

How to bring personality to a corporate wardrobe



Anna Berkeley

Ask a stylist

I have a portfolio career but my roles require very different things. In one I am working in a corporate environment and in the other I am in the art world working alongside other creatives. How do I look appropriate for both? I am very creative naturally and don't want to lose my sense of self in the corporate world.

Dressing for ourselves is a complicated issue. I am always saying to clients that we should bring our personalities to the way we dress. To start, consider three words that describe your positive characteristics. You might say funny, determined and garrulous or intelligent, kind and disciplined. If coming up with these words makes you squirm then ask a close friend for help. Once you have these, turn your attention to how you want others to perceive you. When you walk into a work meeting, what do you want your clients and colleagues to think? You might say professional, confident and put-together or competent, strong and elegant. We then need to marry the words and use them as criteria for making outfits or buying new clothes.

I would try and keep the two working wardrobes separate if you can — especially if time is tight. Ideally hang your outfits together or take photos so you can pull them quickly. Doing this also helps keep your mindset on the



Guests at the Frieze art fair
Sarah Lee/GuardianEyeView

role for that day. For the corporate days, add in just one piece that represents your artistic side. It could be amazing earrings, an interesting ring, a colourful or unique shoe, a printed scarf or blouse. Remember these can be talking points — especially jewellery. Nothing better than someone eagerly asking where you got that ring, earring or necklace to get you off to a good start. It always makes my day, anyway!

Annika Inez sculpted earrings add an edge to a plain outfit, and suit a large frame (Annika Inez 14ct gold-filled large endless curve earrings, £180, libertylondon.com).

Louise Olsen makes exceptional shapes. Her wrap ring will get you noticed (£335, dinosaurdesigns.co.uk).

Make a pop with a coloured shoe — good with navy, charcoal and cream (LK Bennett Beatrice pink suede mid-heel courts are a good option, £229, lkbenne.com). Or choose an interesting design such as these Dior Déesse pumps (£790, dior.com).

Without seeing your shape it's hard to be precise, but I would suggest you focus on a specific look or uniform, if you like. It could be tailoring — whether that's a suit (and I know everyone is banging on about the demise of the suit, but I love them for their instant smartness) or a tailored trouser and shirt, knit or top for a more relaxed option. Alternatively, it could be more feminine — a dress or a skirt with a blouse or knit. Dresses are often easier as it's just one piece.

For your creative meetings be bold. Colour! Pattern! Silhouette! Take your cues from stylist JJ Martin (although perhaps not all of them all at once) and choose one of the above to have fun with. Colour-blocking looks modern, plus it makes you look taller and leaner. You could opt for co-ords — a matching top and trouser in the same fabric or simply a toning top and trouser.

Joseph is masterful at this. The label's silk co-ords are beautiful — the Hulin trousers have three matching tops to choose from (£365, joseph-fashion.com). Alternatively, select a dress with a



From top: Lee Mathews dress, £590; Joseph trousers, £365; Dior Déesse pump, £790; Louise Olsen ring, £335

coloured shoe and a soft fun bag. Add a blazer if it's cooler. This Lee Mathews pink and yellow is divine — best for straight-line figures (brownfashion.com). Pair with Scarosso's Hailey fuchsia sandals (£325, scarosso.com).

Sometimes it's best to let the shape of the clothes do the talking. Use asymmetry — a trick for adding curve to straight-line figures, or for moulding around curvy ones. Or go full fashion with an exaggerated shoulder. Choose a wide-leg trouser or fuller A-line skirt to counteract the built-up shoulder line.

If print is your thing, choose a print you love. This sounds obvious but it also needs to love you. Does it suit your frame? Clients often buy prints they love only to realise they don't look right on the body. Larger frames need large-scale prints and small ones dainty-sized ones.

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Tucked away on the top floor of the townhouse where Christian Dior founded his couture fashion house in 1946, there is a jewel box-like apartment with a marble bathtub, lacquered walls and a salon overlooking a private roof garden.

Dior's most favoured clients will soon be able to stay here and have the renovated 30 Avenue Montaigne all to themselves overnight for a meal cooked by celebrity chef or a visit to the ateliers where made-to-measure gowns and jewellery are crafted. The suite is the most over-the-top part of a two-and-a-half-year-long renovation of the complex of buildings that form not only Dior's spiritual home but also long housed its top-grossing store.

The renovation also symbolises the unbridled ambition that Dior owner LVMH, the world's biggest luxury group by sales, has for its second-most valuable brand after its powerhouse Louis Vuitton. Although the group declined to disclose how much it spent.

"Dreams do not have a price tag!" says chief executive Pietro Beccari in an interview at Dior's headquarters. "We have to create something to set ourselves apart that nobody will ever be able to copy or imitate."

That was the pitch that the 54-year-old Italian executive says he made to LVMH owner Bernard Arnault shortly after taking over at Dior in 2018. He cast the Avenue Montaigne overhaul as a key part of his bold plan to grow Dior's market share in all of its categories: women's and men's fashion, leather goods, jewellery, and homewares.

Such ambition is typical of the kinetic Beccari, who has earned a reputation in the luxury sector as a rainmaker. LVMH recruited him in 2006 from consumer goods maker Henkel, where he hawked mass-market shampoos and hair dye, and named him as head of marketing and communications for Louis Vuitton. In 2012 he was promoted to lead Fendi.

"Don't think big — think huge," he often tells his staff.

That ethos has paid off at Dior's fashion and accessories business, which has been on a growth tear under Beccari. Although LVMH does not disclose results of individual brands, investment bank Stifel estimates that it has more than doubled its sales from €2.9bn in 2018 to €6.2bn in 2021. The separately managed Dior fragrance and cosmetics business brought in €3.2bn in revenues last year, roughly the same as before the pandemic, according to Stifel.

Taking beauty and fashion together, Dior is now within striking distance of reaching "megabrand" status, which in luxury means annual sales of over €10bn. That has been achieved only by Louis Vuitton and privately held Chanel, although Kering's Gucci and Hermès are close.



Dreaming big at Dior

Interview | Pietro Beccari reflects on his brand's rapid rise as he unveils his most daring project yet. By Leila Abboud

Working in tandem with Maria Grazia Chiuri, the artistic director of womenswear, and Kim Jones for menswear, Beccari has taken a brand long considered the epitome of French high fashion and turned it into something louder, faster and more profitable. "Dior has become bolder and more aggressive in both aesthetics and commercial push," says Luca Solca, analyst at Bernstein.

Asked what had driven Dior's recent success, Beccari says it is "a combination of many, many things", chief among them getting serious about ecommerce and investing in technology.

The products have also been given an overhaul. Under Chiuri, Dior has embedded feminist messaging into its clothing — not always to critical acclaim — and expanded its handbag line to rely less on the iconic Lady Dior bag. It now sells multiple models, including the laptop-sized Book Tote and the rebooted, curvy Saddle Bag, expanding its presence in accessories as the most profitable luxury brands have long done.

Jones has brought a modern vibe to Dior menswear via collaborations with Nike and high-profile artists such as Amoako Bofo and Peter Doig. That has helped multiply the size of the business "by several times", says Beccari.

"The basis of our success is the creative side," he enthuses. But there is little doubt that it is also down to Beccari's skill as a manager and marketer.

Born in a village of around 1,200 residents in the Parma region, he has the

discipline and ethos of an athlete — as a young man he briefly played professional football in Italy's second division and says the experience shaped how he manages people. "You must be a team, no one wins alone, you never give up, you fight, you must take risks," he says.

People who know him say Beccari gets to the office every day around 7am, and belying Italian stereotypes, he drinks no coffee and usually eats lunch at his desk. He met his wife Elisabetta when they were in primary school, and they have three children together.

Beccari's time in the consumer goods sector grounded him in mass-market sales techniques honed at dairy group Parmalat in the US and at Henkel in Germany. "It taught me a lot of things that you should not do in luxury," he says wryly. "In consumer marketing you have to hammer the same message in different ways and incoherence is not allowed. Luxury brands are more complex, like a multi-faceted diamond, so some incoherence can even create desirability... You have to put chaos into your business."

During the first two years of the pandemic, Beccari invested heavily on everything from fashion shows to influencer marketing despite repeated store closures and supply chain disruptions. "We shouted when everyone was quiet," he says, implicitly critiquing some competitors who cut back on live shows and product launches. "Speed, action and risk-taking are part of today's world if

you want to succeed." The tactics worked, according to Morgan Stanley analyst Edouard Aubin, who estimates that Dior sales jumped by around 50 per cent between 2019 and 2021. He reckons Dior was "the fastest-growing leading fashion and leather goods brand in the world over the past two years".

Mario Ortelli, who advises luxury companies on strategy and acquisitions, says of Beccari: "He is a risk taker, and it has paid off. Now the only question is avoiding overexposure after such a period of rapid growth. Can he keep this magic over the long run?"

Asked what his dream for Dior was in terms of size, Beccari declined to say.

"If Dior were still listed on the stock exchange, I would strongly encourage people to buy the stock," he says. "We still have huge opportunities in many categories, and the sky's the limit in terms of what we can sell at what price."

He cited the example of a yellow diamond that Dior will sell at 30 Avenue Montaigne for around \$50m.

Dior also only has 240 stores globally, he added, which suggests that a retail expansion could significantly add to sales. That is roughly on par with Hermès's 221 and Chanel's 273, according to Stifel, but far fewer than Gucci's 488 or Louis Vuitton's 478.

The 30 Avenue Montaigne renovation

'Arnault is a very intuitive entrepreneur, able to decide with his gut when it comes to picturing the future'

is something that only a megabrand could take on, says Beccari. "Today Dior has the economic power that allows us to do unthinkable projects," he says.

Yet convincing Arnault to greenlight it was not easy. "Economically speaking, the project financially would have never made sense for the smaller Dior business that we had back then," Beccari says. "But Mr Arnault is a very intuitive entrepreneur who is able to decide with his gut when it comes to picturing the future."

The building has a rich back-story that Beccari wanted to use to stoke the Dior mystique that keeps luxury fans coming back to the brand. Christian Dior showed his collections to Europe's postwar elite here, and Dior staffers joke his ghost can be heard rattling around the top floor atelier where skilled *petit mains* have been stitching creations for 75 years. Although the renovation has tripled the selling space to 2,300 square metres, Beccari refuses to call 30 Avenue Montaigne a boutique because it contains much more than that.

There are three lush interior gardens and pleasant places to hang out like a brightly coloured restaurant and a bar with a pâtisserie — nods to Christian Dior's love of nature and his sweet tooth. Visitors can also check out a museum on the history of the brand and its founder that will display a rotating collection of gowns and artefacts like the designer's early sketches of "New Look" dresses with cinched waists and full skirts.

On the upper floors, Dior's skilled staffers will be working at the couture atelier and a new one for jewellery. "I think many industry observers or our competitors will see this place as something completely new in the universe of luxury," he says.

None of LVMH's other brands have an equivalent mixed-use space from which to tell their whole story, although the group's €750m renovation of department store La Samaritaine was also ambitious. "Our job is a continuous quest of seeking balance between tradition and modernity," says Beccari. "If you are the artistic director, if you're a CEO, that's the most difficult part of the job."

Main: Dior chief Pietro Beccari in his office, photographed for the FT by Elliott Verdier

Right: the renovated galleries and showrooms of 30 Avenue Montaigne
Kristen Pelou

Below: Dior autumn/winter 2022
Frédérique Dumoulin

