

Q&A With Cynthia Martens

Published by *Katten Kattwalk* | Issue 24

Summer 2022

[Background]

Let's explore your path to law. What drew you to the profession?

I still remember my college roommate's reaction when I decided to major in Italian language and literature. "What are you going to do with that?" she asked incredulously. I didn't know, exactly, but Italian certainly changed my life.

My career has not followed a conventional trajectory. My first job after college was as a news desk assistant at *Time Magazine*'s Chicago bureau, which closed about six months after my arrival (coincidentally!). From there, I moved to Milan without a precise plan, but determined to get a job in Italy. I found an internship at the Versace press office and then two other jobs in fashion public relations, at Neil Barrett and Valentino. I did a lot of translating press releases and ghostwriting designer press interviews, and also was involved in organizing press and photographer accreditations at various runway shows. Each of those jobs was different. Versace was a big-name brand, but family-run. Neil Barrett was an edgier, niche label and I wore a lot of different hats. I was shipping clothes all over the world for editorial and celebrity shoots and once served as impromptu fit model for some shorts the designer was urgently sending a pop star. Valentino was in a transition phase, as the founder had recently retired and two new designers were at the creative helm.

I learned a lot about the industry in those roles and ultimately was recruited to work in the Milan bureau of *Women's Wear Daily*, which I loved. My boss noticed I was good at covering legal topics and encouraged me to develop that angle. I took a train down to Prato, a traditional textile hub in Tuscany, and interviewed the prosecutor overseeing various sweatshop cases. I spoke with European Union lawmakers about the disputes surrounding country-of-origin labeling, and with an intellectual property lawyer about all the Italian fashion brands funding the restoration of cultural heritage sites. Then, a freelance piece I was working on for *The New York Times Magazine* was cut at the fact-checking stage because of defamation concerns. I realized I was interested in

understanding *that* better, too. I thought: if I don't study law now, I'm never going to do it. So, I went to law school in New York.

You've had a fascinating career trajectory on multiple tracks: journalism, fashion industry, language translation, law. What's the common thread and how did you find that connection?

The fil rouge is a fascination with how people communicate ideas and culture. I've always loved to write; as a child, I made my own newspapers and magazines by cutting up catalogs and writing copy. My love of fashion is related to a broader appreciation for art. I view fashion as a form of visual communication, one that plays an important role in human society. Think of historical sumptuary laws, which restricted who could wear certain colors or materials. Laws express the evolving ideas we have about how to live together. As for translation, I spent my formative years in Paris, speaking English at home and French at school. I developed a sort of dual identity and continue to find languages extremely interesting. To quote Italian author Umberto Eco: translating is "to say almost the same thing."

[Practical Experience]

Many attorneys who regularly write say the practice increases their breadth of knowledge, especially in a niche practice. How has your journalism impacted (or improved) your legal practice?

Journalism and law demand similar skills. You need to be able to read and absorb information quickly, to train yourself on unfamiliar topics. You need to think critically: what do I know, and what else would be good to know about this? What question haven't I answered? What are my blind spots here? And you need to learn how to create rapport with people. No one is going to want to talk to you if you make them uncomfortable, though of course, the flip side of that is that some conversations are going to be tough by virtue of the subject matter. What I really love about both fields, however, is their connection to public debate: how the world is, and how it should be. Another thing journalism taught me is not to take professional criticism personally. I've had editors make extensive edits to my articles, and earlier on it was hard not to feel upset, because writing feels so personal. But good editors can teach you a lot, and all writers need editors.

COVID-19 threw the world a curveball. How did the pandemic impact your practice areas and how is the fashion industry responding?

The fashion industry had to respond to a series of sudden changes in consumer buying patterns, workplace safety needs and work-from-home policies. At the height of the pandemic, I read a lot of discussion about how everyone would only want to wear athleisure, but now the consensus is that

people are celebrating a return to socializing with bright colors and festive attire. And that it's more important than ever for companies to facilitate digital sales.

What challenges have you faced and overcome in your practice?

I started studying law later than many of my classmates. I was pregnant during my first year of law school, which made jumping through all the hoops of internships and exams that much more difficult. My son was about a year and a half old when I took the bar. But in many other respects I was privileged to be able to take on the challenge. I have two young children now. Juggling professional life with family needs, especially in a small New York City apartment, means there is never a dull moment. Still, I know I'm not the only one in that boat!

[Personal Side]

What's one thing people – colleagues and clients – would find surprising about you?

I met my husband on a flight from Milan to New York in 2010. He was part of a group of Italian actors participating in the Lincoln Center summer festival. We were next to each other; my mom takes credit for that because she helped book the ticket and chose the exact seat.

What are your passion projects?

Amateur photography. I like running, spinning, yoga and dance, when there's time. I'm a big animal lover and always enjoy curling up to watch a movie or read a book with my cat.

IP-wise, what I find most interesting is the tension between encouraging individual creativity through exclusive rights and allowing society as a whole to benefit from innovation and the free exchange of ideas.

I'm excited to join Katten, which focuses on many areas of law that I enjoy, and look forward to this next chapter.

To read *The Katten Kattwalk* | Issue 24, please click here.

Attorney advertising. Published as a source of information only. The material contained herein is not to be construed as legal advice or opinion.

©2026 Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP.

All rights reserved. Katten refers to Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP and the affiliated partnership as explained at katten.com/disclaimer.