texture. Clasper-Torch recognized this 19th-century technique as a rug-making method popular in her native New England and thought it might be fun to use it to construct a wool coat.

“I thought, let me learn this technique, make one piece from it, and then I would move on to something else.”

Little did she know it would change the course of her life. The coat went viral on Instagram, garnering more reactions than any art she’s posted to date, and Clasper-Torch immediately started getting ideas for other pieces she could make using punch-needle techniques: sweaters, clutch bags.

A year later, she became certified as a punch-needle instructor by the Oxford Rug Hooking School, the only institution to still practice this traditional craft. She’s since given courses in punch-needle techniques to hundreds of students through Spanish company Domestika and Punch Needle World, a platform and online community she founded in 2020 after an overwhelming response to her punch-needle art on social media. “The second I started incorporating this into my fashion pieces through my [personal] Instagram account,

everyone just wanted to know, ‘What is that technique?’” she said. The lack of training available for this technique convinced Clasper-Torch there was a need for an educational platform and community. Punch Needle World “became more of a craft business—once people found out about punch needle, [the site] could teach them how to do it, and then my own art practice could still exist on the side,” she said.

More than creating unusually plush fabric effects, the punch-needle method forced Clasper-Torch to slow down and look at her work deliberately. “You’re creating a textile,” she says, like a fashion designer who weaves their own fabric instead of buying bolts from a supplier. “There’s really this two-part process.”

One piece takes Clasper-Torch four to six weeks, depending on its size and complexity. Once the fabric is constructed, it must be hand-sewn, and the piece must be planned precisely from the outset because, unlike with flat fabrics, taking in a seam isn’t an option.

“You can’t sew it on a sewing machine,” she says. “To get an unbroken effect you need to hand sew every seam.”

“If I’ve done my job with construction well, you can’t tell in the loops where there is a seam, because they’re sewn together so tightly.”

She has displayed in galleries and exhibitions including the TUFT exhibition at Group Projects PHL in Philadelphia, and Sauder Village’s Rug Hooking Week in Ohio. Last year in Los Angeles, she showed her first solo exhibition, *Construct: Loud by Nature*. Her first book, a guide to the punch-needle craft through 15 projects, will come out in spring 2025 from Hardie Grant Publishing.

In a world where instant gratification is the norm, Clasper-Torch appreciates holding the thread of a traditional craft. “I want people to be able to see the textile arts as something that has new possibilities,” she says. “There’s this history built in. I hope that other art and fashion students and individuals can begin to look at this technique as something that’s a possibility for their own work.”



Nicole Marie Orlando

Fashion Merchandising Management '12
Founder, The Laundry Lab

Nicole Marie Orlando always knew she wanted to be in fashion—after studying fashion merchandising management at FIT, she worked in sales administration for Armani, Calvin Klein, and a number of Garment District shops. But she didn't realize she loved home products until she came up with an item to solve a personal inconvenience: Living in a third-floor apartment in Queens, she found herself dreading laundry day.

"Imagine walking up and down the steps and walking down a hallway to a laundry room, and then the washing machines are occupied, so I'd end up walking to a laundromat trying to carry everything." When she tried to lighten her load, Orlando was surprised at the lack of laundry supplies that would make the job easier. "For a while, I was taking my liquids and pouring them into Poland Spring water bottles or food storage containers or Ziploc bags, which is incredibly wasteful," she recalls.

So the Queens native went to work sketching out an idea—a set of clear containers with measures marked on the side that could stack into a thermos-size device, complete with a handle on top.

An industry colleague she'd met at FIT helped connect her with a factory that could create a clear, stackable container, and a last-minute entry to a major home products conference let Orlando know she was on the right path. "Every big home brand is there—and everyone that came to the booth validated the idea," she said.

She launched The Laundry Lab in 2021, and won a prestigious Good Housekeeping award less than a year later.

As a self-taught inventor and solo founder, Orlando has faced some challenges, including having to empty out her savings account to bootstrap the business ("I'm still a renter," she says) and building all aspects of her company from scratch.

"There were so many things to figure out, like packaging, how to set up a website, how to ship—all of those things I completely self-taught." And then there's the work; Orlando works seven days a week, fulfilling all aspects of the business from planning events to shipping orders (and finding time to appear at FIT as a guest speaker or student judge several times a year). But her belief in her product is unshakable.

"Laundry is such an untapped market. There's all these apartment buildings, there's all these colleges, there's millions of students that are dorming on an annual basis," she says. "Why are we not improving this?"

Her next aim is achieving store distribution—in the laundry aisle, of course—and adding a charitable component to the business for people living on the streets or in shelters. "The same way that people need food, they need clean clothes."

Nikki Hugarir

Graphic Design '09

Erica Blumenthal

Fashion Merchandising Management '04

Founders, Yes Way Rosé



Sometimes a business comes out of a problem, or a stroke of luck. For founders Erica Blumenthal and Nikki Hugarir, it came out of a shared love of quips and late-night jam sessions that gave rise to the top-selling rosé wine in the states.

"We had the brand before we had the wine," says Hugarir. The two high-school friends reconnected at FIT, where both had transferred from other schools—an experience that would serve them well as outsiders trying to shake up the wine world.

Making their way together in fashion publishing (Blumenthal as a columnist for *The New York Times* and Hugarir as a graphic designer at *T: The New York Times Style Magazine* and *Madewell*), they bonded over a shared love of rosé wine, which Blumenthal says reminded them of French fashion.

"We were obsessed with the color, that perfect, indescribable, peachy pink, and it just inspired so much humor and joy in our lives," she says. The duo created an Instagram account in 2013 to share pun-filled posts celebrating their love of the beverage, and soon after launched their first product, the Hugarir-designed "Yes Way Rosé" tote bag. Apparel followed, to surprising popularity—and growing pains.

"There was a weekend where Drew Barrymore wore our sweatshirt and posted to our Instagram, and we had to graduate from selling T-shirts and sweatshirts out of our apartment to working with a company who could do the fulfillment for us," Blumenthal recalls.

The two were immersing themselves in the wine world to learn more about this still less-known varietal, with an eye toward making their own, when a stroke of luck pushed them forward. They had created a pitch deck for their lifestyle products for Target, and it caught the eye of the chain's adult-beverage buyer. (The two New Yorkers "literally did not know that they sold wine at Target in other states at this time," Hugarir says.) The buyer's encouragement pushed them to find a partner and Yes Way Rosé's first bottle hit the shelves in 2018—a light, breezy rosé made in the south of France.

The wine was quickly named among the best available at Target and Walmart, and won accolades from the likes of foodie mecca *The Kitchn*, which praised its "floral and fruity aroma." A book outlining their philosophy, *Yes Way Rosé: A Guide to the Pink Wine State of Mind*, came out the following year. Today, Yes Way Rosé is the fourth-best-selling wine in the U.S., according to the duo, and rated better than 90% of similar wines in the world.

"This is wine that is meant to be fun and easy and enjoyable and also really good ... it's not hard to enjoy," says Hugarir. The duo has gotten as far as they have thanks to their authenticity and outsider status—including understanding the importance of branding in a way that some traditional winemakers may resist.

Before starting the brand, "we had full professional careers—we understood certain professional dynamics, and had a lot of experience navigating certain situations, knowing when to ask for help, meeting deadlines," says Blumenthal, adding, "we are our consumer, so we're able to speak directly to them."

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Cecelia and Paul Rubino
Julia R. Rutherford
Christina F. Ryan-Linder
Natalia Hrehoraszczuk Saba
Ulna Saint-Fort
Daisy Saldana
Pablo Salinas
Nicholas Samreth
Eda Sanchez-Persampieri
Margaret H. Sancho
Sharn Sandor
He Sang
Christine L. Santarsiero
Daniel J. Saponaro
Gail R. Sarasohn
Paul Sarbaugh
Cristel Joy Sarmiento
Beverly Schnur
Lisa B. Schnur
Kathy J. Schreiner-Leipsner
Miranda M. Hayes Schultz
Hollis Schwanz-Cohen
Shelli M. Scott
Tanya L. Scott
Jamie Seiden
Ellie Shephard
Martha E. Shinaba
Roselyne Shiyenze
Ronald Shore
Ellen T. Sideri
Marisa Silber
Georgianne D. Siller

Nia Silva
Erica M. Slater
Elisia B. Sloane
Sweetman Smith
Francine Smith and Daniel Alexander
Pamela Snyder-Gallagher
Tabea Soriano
Jennifer A. Stavola
Ashley R. Stephenson
Emma M. Storm
Casey E. Stuart
Alice M. Sungurov
Nicole R. Suppa
Lori Swanner
Philip Tadic
David Talbert
Natasha Tan
Nancy-Jean Taylor
Jeaneilla Teixeira
Stephanie Testani
John C. Thom
Patrice A. Thomas
Alin Tocmacov
Christina M. Trevino
Maria G. Trpic
Jennifer L. Truesdell
Sophia Tsao
Margaret Ullrich
Victoria M. Umscheid
Michel Valdez
Fatima Vali
Judith S. Van Bramer
Tomekhia L. Vega
Sujatha Vempaty
Megan Venere
Maria F. Versace
Chrysanthi Vervenioti
Hariharan Vijayachandran
Christine H. Waldhof
Christopher T. Wallace
Neta Washington

Emily J. Waters
Justin Watrel
Patricia A. Whipple
Barry White
Teychenne A. Whitley
Simone R. Wicker
Hanna L. Williams
Trudy Williams
Julia B. Willis
Steven R. Wilson
Amanda Woodley
Cassandra C. Wu
Nioka Wyatt
Brenda M. Yangali
Saaya Yasuda
Yasemin Yeldener
Despina Yphantides
Zoey Zhang
Mikaela Zhao
Millenna A. Zographou
Jasmin M. Zorlu
Natalia Mazzei Zubillaga
Karen E. Zurich

Gifts in Kind
O-Mile
Alessi International
The Anahid Iskian Revocable Living Trust
Leslie Andersen
Balenciaga America Inc.
David Bernstein
Anita J. Brause
CEES SMIT, Inc.
Chesler + Associates
Richard Flaster
FULLBEAUTY Brands
Isabelle Goldfarb
Isabel A. Grecco
Jill Greenberg
JLJ Productions LLC
Gina Kuyers
Elizabeth and Frank Lawrence
Cheryl Leggi
Sandy Liang
Macy’s, Inc.
Cynthia Matthews
NedGraphics, Inc.
Judy Portello
Rachel Pullman
Nancy B. Raisman
Ralph Lauren Corporation
Steven Salen
Ed Segal
James Siegel
Ting Sirivisasokul
SPARC
Elsa Minsberg Spindler
Nicole Stappler
Stella McCartney, Ltd.
Summers & Oppenheim, Inc.
Talbots
Trim Knowtions
Pamela Vetter
Leslie J. Lane Vorcheimer

financials

gifts to the foundation

52%
UNRESTRICTED
\$2,346,000

48%
RESTRICTED
\$2,156,000

62%
FINANCIAL AID
\$2,319,000

36%
DEPARTMENTAL SUPPORT
\$1,336,000

2%
CAPITAL AND OTHER
\$83,000

financials

foundation support

STATEMENT OF NET POSITION

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

ASSETS AND DEFERRED OUTFLOWS OF RESOURCES

	THE COLLEGE	STUDENT HOUSING CORPORATION	FIT FOUNDATION	TOTAL REPORTING UNIT
ASSETS				
CASH	\$21,352,891	\$14,789	\$6,154,637	\$27,522,317
SHARE OF POOLED CASH	-	41,439,202	-	41,439,202
SHORT-TERM INVESTMENTS	131,273,145	-	3,793,163	135,066,308
RESTRICTED SHORT-TERM INVESTMENTS	15,535,614	432,591	-	15,968,205
STUDENT RECEIVABLES (NET OF ALLOWANCE OF \$3,925,763)	1,343,473	-	-	1,343,473
OTHER RECEIVABLES	1,019,121	57,970	2,638,046	3,715,137
PREPAID EXPENSES AND DEPOSITS	1,722,420	1,422,939	38,065	3,183,424
LOANS RECEIVABLE (NET OF ALLOWANCES OF \$237,372)	237,367	-	-	237,367
DUE FROM FUNDERS	16,711,843	-	-	16,711,843
BOND PROCEEDS HELD BY TRUSTEES	-	20,842,976	-	20,842,976
DUE FROM AFFILIATES	7,802,623	2,476	5,400	7,810,499
RESTRICTED INVESTMENTS	7,646,096	-	-	7,646,096
RESTRICTED LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS	-	-	56,366,758	56,366,758
CAPITAL ASSETS INCLUDING RIGHT-TO-USE ASSETS (NET OF DEPRECIATION)	147,183,905	102,673,265	-	249,857,170
TOTAL ASSETS	\$351,828,498	\$166,886,208	\$68,996,069	\$587,710,775
DEFERRED OUTFLOWS OF RESOURCES				
DEFERRED AMOUNT ON REFUNDING	-	4,104,614	-	4,104,614
DEFERRED AMOUNT RELATING TO PENSIONS	12,615,419	-	-	12,615,419
DEFERRED AMOUNT RELATING TO OPEB	17,032,426	226,868	-	17,259,294
TOTAL DEFERRED OUTFLOWS OF RESOURCES	\$29,647,845	\$4,331,482	-	\$33,979,327

STATEMENT OF NET POSITION

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

LIABILITIES, DEFERRED INFLOWS OF RESOURCES, AND NET POSITION

	THE COLLEGE	STUDENT HOUSING CORPORATION	FIT FOUNDATION	TOTAL REPORTING UNIT
LIABILITIES				
ACCOUNTS PAYABLE AND ACCRUED EXPENSES	\$40,637,095	\$1,350,447	\$279,056	\$42,266,598
INTEREST PAYABLE	110,035	2,658,136	-	2,768,171
ACCRUED RETIREE HEALTH BENEFITS	77,184,826	418,971	274,995	77,878,792
DUE TO POOLED CASH	41,439,202	-	-	41,439,202
DUE TO AFFILIATES	5,400	7,474,123	330,976	7,810,499
UNEARNED REVENUE AND CREDITS	3,651,661	886,012	434,000	4,971,673
LEASE LIABILITY	42,933,368	-	-	42,933,368
RESTRICTED PENSION LIABILITY	2,010,749	-	-	2,010,749
LONG-TERM DEBT	-	122,234,853	-	122,234,853
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$207,972,336	\$135,022,542	\$1,319,027	\$344,313,905
DEFERRED INFLOWS OF RESOURCES				
DEFERRED AMOUNT RELATING TO PENSIONS	\$1,093,871	\$-	\$-	\$1,093,871
DEFERRED AMOUNT RELATING TO OPEB	56,228,946	1,315,275	-	57,544,221
TOTAL DEFERRED INFLOWS OF RESOURCES	\$57,322,817	\$1,315,275	\$-	\$58,638,092
NET POSITION				
UNRESTRICTED	\$(24,782,515)	\$38,030,605	\$1,699,340	\$14,947,430
NET INVESTMENT IN CAPITAL ASSETS	106,216,754	(10,489,507)	-	95,727,247
RESTRICTED - SPENDABLE	34,746,951	7,338,775	28,334,614	70,420,340
RESTRICTED - PERMANENT	-	-	37,643,088	37,643,088
TOTAL NET POSITION	\$116,181,190	\$34,879,873	\$67,677,042	\$218,738,105

STATEMENT OF NET POSITION

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

REVENUES

	THE COLLEGE	STUDENT HOUSING CORPORATION	FIT FOUNDATION	TOTAL REPORTING UNIT
REVENUES				
PAID BY STUDENTS	\$106,352,375	\$39,074,623	\$-	\$145,426,998
LESS FINANCIAL AID AND ALLOWANCES	(25,866,490)	-	-	(25,866,490)
NET TOTAL	\$80,485,885	\$39,074,623	\$-	\$119,560,508
APPROPRIATIONS				
NEW YORK STATE	\$27,760,450	\$-	\$-	\$27,760,450
NEW YORK CITY	71,265,311	-	-	71,265,311
NEW YORK COUNTY	26,801,647	-	-	26,801,647
TOTAL	\$125,827,408	\$-	\$-	\$125,827,408
FINANCIAL AID APPROPRIATIONS				
FEDERAL	\$14,442,527	\$-	\$-	\$14,442,527
NEW YORK STATE	6,430,239	-	-	6,430,239
TOTAL	\$20,872,766	\$-	\$-	\$20,872,766
GIFTS AND GRANTS				
FEDERAL	\$701,029	\$-	\$-	\$701,029
NEW YORK STATE	2,240,317	-	-	2,240,317
NEW YORK CITY	658,400	-	-	658,400
GRANTS FROM AFFILIATES	2,319,985	-	-	2,319,985
FUNDING FOR CAPITAL PROJECTS	9,780,366	-	-	9,780,366
CONTRIBUTIONS FROM FIT	-	-	1,028,493	1,028,493
PRIVATE GIFTS	-	-	2,928,634	2,928,634
ADDITIONS TO ENDOWMENT	-	-	232,493	232,493
TOTAL	\$15,700,097	\$-	\$4,189,620	\$19,889,717
INVESTMENT INCOME/(LOSS)	\$2,821,421	\$1,402,414	\$4,612,402	\$8,836,237
OTHER EARNED AND MISCELLANEOUS	3,479,114	779,588	312,410	4,571,112
TOTAL REVENUES	\$249,186,691	\$41,256,625	\$9,114,432	\$299,557,748

STATEMENT OF NET POSITION

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

EXPENSES

	THE COLLEGE	STUDENT HOUSING CORPORATION	FIT FOUNDATION	TOTAL REPORTING UNIT
FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES				
INSTRUCTIONAL	\$76,238,984	\$-	\$-	\$76,238,984
PUBLIC SERVICE	159,165	-	-	159,165
ACADEMIC SUPPORT	32,475,373	-	-	32,475,373
STUDENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT	12,362,611	-	-	12,362,611
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT	39,874,384	-	-	39,874,384
PLANT MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION	37,219,327	-	-	37,219,327
STUDENT AID AND LOAN EXPENSE	686,816	-	-	686,816
TOTAL FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES	\$199,016,660	\$-	\$-	\$199,016,660
EXPENSES OF AFFILIATES				
DORMITORY OPERATIONS	\$-	\$21,705,162	\$-	\$21,705,162
PROGRAMS AND COLLEGE SUBSIDIES	5,768,903	-	3,737,910	9,506,813
MANAGEMENT	-	-	2,501,498	2,501,498
PLANT FUND				
DEPRECIATION	\$20,524,489	\$8,258,530	\$-	\$28,783,019
DEBT-RELATED EXPENSE	1,222,560	5,305,806	-	6,528,366
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$226,532,612	\$35,269,498	\$6,239,408	\$268,041,518
NET INCREASE/(DECREASE)	\$22,654,079	\$5,987,127	\$2,875,024	\$31,516,230
NET ASSETS - BEGINNING	93,527,111	28,892,746	64,802,018	187,221,875
NET POSITION - END OF YEAR	\$116,181,190	\$34,879,873	\$67,677,042	\$218,738,105

FIT Facts

FOUNDING DATE

1944

PROGRAMS

- 15** Associate in Applied Science
- 14** Bachelor of Fine Arts
- 12** Bachelor of Science
- 3** Master of Arts
- 2** Master of Fine Arts
- 2** Master of Professional Studies
- 9** Credit Certificate

ENROLLMENT

- 4,147** Associate's
- 3,428** Bachelor's
- 265** Master's
- 269** Nonmatriculated
- 8,108** Total

ACCREDITATIONS

Middle States Commission on Higher Education
National Association of Schools of Art and Design
Accreditation Council for Business School and Programs
Council for Interior Design Accreditation
American Alliance of Museums

COLLEGE FACULTY

- 250** Full-time
- 748** Part-time

DEGREES AWARDED

2022-23

- 1,840** Associate's
- 1,703** Bachelor's
- 112** Master's
- 12** Certificates
- 3,667** Total

DIVERSITY

- 13%** Asian
- 9%** Black
- 23%** Hispanic
- 12%** International Students
- 5%** Multiracial
- 38%** White
- 82%** Female
- 18%** Male

ACADEMIC DIVISIONS

School of Art and Design
Jay and Patty Baker School of Business and Technology
School of Liberal Arts and Sciences
School of Graduate Studies
Center for Continuing and Professional Studies

As of fall 2023

Administration

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Jaqui Lividini, vice chair
Richard A. Anderman
Judith I. Byrd
Gabrielle Fialkoff
Yaz Hernández
Joan B. Hornig
Mona Aboelnaga Kanaan
Beverly S. Mack
Elizabeth T. Peek
Deirdre Quinn
Sally Singer
Saumya Joshi, student trustee

Trustees Emeriti

Peter G. Scotese, chair emeritus
John J. Pomerantz, trustee emeritus

PRESIDENT'S CABINET

Joyce F. Brown, president
Sherry F. Brabham, treasurer and vice president for Finance and Administration
Stephen Tuttle, general counsel and secretary of the college
Lawrence Baach, vice president for Information Technology and CIO
Cynthia M. Glass, vice president for Human Resource Management and Labor Relations

Yasemin Jones, interim vice president for Academic Affairs
Loretta Lawrence Keane, vice president for Communications and External Relations
Jennifer LoTurco, deputy to the president
Philips McCarty, vice president for Advancement and executive director of the FIT Foundation
Ronald A. Milon, chief diversity officer
Catherine O'Rourke, interim vice president for Enrollment Management and Student Success

ACADEMIC DEANS

Brooke Laurin Carlson, interim dean of the School of Graduate Studies
Jacqueline Jenkins, interim executive director, Center for Continuing and Professional Studies
Patrick Knisley, dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences
Shannon Maher, interim dean of the Jay and Patty Baker School of Business and Technology
Troy Richards, dean of the School of Art and Design

THE MUSEUM AT FIT

Valerie Steele, director and chief curator

FIT FOUNDATION

Joyce F. Brown, president
Sherry F. Brabham, chief financial officer
Philips McCarty, executive director

Board of Directors

Gary Sheinbaum, chair
Amber Allen
Ivan Bart
Frederic Dechnik
Muge Erdirik Dogan
Abbey Doneger
Gigi Ganatra Duff
Bob Fisch
Eric Fisch
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Morris Goldfarb
Maloni Goss
Geoffrey Greenberg
Sam Haddad
Douglas Hand
Sarah Curtis Henry
Jane Hertzmark Hudis
Rodney Hutton
Dayna Isom Johnson
Laurence C. Leeds, Jr.
Fern Mallis
Corey Moran
Bruce Rockowitz
Jamie Singleton
J. Michael Stanley
Molly Taylor
Amber Valletta

As of June 30, 2023



State University
of New York