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International fashion expert gives talk at USC
An interview with Rosanna Krekel

Rosanna Giacalone Krekel. Say her name and the who's-who of the fashion industry turn around to welcome a friend and trusted colleague. Clive Davis walked Krekel down the aisle in 2008...enough said.

While only 5-foot-1 and a half, Krekel is high up in the fashion industry. It's in the clothes she wears – tonight a dress by Prada – and it's in her resume that includes more than 20 years of experience working inside the fashion business. She's directed fashion and beauty at magazines such as *Glamour*, *Rolling Stone* and *Elle*. She's responsible for launching *Life & Style Weekly*. And she helped take the *Robb Report* public in 2007. Any one of those accomplishments, and many professionals would call it a career. But not Krekel.

After being transplanted in Charleston, SC in 2011 by way of New York City, Krekel is now making her mark as an ambassador for the industry she's help shape. In addition to running **La Vita È Bella**, a branding and marketing consultancy, she's dedicating much her time and talents as regional director for Fashion Group International-Charleston. Through this **member-based fashion organization**, Krekel is aggressively expanding South Carolina's fashion footprint and helping connect industry professionals, as well as students, along the way.



FGI members Karen Edwards, Robbie Butt and Rosanna Krekel.

We caught up with Krekel before her talk at the University of South Carolina on Dec. 4, 2012.

What's your earliest fashion memory?

Seeing my mom when I was a little girl. She was absolutely beautiful and I remember her wearing things that were very reminiscent of 1920s style. She had these flapper dresses and great bags. Wigs were in at the time. Her hair was always perfect, and she had the most amazing accessories. Those vintage items never grow old. They still look beautiful today.

What experience during your college years helped shaped your professional career working in fashion?

I originally went to school pre-med. I changed to Spanish with a business minor my junior year. The lesson I learned at **Stony Brook** was that your career path, like your education, changes – you won't always get to your dream by following a straight line. I learned to go with all the twists and turns that life provides.

At the **University of Salamanca** (in Spain), I was able to study graduate school abroad. I learned at a young age how global the world is and that we're all connected.

So what sparked you to change majors from pre-med to Spanish and business?

I was 19 at the time and simply couldn't imagine going to school for another 11 years. To me, that sounded like forever. I wanted to get out and make my mark on the world. Not wait until I was 30 to get started. I stepped back and asked myself what could get me to that place faster and in a career that I was equally passionate about.

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At what moment did you feel like you had really made it as a professional in the fashion world?

There were defining moments for me at *Elle* magazine, but the first thing that comes to mind is my time at *Rolling Stone*. I was tasked with bringing fashion, retail and music together. That was really hard work, but it was so much fun. Bringing those industries together ultimately created some of the best in-store fashion events with music. It brought bands out on streets to drive sales. We were blending all these art forms together for the first time. And I was like, oh my God I'm getting paid to do this!

What's one of the coolest projects you've ever worked on?

I was the jewelry and accessories manager at *Elle*. As a French magazine, accessories are everything. Europeans will say, wear a two-dollar shirt but wear the best watch, the best handbag, the best shoes. When I came in, jewelry and accessories was one of the magazine's least-performing areas. So my charge was to turn it around. We had to figure out how to get the smaller accessories businesses involved. I could get *Hermes*. I could get Chanel. But I wanted the smaller ones, too. We created the "Real Women, Real Jewelry" section. It got designers that at the time were less heard of – *David Yurman*, for example – tied in with the major retailer, which was Saks. We took the windows of Saks and made the most incredible collaboration projects tied back to the magazine. The success that followed was tremendous.

Tell us about an individual who has shaped your professional career?

Hands down *Clive Davis*. He is one of my dearest friends and besides being an incredible human being, which I think has to come first, he is a master showman, and a legend in the music business. I could go on and on for days about him. He knows everything about managing a brand, about making sales, about nurturing creative talent. I've spent 22 years of my life learning from him. He actually gave me away at my wedding. I think you choose friends that you admire, and support, and I think they choose you for the same reasons.

Talk about how the South Carolina fashion scene is evolving.

When I moved down to South Carolina in 2011 there was this whole percolation taking place with fashion. There was an energy coming from the people that wanted to shape the fashion industry in South Carolina and beyond. You can see it burgeoning now inside Charleston and throughout the state. This is a big reason we brought *Fashion Group International* to Charleston recently. There's tremendous opportunity for fashion professionals in South Carolina and now we're starting to put real infrastructures in place to support this growth.

Give students 3 tips to consider before they enter the world as a professional.

Number one is stay positive. And that should be a life philosophy. I always tell people the day you get a no, make sure you do something else to get a yes. Number two is follow up. I can't tell you how many people I haven't hired because of this. And number three has got to be work ethic and remaining hungry. The fashion industry is not for the weak. Do your homework and work hard.

What's playing on your iPod lately?

Wow, you're talking to someone that worked at *Rolling Stone* during Kurt Cobain, Snoop Dogg and Neil Young. My musical tastes are very eclectic. I have stuff from all around the world, music in Italian and French. I listen to hard rock. I listen to heavy metal. I listen to jazz. I have meditation music. It's really all over the place. I'll tell you my playlist from running the other day. It was Twisted Sister, Neil Young, Jay-Z, Beyoncé, and Snow Patrol. I love, love, love *Eddie Vedder* and Pearl Jam. I listen to Stone Temple Pilots. It's such a mix up. I love music because it provides a soundtrack to your life.

Name a designer that our fashion merchandising students should keep an eye on right now.

There are so many, but I'll give you three. Yasutoshi Ezumi. He was at Fashion Week Tokyo this year and did these incredibly cool, draped jersey types of fabrics. There's also *Marissa Webb* and *Simone Rocha*. Marissa is only 26 years old and she's been at it for 11 years already. A lot of people know her because she was with J.Crew, then she went on to be with *Creatures of the Wind*. She showed her first show at Fashion Week this year in New York. It goes to show you're never too young to get started. There's your inspiration.

Rosanna Krekel's visit to the University of South Carolina on Dec. 4 was co-sponsored the Department of Retailing and Fashion Merchandising, Fashion Group International, Inc. Charleston, and Fashion Board USC. As part of her keynote during a USC fashion symposium, Krekel announced 12 new memberships offered by Fashion Group International Charleston that will be open exclusively to college students, six of which will be held for students at USC. To learn more, visit charleston.fgi.org.