

Queen of fashion brands strategy and expansion

– *Camille Maquin*

Camille is an inspirational and professional young woman who has started her career in the fashion industry nearly a decade ago. Her work experience includes working for brands like Hermès, Chanel, SMCP, ba&sh, and she has just recently joined AMI Paris where she is responsible for the brand's operations and international development.



We met in Paris a couple of years ago during the fashion week SS19 – September 2018. Fashion week is manic period of time, but Camille was professional, prepared and open to listen to the opportunity to expand the brand ba&sh to the Czech Republic.

She said that our presentation of Kotva Prague department store project was so convincing, she would make time to visit, and she did, in December 2018. Soon, we built partnership beyond the work relationship and as we both re-call our first meeting – it was love at the first sight.

Would you introduce yourself, Camille?

I was born in South of France to family of doctors, teachers and military professionals. I guess this is where I learnt and mastered my organisational skills and established my set of values! None of my family members were in business, but I was fascinated with the world of commerce and eager to discover how it works. Especially in the fashion world as I was very receptive to the brands narratives. Naturally I took the way of a business school in Paris.

I started my career with luxury brands, Hermès, Chanel, and then joined affordable luxury brands: SMCP and ba&sh, I am currently working for AMI Paris – which is truly beautiful brand – inside out.

What I realised is my appreciation of the entrepreneurial creative brand with strong purpose where every member has big part and responsibility in creating and developing the story.

I have experience from different business functions from finance, strategy, development, and sales, and all this knowledge has helped me to evaluate and drive brands towards the aimed results. I see myself as a **conductor of orchestra**.

What made you to decide for the career in retail? And what do you enjoy the most?

From the very beginning I knew I wanted to be linked to a tangible product and experience. I need to be anchored in our multi sensorial world. Working in finance or technology would have been too abstract in relations to my personality. Moreover, Retail is a perfect combination of science and emotional human experience. You may set the right merchandise at the right place at the right price, but you will never 100% master the client feeling when he meets your product. This is especially true in fashion retail and I love this dose of human subjectivity. It is a strong injection of **aesthetic in business**. Every fashion retail professional uses his/her left and right brain at all times. **You also lived and work abroad, where, and what did you learn about yourself and working internationally?**

I love this question. I used to live abroad for over 5 years –in India the UK, and Asia – Singapore and Hong Kong. I feel strong connection to Asian culture. I am also grateful that thanks to my roles, I could work within Europe, Russia, Africa.

While travelling so much for business, I learnt there is no need to over adapt the ways of working, presenting, negotiating. In the core essence of humanity, we are the same. Everywhere in the world people seek trust, authenticity and reliability, including in business interactions. Keeping your word, moral commitment, even if not formalised in a contract, is critical to success on the long term. Faithful to this principle, I was lucky to build a long-lasting businesses relationship, which for some of them actually became genuine friendships.

However, it would be wrong to say all cultures are interacting the same way. What deeply sets them apart is what I call the “*intimacy space*”. I recommend reading book by Edward T. Hall, “The Hidden Dimension”. It demonstrates how man’s use of space can affect personal and business relations, architecture, city planning etc. It really helps people working in cross cultural environment understand the importance of this invisible territory while respecting the local etiquette. For example, in China, the seating plan in a meeting is very important. The most important guest seats opposite to the door, with the host on its left.

Based on your experience, what do you think is important in retail?

Hmmm, that is super interesting. I see two main elements: authenticity and omnichannel.

“**Authenticity**” has been at the center of attention and debates recently, for a good reason. However, it is crucial for brand to understand what authenticity means for them, what do they stand for, why they do what they do, and to act and communicate upon that to all stakeholders. They should also make sure their retail concepts 100% convey this authenticity and not fall in the easy way of gimmick or Instagram-friendly concepts. The first objective of retail stores is to tell a story, your unique brand story. Great challenges ahead for retail architects!

Second element: **omnichannel**. The situation of COVID lockdown revived the long-lasting debate of retail vs. ecommerce. Actually, we have never needed the

combination of both as much as now. Omnichannel helps tackle two of 2020 biggest challenges: ease the customer's life and optimize stocks.

What is your main focus now? What keeps you busy?

Earlier this year I joined AMI Paris the nicest brand I have the opportunity to work for. Actually, only a couple of weeks before the lockdown. Settling in the business and new team in these unusual times was experience I will never forget. Thanks to the entire team, we learnt that even the challenging times can be managed and overcome with true partnership, passion, dedication and collaboration across the teams within the company but also external partners.

I guess this sense of responsibility and sympathy is rooted in the brand's DNA. AMI means "friend" in French. It offers a stylish and comprehensive vision of fashion, a rare union of casual and chic, and the promise of high-quality products. I am responsible for brand's development and to create the structure within the company to support this goal.

What books are you now reading, and would recommend us?

I am currently reading book by Dana Thomas *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes*.

The author offers a realistic picture of social and environmental practices in the fashion industry and shows sustainable alternatives for the future. At some point, fashion industry will have to change – sooner or later, and re-consider its massive impact.

COVID19 pandemic has been the occasion of a necessary introspection for many industry players and will hopefully spark a sustainability awakening. We saw many bold statements during the lockdown, claimed commitments to adjust the business strategies. These declarations are a first step. It will be important for businesses to follow up.

How do you keep the balance between work, and your private time?

I feel lucky because I am fulfilled with my professional choices so far and work has never been a burden. I have realized though how important it is to "unplug" yourself from times to times, especially in an era when notifications rule the day. This constant flow prevents us from standing back, looking at the big picture and coming back with new ideas.

Personally, I have 2 tricks to recharge myself. I love visiting my family in South of France as often as possible. Being in the middle of the vineyards with no one working in business is a wealth of refreshment. Second trick: go to places where mobile devices don't work. In my case, I practice technical scuba diving quite often, in France and abroad. It is another kind of yoga: you must focus, breathe and meditate! Hope they will not invent waterproof iPhones soon.

Who inspires you, and why?

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This is a lovely question. My first and forever inspiration is my mum, Myriam. She was this kind of magnetic person, naturally drawing people around her thanks to her invincible optimism, intelligence, and her wise perspective on life. She also handed me over the passion for work and the claim for independence, materially and spiritually speaking. She is not with us anymore, but she remains my **Northern Star** at all times.

More recently I have the chance to work with greatly inspiring people: the duo at the helm of AMI Paris, Alexandre Mattiussi and Nicolas Santi-Weil. They are both visionary, creative and pragmatic; and constantly drive the brand forward. Going through the COVID crisis by their side was the real demonstration that **you can make sustainable business choices with a people-first approach**, remaining faithful to your core values.

What would be an advice you want to share with us?

It stands in two words: **Know yourself**. Whatever you do, do it in line with who you are and what you stand for. It is a life-long process of discovery, but extremely important.

It was a life changing moment when I learnt I am in the introvert side of life! It does not mean shyness, it means I should manage my energy level in certain way, and need “me time” regularly to be best version of who I am.

Is there any question you want me to ask you?

We are having this conversation post-COVID 19 lockdown. **“How do you think that the retail industry will integrate the lessons learnt in the past couple of months?”** Now, this is a question I do not have a definitive answer myself, but am encouraging conversation with business professionals to learn how we must tackle the tremendous social and environmental challenges ahead: carbon impact, plastic pollution, public transport, social mixites, and gender. As I mentioned, Retail being so connected to reality, it has a great civilian responsibility but also a step ahead to learn about the new ways to operate, trade, and educate customers.

And you could also ask me when do I come to see you in Prague. To which my answer would be – as soon as possible, Lenka – and I cannot wait!