



Meet accomplished fashion designer Katharina Starlay

**FRS. Hi Katharina! Thank you for chatting to Front Row Society! Can you tell us a bit about your work? What path led you to what you're doing now?**

KS. Being a certified designer I became a style consultant in the 1980'ies, then, later on started a career in retail, working for the big companies in Germany as well as in Switzerland. In those years I learned what consumption is about. I worked on the fields of clothing for women and men, ladies underwear and cosmetics – everything that makes people attractive. I also got to know how corporate culture works inside a large company. This is what led me to work for firms, giving training to the staff and designing clothes for them.

**FRS. What inspires when you're working in your pieces of clothing?**

KS. The people who are supposed to wear it. Most designers forget about their target group – you can see it each time one of those super slim models is floating over the stage. If you ASK your addressee about his or her lifestyle you will get answers that change your angle of view and you will therefore be able to make clothes that serve the purpose: Make people (with human bodies) look good.

**FRS. What do you look for when choosing your lines?**

KS. I love the pure lines that don't distract from the person. The real expertise about design is not the number of stylish ideas but rather the right selection of what you can do on a person – or a company – in order to achieve a memorable look.

**FRS. When did your interest in design develop?**

KS. As a child I was always dressed in my elder sister's clothes which were passed over from them to me. As they are some years my senior I used to look outdated as soon as I was tall enough to wear those clothes. I always felt this was my motivation to have stylish and new clothes of my own and finally live my own, unique style. I want to treat others with the same good feeling: Wear what matches your personality and look smart in it. This is, why I'm not only designing but also giving lectures about how to accomplish good looks.

**FRS. How long have you been in the fashion industry and how long have you been in business for yourself?**

KS. As I'm Mid-40, I guess this is quite some time... Style consultancy makes more than 25 years by now, having started during my design education. I have been working in retail for 9 years, as a head-hunter for 2 years and then founded my small company almost 10 years ago.

**FRS. You are also this well-known fashion consultant. What is the main topic of a style consultant?**

KS. Most people follow the fashion line instead of learning about style. Style is about a person herself or himself – not a trend. I want my clients to develop self-confidence and personality, because this is what makes them successful in professional business.

**FRS. You've been giving speeches all around. What lead you to start doing that?**

KS. I guess I was asked some day. And besides, I love to be "on the stage", which makes it easy. If you can give something to your audience no-one else would explain to them it gives you a sensation of doing what really makes sense.

**FRS. Can you explain a bit about your process of design – where do you get inspiration for your designs?**

KS. I start by observing people at work. What would they need to make a good job? I then talk to them and take in their wishes and ideas about clothing as it should be. Next I would research for the right fabrics and their availability and then do the sketches. Good design always is meant as a service.

**FRS. How does an idea start and how does it become a finished product?**

KS. Sometimes it takes days and a lot of inner breeding to figure out the special "something" about a design or line. Often you will have to make a sample in order to see whether it works. If not, you start all over again. Courage and self-criticism are essential characteristics for a designer.

**FRS. You have some really interesting designs. What inspires this unique way of design?**

KS. Practicability with the special "something"... And simplicity.

**FRS. What is your favourite part of the design process?**

KS. I do love each phase, but I'm tempted to get a little proud when I see a crowd of people wearing my design, having a smile on their faces. This is what it's all about, the smile. Coolness doesn't make you attractive, a smile does.

**FRS. What are you looking forward to – professionally or personally?**

KS. I'm looking forward to give my experience to younger people. I'm old enough now. My knowledge of style and quality – and their spirit of the time should make an exceptional combination.

**FRS. Which of your projects has given you the most satisfaction?**

KS. Each of them in its own way. There is no favourite.

**FRS. How would you describe your artistic style? How has this style developed over time?**

KS. I'm not an artist, rather a service provider... My style is close to established elements, and always provides just one unexpected element, a fabric you wouldn't think of, a shape or a piece of clothing that is new to the surrounding. I once dressed a pharmacy, whose employees (in our country) mostly wear white lab coats. My team is now dressed in business trousers, blood-red blouses and dressy waistcoats. The design wasn't really new – but the application of the outfit to a pharmacy was!

**FRS. Who is your favourite all-round designer?**

KS. I adore the immortal Coco Chanel...

**FRS. What did you want to be when you were a child?**

KS. When I was tiny I told my parents I would become a "Riding Lady" – close to nature and close to another creature, I guess.

**FRS. What are your future plans in what comes to collections and design?**

KS. With one of my manufacturers I created a collection for women in business. I want professional women to look capable and at the same time feminine whatever they do. I also want them to feel great and completely themselves, even though they move in (often male) business circles.

**FRS. Where can we find your work and collections?**

KS. Style advice you will find on my inter-active website [www.stilclub.de](http://www.stilclub.de), clothes shop on our relaunched website [www.cougarade.de](http://www.cougarade.de).

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