

WFUR

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Elena Salvaneschi Interview

by Lady Fur



Elena Salvaneschi one of the most influential women in the fur sector the one I like to nickname *the mom of Mifur* *TheOneMilano*

W hat role do you have in the fur sector?

In the **fur sector** I have two different but complementary roles: for AIP (**Italian Fur Association**) I am Communications Manager; for **Mifur fair** I am the General Secretary. So I deal with fur sector in communications and coordinate consulting connected to this (press office, PR, digital): as you know with this product the words you choose are really very important. When – in distant 1996 – AIP decided to give the sector it represented a tool for communicating with and approaching markets, I already had the position as Communication Manager... and from communication to marketing the step was short. And Mifur (International fur salon) was born and has recently developed into TheOneMilano. I have always been the General Secretary.

They call you Mother Mifur fair?

Not that I know of! But in many ways it's true. I contributed to the birth of **Mifur fur fair**. With me at that moment there was Nicoletta Caldirola, that dealt with Nafa Fur Auction. We worked a lot, but it would not have been possible to do all we did without some people who were fundamental for the fur sector like *Norberto Albertalli, Alfonso Paoletti, Lele Carminati, Augusto Valsecchi...* people and operators that are on the front line when a person takes his first steps in the salon, that took a risk proposing a model for an Italian fair tied to the category association and so connected to service not business. They always trusted me and I thank them for that: we built an important and beautiful story to tell.

How did you get into the fur sector?

By chance and I fell in love with it. I presented my degree thesis on March 21 and gave it in at the end of January. I didn't have anything else to do and I wasn't used to staying twiddling my thumbs. I answered and advertisement in the newspaper Corriere della Sera: it was an agency that was looking for extra staff for the period of Milanese Fashion Week in February. I answered the advertisement and I was taken on. The agency was EPR of Elena Capra, who unfortunately died for an ugly cancer. At the end of the shows Elena proposed staying on and I accepted. She was the Italian voice of Swakara fur and intended to launch an informative journal, *Ultimissime Pellicceria*, and that became my specific task. I started that way. I like to think there is a design for everything: EPR was also the agency of the first fashion fair in Milan, that started precisely during my extra staff period: it was

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Milano vendemoda. I was there at the first edition (at Milano2). Milano vendemoda evolved over the years, becoming Modit and then Mipap. In 2017 Mifur made an agreement with **Fiera Milano** to launch **TheOneMilano**, the union of **Mifur and Mipap**. Stories that interconnect, evolve and continue. My first employer was Elena, as I said. In our office there are 6 of us. Three are called Elena. In our external press office there is another Elena: isn't that magic and fascinating?

yes it is

Can you call this sector a big family?

Absolutely yes. **The fur world is a small sector** where everyone knows each other and meets up together.

What advice would you give to a young person who wants to get into the fur world?

“ Follow your passion, but be prepared for it to be hard. It's not an easy sector, it's not enough to be good. You need to be better than in other sectors, because this is a difficult sector where every move must take public opinion into account. ”

What has been your biggest challenge in this work?

The daily challenge of respecting, loving and sharing the way of thinking of the sector operators and at the same time pushing them to look with the eyes of an outsider, to learn and move past their own specific visions.

Your biggest success?

“ Having contributed to positioning fur as a fashion product and not seeing it just as a specialized product. ”

Failure?

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Coming in too early with some proposals. In the office there is a good atmosphere, we are all very united. We often joke about it and we often say that staying in front people always see your backside. It's a joke, but it contains a great truth: even being ahead is a mistake because anyway the timing is wrong. My biggest failure was Mifur Smallville, the September edition of the salon. It was 2008. The sector was not ready for the changes in fashion, for the fragmentation of collections into flashes, for capsule collections for nearly immediate delivery for Christmas. It isn't now and it's been 10 years. *It's a pity, because there are many opportunities.* But you can't force people to take them on.

Could you describe Mifur 15 years ago? How was it? And what has changed?

Mifur Fur Fair 15 years ago it was at its peak. The first crisis of the product, the one of the end of the nineties, had passed. The companies were positive and willing to invest. But the salon was very oriented to the sector and there were only the first signs of the decided interest for fashion that started in those years. There is a precise date for this reconversion: 1999, the year when the first event with **Vogue Italia** and with **Franca Sozzani** was started. It was called **Further Fantasy**. We held it at the **Giò Marconi** art gallery in Milan. In the exhibition there were **"works in fur"** signed *Victor Alfaro, Mariso, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, Rifat Ozbek, Meret Oppenheim, Prada, Christian Lacroix, Mat Collishaw, Fendi, Givenchy, Victor & Rolf, Tobias Rehberger, Blumarine, Manolo Blahnik, Atelier van Lieshout, Christian Dior, Versace, Vivienne Westwood, Jean Paul Gaultier, Gianfranco Ferré, Michel Haillard.*

“ I still remember the faces of the furrier's who were invited to the opening event. ”

Marconi gallery was (and still is) in the Milanese casbah behind Porta Venezia. The furrier's were used to period buildings and the historic centre, not to courtyards with bicycles and laundry hung out to dry. It was the first time that fur broke the mould and to be light let's say that this at the beginning was not completely appreciated. But we had the strength to continue and the board of AIP and Mifur strong, united and forward looking in this. The years 2000 to 2005 were the years of the language of fashion, a job done with Franca with strategies and beautiful events: the results could be and are seen.

IMAGE BANNER



LADY FUR LOVES HARRODS



I know you were a friend of Franca Sozzani Editor In Chief of Vogue Italia. Do you know why Conde Nast closed Vogue Leather?

Not just Vogue Leather was closed: nearly all the specialist papers were closed in favour of a more rounded fashion message. I believe the closure of Vogue Leather depends on this strategy, but we have never spoken about this with Conde Nast. Anyway at that time there was also **Vogue Fur**, I believe it came out only very few times, maybe only for a year.

“ Do you still have any copies of Vogue Fur? ”

Unfortunately no: this title is also missing from our library of the AIP Study Centre.

How do you see the future of fur?

I see it as not easy but absolutely concrete.

“ Furs are the emblem of the fight between reason and feeling that has always characterized literature, art, philosophy... ”

thousands of years of history of thought haven't found an answer to this extremely difficult balance, how can public opinion that is fighting with a sterile confrontation of for and against find it now?

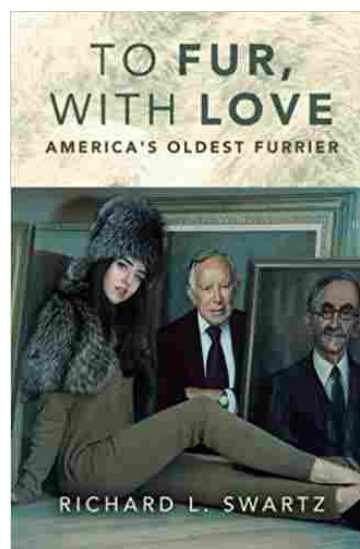
The sector has the duty to show itself modern and to manage the requests that are called for by society and by its evolution. Now there is a real need for traceability, transparency and the fur sector is adapting and answering these questions concretely.

But it's not enough to keep a product up to date: sustainability is an essential prerequisite and fur can demonstrate it. But you also need the skill to give the consumer what he wants in terms of product, service, distribution, means of contact. These are the most difficult challenges for all the small businesses in the world, not just for fur. Not trying to overcome them is wrong.

Do you think that brands that started as producers and then started to develop their brands will go back to being just producers or will they continue to try developing their brands?



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I hope that they will continue developing their brand, but managing communication I realize that brand awareness has a financial and energy cost that it is not always possible to pay.

What do you think the future of furriers is? Will there be a return to the past or an evolution?

The change of distribution is already in act and not only for furriers. Hat shops for example are very few and very positioned: the same thing is happening with **furriers**. Then the product also follows other roads, that go from the boutique to department stores to e-commerce.

“ But in this moment all over the world there are signs of revaluation of the importance of human relationships. ”

Malls are emptying and neighbourhood stores are reopening: it is the moment to ride the wave and unite the material with the immaterial, the point of physical contact (but new) with the virtual one: but it can't be a return to the past: **it can only be an evolution.**

You were able to evolve together with this sector anticipating the market trends: what has that meant for you?

365/10/7: a job done every day of the year, for on average 10 hours a day, every day of the week. **You can only do that for a thing you love:** I could not live without working, even if every day I say I would like to move to my favourite island – Ponza – to be a lighthouse keeper.

If I promised you you would become CEO of the IFF would you accept the challenge?

What a difficult question! I have never asked myself that question, I really don't know. It would mean giving up directing TheOneMilano, for a correct balance with regards to the other fairs of the world. It would be too big a sacrifice.

Describe The One Milano 3.0 and how it will evolve.

Its evolution fits its positioning: we are a **fashion fair**. We are a concrete, product fair. We are a fair where people buy and sell. We are a fair that communicates innovatively and digitally: we are about to launch big things in the digital field. We are not only image and the expression of a product just as a shop window, of highly creative companies that have difficulty to

manage their presence on the market because they are too start-up. Each of our editions work to make this message understood.

Why should a fashion or fur brand take part?

Because clothes, accessories and fur complement each other.

Because clothing finds in fur buyers a new market segment.

Because **furriers ask to sell also something different from fur**, for no other reason than to broaden their sales season. Because fur companies have understood that distribution can't be only specialized.

“ Because TheOneMilano – a certified fair for over 10 years – has 63% of international buyers and is the only one to have these numbers. ”

Who are the buyers of TheOneMilano?

They are **shops specialized in fur** but

“ also fashion boutiques, department stores, ecommerce etc. They are always sector operators anyway: we are not nor want to be open to the public. ”

What is your dream regarding your work? (Everyone has one, don't lie)

To do it with less stress. Tensions are high in this period, too high. It would just be good to be able to work with a less pressing diary.

Do you ever visit your “competitors” fairs?

Yes I do. I find that comparing and analyzing are fundamental elements in my work.

What would you like the Italian government to do for our sector?

I would like them to understand its importance, that is not only connected to numbers. But It's not easy.

“ Anti fur: trend or reality? ”

Reality. But a reality that there has always been and one we can get answers from. And give them: on the fundamental theme of **animal welfare**, but not just limited to that.

We are office neighbours -we have known each other for years – I have gained your trust step by step – we still have to do lunch

Let's do it...When?

Finish of this interview – one of my favorite because Elena Salvaneschi for me is one of the most influential, inspiring and talented women of the fur and fashion business. She did and she is doing a lot for our fur sector.

Love her and my job

Samantha

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