



Model Martina Seligova and designer Sinead Doyle



Designer Yvonne Ross and model Alex Anton

Young designers are breaki

Attempting to forge a career in fashion is never easy, but with the country in the grip of the worst recession in living memory, it is particularly difficult for the current crop of young Irish fashion and accessory designers. Fashion Break Through is an attempt to cut through some of the doom and gloom, and give up-and-coming Irish talent an opportunity to raise their profile.

According to founder Lisa Shawgi – herself a knitwear designer – the event is designed to showcase some of the best emerging talent on the Irish design scene. “It’s all about raising awareness and creating opportunity,” she says.

As well as a trade show at the Loft Market in the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre, the event includes a pop-up boutique on the ground floor of Film Base in Temple Bar, which will run until May 1 and which is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5.30pm. *Agenda* spoke to four of the designers parti-

cipating in Fashion Break Through about the challenges involved in forging a name for themselves in the fashion industry, and their strategies for surviving the economic slowdown.

Lisa Shawgi

Maintaining close relationships with suppliers and customers will be vital for any young designer when it comes to surviving the recession, according to Lisa Shawgi. “Trying to launch your own label is difficult at any time, but it is particularly hard at the moment, and I have seen a drop-off in sales at trade shows,” she says. “I think designers need to look at how they are working, and put a lot of time into maintaining a good working relationship with their clients, be that boutique owners or individual customers.”

Born to Irish and Egyptian-Sudanese parents, Shawgi spent most of her childhood in the Sudan before moving to Dublin as a young teenager. She graduated from the

National College of Art and Design in 2005, and worked for Lainey Keogh and Vera Wang before starting her own line.

“I wasn’t planning to become a knitwear designer, but I started experimenting with knitwear during my final year in college and found that it really suited me,” she says. “I love the textural element of knitwear, and the ability it gives you to work with fabric. Knitwear has definitely moved away from the stereotype of the big, chunky jumper – there’s so much you can do with it in terms of construction.”

Shawgi’s prices range from €40 for fingerless gloves (“they are really popular”), to around €500 for hand-finished, full-length dresses. “The hand-finished pieces are popular with more mature customers looking for investment pieces, while younger girls love the little dresses, which are priced at around €180 and are really popular for weddings and other occasions,” she says.

“The pieces are very fine and elegant, and some of them are quite

lace-like. I like to mix unusual shades like acidic brights with more earthy tones, and in the current collection I’ve got some lovely reds mixed with greens.”

Shawgi’s range is stocked by Lucy Erridge in Adare, Co Limerick; Lisbeth Mulcahy Weavings in Dingle, Co Kerry; Designer Knitwear Direct in Dalkey, Co Dublin; and the Loft Market at the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre in Dublin.

Sinead Doyle

Sinead Doyle’s show was one of the highlights of Dublin Fashion Week, with her very modern take on classic tailoring proving to be quite a talking point. Based in Dublin, Doyle studied fashion at the Limerick School of Art and Design, and before graduating spent time working with London designers Preen, Michelle Lowe-Holder and menswear designer Siv Stoldal.

Her stint with Stoldal prompted her to specialise in menswear dur-

ing her final year in college, and she credits the Norwegian designer with inspiring what she describes as her “long-lasting obsession” with tailoring, finish and detail. Four months working at the Venetian costume and couture house Atelier Nicolao boosted her knowledge of couture finishing, bodice making and corsetry, and she is now putting those skills to use in her own women’s daywear collection.

She describes her range as professional daywear with a fashion awareness. “Women don’t respond to traditional tailoring in the same way that men do – you need to add a twist, something a little bit different, to excite them,” she says.

Prices in the current collection range from €100 to around €550. “I’ve used a lot of luxury fabrics in this collection, and that does push the price up – one of the coats, for example, uses a cashmere mix,” she says. “Next season’s collection is very much in the early stages, but I’ve been looking at a lot of Japanese pattern cutting books, and I’m planning to focus on high qual-