



THE  
POWER  
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# PRETTY SMART

The business of high fashion is not for the faint of heart.  
But when you're **Lauren Santo Domingo**,  
there's really very little that intimidates you

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If

you go to style.com and search “Lauren Santo Domingo,” 175 photos pop up of her in fabulous gowns at high-society soirees and ultra hip outfits in the front row at fashion shows. Her hair is blown out like a sheet of gold, she carries the latest Jack and Lazaro bag, and her figure is elongated like an illustration of a couture model. You think: beautiful girl.

Then a Google search probes beneath the sheen. Lauren Santo Domingo, née Lauren Davis, from Greenwich, Connecticut, is a contributing editor at *Vogue*; has her own column, “APT with LSD”; and is cofounder and creative director of innovative online retailer Moda Operandi, where customers gain access to collections straight off the runway. The picture is clearer: Powerful Woman.

In the 25,000-square-foot Moda Operandi offices in Tribeca, where seventy-five employees work, the real Lauren Santo Domingo emerges. She is six feet tall in stilettos, and her designer’s dream body is clothed in a feminine Nina Ricci print skirt and lavender sweater. A Carven deer-print jacket is draped over her chair. Surprisingly, even though Lauren is hosting a baby shower at the Carlyle for Margherita Missoni today, she wears minimal makeup—a hint of lipstick and a touch of mascara to bring out her amber eyes. Her flaxen hair has not seen a blow dryer today, and her smile elicits authentic crinkles around her eyes—something that has been banished from most social-ites’ faces.

Lauren is more than a social-ite who spends hours primping. This thirty-seven-year-old entrepreneur is changing the way the world’s most stylish women shop and the most promising



designers sell their wares. She gushes confidence and barely needs any prompting in recounting the story of how she became a fashion-industry powerhouse.

### Thataway Café to Carolina Herrera

“I grew up in Old Greenwich, off Shore Road. My backyard was Long Island Sound,” begins Lauren. Her dad, Ronald Davis, founded and served as CEO of Perrier Group of America, and her mom, Judy, is an artist. “I spent summers sailing, swimming and synchronized swimming at Rocky and playing golf and tennis at Innis. By freshman year in high school, my parents made me have summer jobs. I worked at Thataway Café. I had an internship in the city one summer at an ad agency. I worked as an au pair, and even for the World Wrestling Federation.” As Lauren talks, it’s hard not to notice her high cheekbones, aristocratic nose and full lips.

“I knew a girl, Anne Nolte (a Darien native who went on to work for *Vogue* and Chaiken), who was modeling. I thought it was so amazing that she went into the city and did all these



Lauren and her husband, Andrés, at the 2012 Met Costume Institute Gala



Designer pieces: Valentino, Prabal Gurung, SUNO, Rocha and Peter Pilotto

shoots. I really wanted to try it," recalls Lauren. Elite promptly signed on the lanky beauty. "My first job was a ballet shoot for *Sassy* magazine," continues Lauren. "I watched the editor talking to the photographer and the makeup artist, directing the models. When she spoke, there was a hush and the team would immediately rally. I said to myself, That's what I want to do." Lauren was a sophomore in high school.

"I feel really lucky that not only did I know my passion and calling early on, but I was exposed to it and it was attainable," says Lauren. "I realize how fortunate I am that I grew up in Greenwich in the country but New York was only a Metro North ride away."

At Greenwich Academy, Lauren was not sporty. She spent her afternoons at Greenwich Ballet Workshop, where the training did more for Lauren than help her land that first modeling job.

"The instructor's name was Felicity Foote. She would smoke in class and have this long ash. It was incredible! There was a live piano player," recounts Lauren, talking with her slender hands, which feature unpainted fingernails and look like they should play piano. "Every summer her top dancers would go to Europe to train and perform. It was the last summer before I was going off to boarding school

"When I was an assistant at *Vogue*, the new designers were Jack and Lazaro, Proenza Schouler, Phillip Lim, Zac Posen. I was the assistant calling in the clothes. They were young and didn't have PR people and were doing it themselves. Real friendships emerged. Now we'll sit around and say, 'Wait, we're not the new kids anymore. We're the grown-ups!'"

—LAUREN SANTO DOMINGO

(Kent) and I hadn't been invited to go. But then Mrs. Foote sat me down and said, 'Normally I wouldn't ask you, because you don't have the natural ability as everyone else does, but I've never had anyone as passionate and committed. You are coming for that reason.' I learned early on that you have to be dedicated and you have to persevere."

Lauren continued to model during summers and on weekends, inspired by the supermodel era. "You couldn't escape that. It looked like they were having a lot of fun," she says. "I never missed a day of school to model, though. My parents told me that if I wanted to

continue after graduation, I'd have to reimburse them the cost of my private school education. So, uh, it didn't make sense!"

Lauren chose to study at the University of Southern California. "When I was doing my college applications, there was five feet of snow and then three feet of ice on top," she says. "Your hair would freeze on the way from the gym back to the dorm. I'm also third generation USC. Growing up we had a vacation house in Emerald Bay in Laguna Beach." Lauren rushed Pi Phi and majored in history. "I was drawn to the most decadent and outrageous periods. I soaked up the culture, art, and literature and forced myself to barely understand the political history. I was more interested in what the queen was wearing to the revolution."

After graduating, Lauren went to Paris. That's where she met her husband-to-be, Andres Santo Domingo, son of Colombian billionaire Julio Mario Santo Domingo. "He was in his junior year abroad, so I was the older woman," notes Lauren. Meeting her dream man was followed by her dream job: an assistant position at *Vogue* in New York, "that job every girl wanted."

"It was hard," Lauren admits. "I wasn't prepared. It was probably like the equivalent of a Goldman Sachs analyst job, but it was amazing. For three years, all I did all day was deal with clothes. I saw couture dresses, ready-to-wear dresses. Everything came through my office. I would request them from the PR firms and then send them off on shoots. That prepared me—not only the long hours, the stress and the extreme dedication—but this intimate knowledge of fashion that has served me so well. I can spot any designer, any fabric, any silhouette. If I see an old dress, I can tell you what season it's from, possibly the exit number when it went down the runway, and if it was a really special dress, maybe the model who was wearing it. I developed almost a photographic memory for these dresses."



Nicholas Kirkwood ankle-strap sandals



Lauren with Riccardo Tisci, Rooney Mara and Anna Wintour at the 2013 Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute Gala

Lauren went on to do PR at J. Mendel and Carolina Herrera. "Both were family-owned small companies, and it was during that time that I thought, I would love to start my own business," explains Lauren. "Mrs. Herrera was so inspiring. It was fascinating to watch her. She was so in charge of her domain."

The statement proves prophetic when Indre Rockefeller, who oversees the trunk show side of Moda Operandi, peeks in to see if Lauren can review some vintage Rolexes. (Yes, Indre is the wife of a Rockefeller heir. It could just as easily have been Hayley Bloomingdale or Ashley Bryan, Anna Wintour's boyfriend's daughter. They all call Lauren boss.)

The meeting is brief and efficient. "I love this story," comments Lauren, assessing the watches Indre places on the table. "These could almost go in the men's



category.” She shuffles some out of the lineup. “The olive with gold—love that. So when will these go? In time for Christmas?... You’ll make it really clear that these ship immediately?... Gift wrapping is available?”

Indre answers in the affirmative, adding, “Italian clients are wearing one on each wrist to make more of a statement.”

“In Newport Beach, they wear two on one wrist, for two time zones, because they’re *bi-coastal*,” says Lauren, poking fun.

Indre then presents some Birkin bags in “rare, exotic colors.”

“Some of these don’t seem so rare and exotic,” Lauren interjects, but Indre quickly explains that those are for “Boutique,” not the trunk show.

“Ah, OK,” Lauren says. “Can we not put them all in

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## LAUREN’S MUST-HAVES

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- **A FABULOUS BLACK SMOKING JACKET** (We have a Givenchy one on our site.) It dresses up jeans at night, or throw it over your shoulders over a cocktail dress—instant chic.
  - **EVENING CLUTCHES** I tend to wear the same evening dress several times in one season. But fun minaudières make a dress feel new and fresh every night.
  - **A TAILOR** I alter absolutely everything. Even jeans can be hemmed up to hit at the skinniest part of your ankle. Remove the lining of the pockets so there is no bunching. I would alter a white t-shirt sleeve to hit at the most flattering part of the arm, if I could, but even I have my limits.
  - **A SENSE OF HUMOR** Fashion is meant to be fun. Don’t take it so seriously and take a risk or two. Just not two at the same time.
- 

at once and trickle them in? This one is heaven.” She points to “a silver Kelly limited super-rare edition. It’s so special, I almost wouldn’t put it on the website. Give one of our best customers the first chance of getting it.”

Talk about a woman in charge of her domain.

### The Business of Style

Despite warnings that once you leave *Vogue*, it’s hard to get back in, Lauren returned as a contributing editor in 2006. “In order to contribute to the magazine, I needed to broaden my exposure and skill set,” explains Lauren. “I have great respect for the magazine and for Anna Wintour, and I feel like I really understand the *Vogue* woman.”

The *Vogue* reader began seeing not only her byline, but also Lauren posing for photo editorials shot by the world’s top photographers. She became a muse for designers. “A lot of the designers, we started together,” says Lauren. “When I was an assistant at *Vogue*, the new designers were Jack and Lazaro, Proenza Schouler, Phillip Lim, Zac Posen. I was the assistant calling in the clothes. They were young and didn’t have PR people and were doing it themselves. Real friendships emerged. Now we’ll sit around and say, ‘Wait, we’re not the new kids anymore. We’re the grown-ups!’”

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## A DAY IN THE LIFE *of* Lauren Santo Domingo

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### **6:30 a.m.**

Wake up and have breakfast with my children.

### **8:00 a.m.**

Ballet Beautiful lesson with Mary Helen, whose class is perfect for helping moms get back in shape after having a baby.

### **9:00 a.m.**

Walk from Ballet Beautiful's studio to the office.

Check in with all departments to see where we are with all plans and initiatives.

### **12:30 p.m.**

Many of my friends are editors or designers, and it's great to meet for lunch and share news or discuss projects we can work on together.

### **2:00 p.m.**

Return to the office to work with Deb Nicodemus, our CEO. We make a great team; her merchandising expertise complements my editorial background perfectly.

### **5:30 p.m.**

Once a week, I head to Chelsea Piers for a gymnastics class with my son.

### **7:30 p.m.**

A quick blowout at Dreamdry and I'm ready to head to one of my charity events.

### **11:55 p.m.**

I'm home, ready for bed, but only after checking in with Deb one last time to get the final sales report for the day.

In her *Vogue* column, "APT with LSD," Lauren peeks into the homes of style icons in New York. "I'm drawn to people and the way that they live, whether modern or old-fashioned," she says, adding that her family's apartment in Gramercy Park, previously her husband's bachelor pad (all 8,800 square feet of it), is a mix of both. She has covered her friend Samantha Boardman's house and "fabulously chic" Rebecca de Ravenel's West Village apartment.

The idea for Moda Operandi came from one of the fringe benefits of working for *Vogue*: direct access to the designers. "I was often invited to pre-order whatever I wanted," explains Lauren. "When the season came, I wouldn't even have to set foot in a store. The best items from the collections would already be arriving to me from the designer. My friends would always say, 'How did you get that dress? I've looked everywhere for it!'



Lauren and former mayor Michael Bloomberg being photographed by Annie Leibovitz for *Vogue*

I realized the option to shop the way that editors, actresses and stylists had was a real luxury.”

Determined to offer this access to fashion lovers everywhere, Lauren cofounded Moda Operandi with former Gilt Groupe executive Aslaug Magnusdottir in 2010. The site launched in 2011, giving anyone the option of pre-ordering looks from the runways through online trunk shows, including items that might never even make it into stores. In-season curated designer products became available in the online “Boutique” in 2012.

“Moda Operandi has changed the face of shopping,” says fashion writer Derek Blasberg, who worked with Lauren at *Vogue*. “Lauren has always been aware that from her position at *Vogue* and her friendships with the world’s most influential fashion designers, she has had priceless access to the world’s most important fashions. And she was brilliant to find a way to distill that access into something convenient and easily shoppable to women around the world.”

Moda Operandi hosts live trunk shows as well and a recent one at the home of Hillary Haroche in Greenwich was a big hit. “I met amazing women,” says Lauren. “If I lived there, they’d be my best friends.” Greenwich women fit the Moda Operandi customer description: chic, elegant, refined.

“Our customer knows any designer we feature, we believe in, and she’ll be getting the coolest and most up-to-date fashion,” says Lauren, who loves to scout and launch new designers. “I like to think that when a woman enters a room wearing something she got on our website, she gets the nod of approval from her girlfriends but not the eye roll from her husband, not ‘Uh, what are you wearing?’

“Skeptics didn’t think women would shop this way,” continues Lauren, “but we’ve had 130 percent growth year-over-year. It’s been more successful than I ever imagined. I thought it would be a cute little project.”

Caroline Palmer, editor of *Vogue.com*, comments, “Lauren is amazing. I always joke, ‘Lauren, possibly you should rule the world!’ Her thinking is so strategic but it doesn’t seem overt. A lunch with her will feel social but an enormous amount of smart business is accomplished at the same time. She’s also incredibly self-confident, in an authentic, not overbearing, way.” *Vogue.com* and Moda Operandi collaborate during fashion week, so that



In just two and a half years Lauren has built Moda Operandi into a fashion powerhouse

looks coming down the runway also can be pre-ordered via *Vogue.com*. (Condé Nast is an investor in Moda Operandi.)

Mollie Ruprecht, a Greenwich native and editor at *1stdibs*, says, “With everything she does, Lauren works so hard and is so steadfast. She’s really inspiring. She’s a wonderful mother; a genuine, genuine friend; and she runs this amazing business. I don’t know any other woman who has accomplished all that at her age.”

### Old Guard, New World

“Moda Operandi is two and a half years old and my son is two and a half years old, and I have a twelve-month-old. That gives you an idea of what the last three years of my life have been like,” says Lauren, who married Andres in Cartagena, Colombia, in 2008, in what was





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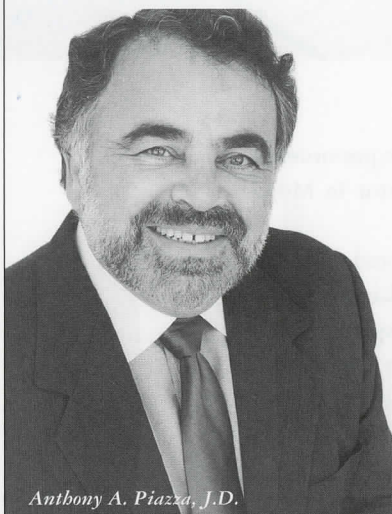


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Lauren has been dubbed “the next Mrs. Astor” by *Town and Country* and made *Vanity Fair*’s International Best Dressed List in 2012. “At this point, it’s a bit like a high school yearbook; you know everyone on it and they’re your friends,” comments Lauren.

called the “wedding of the century.” The bride wore a strapless Nina Ricci gown with a peony design in the damask fabric. “It’s my favorite flower, and short of building a hothouse, there was just no way to get them to a tropical climate,” explains Lauren, who had her dress made bigger and wider after getting a tip from Anna Wintour. “She told me, ‘You know, the dress actually is dictated by the church.’ The church had extremely high ceilings and a seven-foot wide aisle. I look back at the photos [shot by Arthur Elgort] and see that it was the perfect dress for the occasion. There’s a reason Anna is who she is.” *Vogue* featured the nuptials in a ten-page spread. Lauren shrugs off the idea that it was a fairy-tale wedding. “Every little girl dreams about her wedding,” she says. “I certainly was one of them.”

Lauren has been dubbed “the next Mrs. Astor” by *Town and Country* and made *Vanity Fair*’s International Best Dressed List in 2012. “At this point, it’s a bit like a high school yearbook; you know everyone on it and they’re your friends,” comments Lauren, whose friends all rank “wit” right up with “work ethic” when describing her. “It’s like a school play—did you make the

cut?” Although she has only one fashion rule—“try not to wear jeans”—Lauren is mindful of how she dresses even at home. “I always wanted to be sort of a chic old lady,” she says. “I’m not one to walk around in my yoga clothes all day. That’s the old-fashioned girl in me. Maybe that’s part of my Greenwich upbringing. It was very understated but women definitely took care in their homes and how they presented themselves.”

“Lauren is what I’d call a modern classicist,” comments Blasberg. “She hits all the hallmarks of traditional Americana dressing, in the vein of a Nan Kempner or Babe Paley or Carolyn Bessette Kennedy. But she’s never one to shy away from something with



Marc Jacobs mini metropolitan leather and suede perforated bag

a hint of avant-garde.” Blasberg also notes, “Lauren can make or break a trend.”

This trendsetter has not forgotten the simple joys of her childhood, including the freedom of roaming Tod’s Point and riding with pals on the train to Riverside at age nine to visit Ada’s Candy Store. “I honestly believe that independence is part of why

Switzerland. She shares that love with her mother-in-law and both have been involved with Save Venice for years. “Obviously my love of fashion brought me to the Costume Institute,” says Lauren. Moda Operandi was the lead sponsor of their “PUNK: Chaos to Couture” exhibit at the Met. Lauren’s father founded Guardian Scholars. “They take foster youth and put them through college,” explains Lauren. “We recently brought it to New Yorkers for Children, and it’s been a huge success. Our first scholar is now finishing her PhD in social work.” Lauren is also involved in the upcoming Greenwich Film Festival.

Like an editor saving a juicy nugget for the final paragraph, Lauren wraps up the interview with a tour of the Moda Operandi photo studio, where a holiday shoot for the site’s “Gift Guide” is underway. A lavish table set by entertainment expert Bronson Van Wyck forms the centerpiece of a set to rival any *Vogue* might create. A fabulously chic multi-generational and multiracial family poses beside a \$20,000 Christmas tree and a \$24,500 Foundwell bar. As Lauren enters, she might channel that Sassy editor from years before and wait for the hush after issuing directions. But, there’s no need. Everything is running perfectly smoothly already. **G**

## LAUREN’S LOCAL FAVES

*Garden Caterers*  
*Terra*  
*Abigail Fox Designs*  
*Antique &*  
*Artisan Center*  
*Picnics at Tod’s Point*

I’m so self-sufficient and self-reliant,” says Lauren. “I don’t know how that will translate in today’s society. I have friends whose kids get out of their parents’ car and are escorted across the sidewalk and into the building.” She’s also not sure about strategies to keep her kids grounded. “I’m not there yet. I’m just trying to figure out how to keep Nicolas in his toddler bed at night!”

Philanthropy is a good start. “The more you get, the more you have to give,” states Lauren. She fell in love with Venice at an early age, during excursions there from summer camp in

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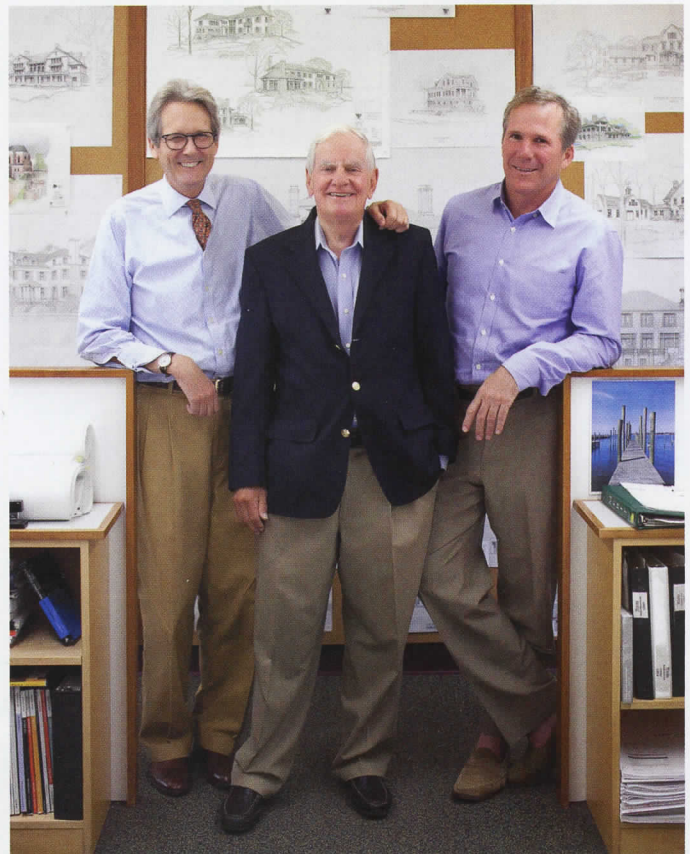
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