





Margaret at Fashion Group International's New York office

# THE POWER ISSUE 2015

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# FASHION FORCE

**President of Fashion Group International, Margaret Hayes Adame rubs elbows with the fashion elite** (from Carolina Herrera to the late, great Oscar de la Renta), but nothing intimidates this powerhouse as she influences the cutthroat world of fashion

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BY JILL JOHNSON

PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM TAUFIC



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This dynamo does business-as-usual with a touch of everyone's outspoken Aunt Margaret. Whether she is chatting with Superstar Award winner Diane von Furstenberg or up-and-comers who are barely on the radar, Margaret is Margaret—no pretense, no fake air kisses, no frills, just substance. In a low-key outfit—a black sparkly sweater revealing a triangle of red satin blouse and dressy black pants—she circulated through the crowd, stopping at each table to greet her guests as though they were sitting in her living room. Her chestnut hair is short and stylish, with not a hint of gray. Prominent dark-framed glasses recall

the 1970s yet feel au courant in a vintage way, reinforcing her approachable vibe.

sea of tables, decked out in flowers and finery, filled the floor of Cipriani Wall Street—a Greek Revivalist ballroom fit for an emperor. It was actually fashion's kings and queens who would strut the red carpet there last October, before honoring their finest at Fashion Group International's thirty-first annual Night of Stars.

Margaret Hayes Adame, president of the non-

profit organization Fashion Group International and longtime Greenwich resident, wove through the tables, seating plan in hand, inspecting place cards and overseeing the proceedings like the mother of the bride at a wedding. Only, rather than just one bride, she had dozens of A-list celebrities to keep happy, 600 guests to manage, and a full program of entertainment and award presentations to orchestrate. A lesser woman might be a tad frazzled. But Margaret Hayes Adame does not do frazzled.

Seventy feet overhead, splashed in colored lights across the walls around Cipriani's Wedgewood dome, were the sponsors' names, including Condé Nast and fashion behemoth Lord & Taylor. It was at two such retail giants, Bloomingdale's and Saks, where Margaret rose to such heights that she attained the skills and network to light up the night at Cipriani. She had no fashion pedigree to boost her up the ranks. Her story is classic American dream material: all about grit and hard work.

### FROM QUEENS TO FIFTH AVENUE

Margaret Hayes grew up in Queens, the only child of a purchasing agent for shipyard materials and a mother who worked as an administrative assistant in a real estate firm. In an era when most women were stay-

at-home moms, both of Margaret's parents worked full-time and she was responsible for taking care of the house. By thirteen, Margaret had her first job as a sales assistant in a millinery shop.

"I grew up in a Catholic school environment," says Margaret, sipping iced tea on the back patio of her Greenwich home—a brick bungalow busy with lived-in furniture, coffee table books, black-and-white framed photos (including one of Marilyn Monroe,



Margaret with designer Ralph Rucci, daughter Alex Adame and fashion powerhouse Andre Leon Talley (seated)

personally signed with a message to Margaret's father-in-law, who had remodeled the starlet's bedroom in New York). The house is devoid of any ostentation or high ceilings. She continues: "That environment was very organized and very disciplined." Those are qualities that came to define Margaret.

She obtained a job at Bloomingdale's in Manhattan, which Margaret calls "one of the best retailers in the world," and worked while attending Queens College in Flushing, New York. She studied to be a teacher and taught history for two years at a special school for

children with behavioral problems. "I realized it wasn't for me," she says.

With a background in retail, a young Margaret entered the executive training program at Bloomingdale's. "My formative years were at Bloomingdale's," says Margaret, who spent a decade there and moved up the managerial ranks to coordinator for the beauty businesses in Bloomingdale's branches. Then Margaret accepted an offer from Saks and ultimately rose to the position of senior vice-president and general manager.

Burton Tansky, who was president of Saks at the time, says, "Margaret is smart, aggressive, focused and very determined. Over the years that she worked for me, she set goals and she met them. She also had good interpersonal skills, working with the vendors, but she was demanding. Margaret understood what had to be done, which was grow the cosmetic business. She knew how to make it grow and she did it." Tansky adds, "I enjoyed working with her. We had fun along the way."

A devoted wife and mother, Margaret never felt a serious gender barrier in her career. "In over twenty-five years of retail experience, I



Major designers like Jason Wu credit Margaret with their success.

**"She is a very determined woman. She gets everything she wants."**

*—Diane von Furstenberg on Margaret's business sense*

developed some mentors within the male population. Burton Tansky is a wonderful example of a powerful person who wanted to create a balance of male and female executives. The fashion industry is very much a platform for females to succeed."

Eleanor Roosevelt sat on the original board of trustees of Fashion Group International (FGI), with seventeen other female senior executives, for that very reason. "Fashion Group International was founded in 1931, at a time when women didn't have a voice in business," explains Margaret. "For Mrs. Roosevelt, it was not about the fashion. She was involved because the

focus was on female executives and professionals. The goal was to encourage dialogue, interaction and recognition of their achievements."

The same can be said of Margaret; it's not about the fashion. She thrives running

big businesses. When the non-profit FGI recruited her in 1993, Margaret recognized what she'd be up against—"raising the funding and delivering the product [the programming]"—but also saw an opportunity to shift gears. Her husband, Omar Adame, who was a beauty executive, was diagnosed with Parkinson's in his fifties and Margaret wanted to be there to take him to his doctor's appointments, to make him dinner. "High-end retail is my love," explains Margaret, "but it was the appropriate time for me to take on a different challenge, where I could create my own environment and manage my own time. I also had a desire to become a



Margaret with Mary Hackley, Steven Kolb and Marylou Luther at Jason Wu's fashion show during Fall Fashion Week

more important force within the fashion industry.”

At the Night of Stars, it was clear that Margaret is just that: a force. Diane von Furstenberg, the woman that Top Model Karen Elson introduced as “the person who runs the fashion industry,” has this to say about Margaret: “She is a very determined woman. She gets everything she wants.” (DVF then proceeded to her assigned table and began rearranging place cards, illustrating how apt that statement was for more than one woman in the room.)

Margaret, in her opening speech, highlighted FGI's growth since 1931: “Today we are an international organization with twenty-eight regions and membership of 5,000—men and women engaged in fashion and design. Our mission, which is to help our members advance their careers, is augmented by a yearlong calendar of programs, symposiums, trend overviews and design awards...”

## THE BUSINESS OF FASHION

Fashion Group International has its place in history as the first nonprofit fashion organization established by and for women—and those women were all powerhouses. Alongside Eleanor Roosevelt were impressive female founding members, including cosmetics pioneer Elizabeth Arden, Dorothy Shaver (the first CEO of Lord & Taylor), costume designer Edith Head and Claire McCardell (one of the first American female designers). But in this day and age, Margaret recognized the contributions men in fashion could make to FGI and opened up membership to them soon after coming on board. “Now we have both male and female members, from CEOs of major retail and manufacturing and design businesses down to entrepreneurs with their own businesses,” Margaret explains, “so it's broader based.”

Margaret also made creating successful events a priority. “I focused a lot on bringing more business

intelligence to the community,” she says. “It’s a place for people to interact between all of the four major classifications—apparel, accessories, beauty and interior design. We create many business, award and scholarship programs.”

In addition to Night of Stars, FGI’s Rising Star event has grown into an important occasion on the fashion industry’s calendar. Margaret explains: “Rising Star helps support the development of young professionals in multiple categories: women’s apparel, men’s apparel, fashion accessories, fine jewelry, cosmetic and beauty, interior design/architecture, retail entities, and young entrepreneurs who have a strong business ethic. We give a very special award, with a singular sponsor, for a powerful and innovative business concept. Rising Stars can only have been in business one to six years.”

FGI members vote on the winners and among them are newcomers who subsequently became big names, including Tory Burch (2005), Phillip Lim (2006), Jason Wu (2008), Joseph Altuzarra (2010, winner of a Fashion Star award in 2014), William Sofield (2002,

Margaret recognizes how hard designers work as well. “Perhaps the untutored might think that fashion designers lead glamorous lives of red carpet events, parties and socializing with the rich and famous, when nothing could be further from the truth,” she says. “In reality, designers are responsible for producing eight collections a year, one right after the other—an unimaginable output of creativity along with attendant production, selling and shipping challenges.”

While FGI clearly helps emerging talent, Margaret also emphasizes engaging the younger generation. “Part of our challenge, as an eighty-five-year-old organization, is to continue to move it forward,” she says. Her strategy includes a focus on social media, a committee focused on drawing Millennial speakers, events geared toward the younger set and an open mind: “I have the ability to listen and always had an open-door policy. I’m willing to take suggestions, and I’m a big fan of innovation and creative thought.”

“As always, Margaret is a woman who is making things relevant,” says Marigay McKee, the new president

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Interior Design Star in 2014), as well as successful concepts like Rent the Runway.

Jason Wu says, “I was completely humbled and flattered to be recognized by my industry peers so early on in my career, and receiving the prestigious Rising Star award really gave my career and brand an immediate boost.” Wu continues, “Margaret has been a pillar of the New York fashion industry and has done so much to promote established and young talent. Her contribution to our industry has been and continues to be truly invaluable.”

Tory Burch echoes those sentiments: “Being recognized by our peers was a great moment for us that definitely had ripple effects.” She adds, “Margaret is an extraordinary leader who works incredibly hard. I admire all that she and FGI do to support young designers, whether it’s through educational programs, events or symposiums.”



Margaret with designer Marc Jacobs

of Saks, during the Night of Stars gala. “All of my team tell me Margaret is making everything very glam, very fashion forward and relevant for an audience today.”

Night of Stars, which Margaret notes is “the singularly most important event for us,” engaged young and old with the humor of Barneys’ Simon Doonan, the beauty of presenters like Karen Elson and Isabella Rossellini, the cool factor of music-world presenters Mary J. Blige and Debbie Harry, and the poignancy of Diane von Furstenberg’s words on the loss of her dear friend Oscar de la Renta. The evening focused on talent—honoring international fashion designers, architectural/interior designers, as well as leaders in beauty, brand vision, humanitarianism, sustainability and corporate leadership—but also highlighted how the fashion world has heart. The most important fashion media in the world were there to take note.

Most of *Vogue*’s masthead, from Grace Coddington to Hamish Bowles, attended. Katie Couric was among the presenters. *Harper’s Bazaar* editor-in-chief, Glenda Bailey, there to accept the Fashion Oracle award, lauded FGI’s president from the red carpet: “Margaret has done a wonderful job at Fashion Group. She’s created an organization that really promotes our industry. And what I like about it more than anything is that it’s a total celebration of everything we love about fashion.”

### FASHION FLASHBACK & FORECAST

Thinking back on pivotal moments in fashion, Margaret says, “Two interesting events come to mind. The 1994 Fashion Group Night of Stars when Ferre (then with Dior), Galante, Givenchy, Lacroix, Lagerfeld, Ungaro,

Venet, Versace and de la Renta (then with Balmain) came to New York to present their collections at a live haute couture show. This was a never-before, once-in-a-lifetime situation. The collections of nine European couturiers were shown at a single event, and all but two of the couturiers themselves were present.

“The second is an event that truly revolutionized the international fashion community. In 1973, a fundraiser for the restoration of the palace of Versailles presented five French couturiers competing, on the runway, with five American designers. Among those designers was the

multi-award-winning, black American Stephen Burrows who, along with eight tall, willowy and gorgeous black supermodels, stole the show, the applause and the headlines in what came to be known as ‘The Taking of Versailles.’”

Recently changes in the industry, not surprisingly, relate to the Internet. “Live streaming from the runways, e-commerce and social media have, in my view, revolutionized the fashion industry,” comments Margaret. “Runway collections, once attended mainly by buyers and editors, can now be attended ‘virtually’ by consumers everywhere. Social

media now gives consumers the power to influence the ways in which fashion is marketed and e-commerce has changed dramatically the ways in which consumers shop.

“I think that e-tailers will continue to grab an even greater share of the consumer dollar away from brick-and-mortar retailers as consumers shop more and more from their technological devices. To lure shoppers to their stores, brick-and-mortar operations will have to provide the kinds of experiences that make the trip worthwhile.”



Margaret with Katie Couric



Margaret and the Fashion Group International team ring NASDAQ's closing bell.

As far as the fashion itself, Margaret predicts: “As with accessories, clothing with embedded technological features will become more available and much in demand.”

Margaret prefers not to name names when it comes to her favorite up-and-coming designers, but she will say, “Stores in our area, such as Richards, carry many designers—actually not emerging talents, but well-established designers—whom I very much admire and whom Fashion Group has honored over the years.”

### FAMILY LIFE IN GREENWICH

As she tells it, Margaret has lived in Greenwich “forever.” She and her husband Omar Adame, who is of Mexican descent and grew up in the Bronx, married forty years ago and chose to settle in Greenwich. “It was commutable and was a wonderful, eclectic community,” explains Margaret. “I love the fact that it’s sophisticated yet still has some aspect of a countrified existence.”

Margaret and Omar’s daughter, Alexandra, “was twelve or thirteen when Omar retired,” says Margaret, talking about the family-work balance. This helped

“Social media now gives consumers the power to influence the ways in which fashion is marketed and e-commerce has changed dramatically the ways in which consumers shop.”

—Margaret, on technology’s influence on fashion



with the juggling act, though according to her daughter, Margaret was a master at keeping all balls in the air.

Alex, a lovely down-to-earth young woman with an easy demeanor and diligent attitude (she snapped photos through half of the Night of Stars gala), brightens when discussing her mother. "She's really inspirational in the way that she manages her time. She's a marvel in terms of how much she gets done each day. Then she still has the energy to work all night and help me with things and help my father, because he's not well and needs some help. Then she'll be up at 6 a.m. to go to a board meeting the next day. She does that all week long.

## Fashion Group International has its place in history as the first nonprofit fashion organization established by and for women.

"Growing up she was always there for me for all the special events and when I needed something. Since I'm an only child, she's always been very focused on me anyway. The spotlight is on you whether you like it or not!"


Alex attended Convent of the Sacred Heart and, like her mother, developed a work ethic early on. "I started working when I was twelve or thirteen. My mom had a friend with a retail store, Steilmann on West Putnam Avenue, years ago. She got me a weekend job sorting clothes for minimum wage. I always understood working is part of life."

Alex now has a unique business called the Dressing Room on Orchard Street in Manhattan. "It's a three-part retail environment," she explains. "It was created to

provide a platform for local and emerging designers in the form of a cooperative boutique, where they could rent space or sell their goods on consignment and get their product out in front of customers. And there's also a full bar so friends and customers can enjoy a drink. In the downstairs area, we have secondhand and vintage items, so anyone on a budget can come in with five dollars and find a treasure."

Having tagged along with her mom to couture shows as a child, a fashion career "seemed natural. Growing up around my mom and my father, who was in the cosmetics industry, I hung out at Saks Fifth Avenue and grew up reading *Women's Wear Daily* and *W*, thinking those were the regular newspapers," says Alex.

Margaret is back on her patio in Greenwich, overlooking a lovely backyard with accentuated with roses. When asked what she is most proud of, Margaret responds, "My family. Doing the best for your family is the most important thing in life. I worked a lot; you have to be able to judge how you manage both." She comes back to Omar—now resting inside, dependent on her to care for him—as the person who helped her do that. "My husband gave Alex her first bath," says Margaret. "I was too scared. He also cooked better than I do (and I'm pretty good). He was a solid partner in every way." Tears well up in Margaret's eyes, and she struggles to speak. "He had a big influence on my career development." She takes a moment to compose herself.

In the fashion world, the powerful Margaret Hayes Adame stands tall like one of the towering marble columns outside Cipriani Wall Street, but just as the fashion industry's heart came through at the Night of Stars, so shines a woman with heart, in her home, nestled in Greenwich. 

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