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OF GUCCI

FRIDA GIANNINI: PORTRAIT OF A DESIGNER

If anyone can define modern Italian fashion and style, it is surely Frida Giannini, who before reaching the age of 35 was named the Creative Director of Gucci, one of Italy's most renowned fashion houses. Hers has been a meteoric career. Barely a decade after graduation, she took her first runway bow after her debut ready-to-wear collection for Gucci, ushering in a new era at this Florentine house—a sophisticated balancing act of Italian tradition with innovation, craftsmanship with modernity.

As a teenager growing up in Rome, Frida would ride her Vespa scooter through the fabled Renaissance streets en route to Rome's Fashion Academy. After college, she joined Fendi, becoming designer of leather goods and developing profound knowledge of haute gamme Italian know-how. The daughter of an architect father and art history professor mother, Frida was hand-picked by Gucci in September 2002 to be its Handbag Design Director. Next, Gucci created a new title of Creative Director of Accessories for Frida, placing her in charge of the creation of all non-apparel collections—from luggage and silks to fine jewellery and watches.

Her mix of technical self-assurance and savvy business sense shone through. Meticulous research into Gucci's carefully assembled archives led Giannini to re-invent house classics as covetable accessories, such as the Flora scarf pattern, a style originally created for Princess Grace. By 2006, she was staging her first women's ready-to-wear show, injecting boyish suits, floral blouses, skirts and dresses into the mix. "Women want more intimate moments today," Frida explained, "it's not just about showing off skin."

Following that, she led a vanguard of designers, including Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel and John Galliano at Christian Dior, to reinvent the cruise season by taking it on a global tour. First to New York and then in 2008 to Rome's towering Janiculum Hill for a contemporary

Dolce Vita live webcast show, dinner and party in 17th gardens. This was timed to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Gucci's iconic Via Condotti boutique, redesigned by Frida with bronze mirrors, light filtering plexi-glass rods and free-floating staircases. Today, Giannini's luxurious concept is rolled out in all of Gucci's signature stores worldwide. In advertising, Frida collaborated with top talent, commissioning director David Lynch to make a sensual Gucci by Gucci fragrance advertisement, then eliciting a windblown fantasy commercial with video artist Chris Cunningham for the new Flora fragrance. Giannini's sense of feminine glamour drew actresses Drew Barrymore and Claire Danes to the house for jewellery campaigns, while her take on the stylish contemporary man led to the choice of James Franco for Gucci's new men's fragrance.

Under Giannini's leadership, Gucci has also made exceptional strides in social responsibility. Over the past five years, Gucci's partnership with Unicef has grown to become a global initiative that has raised over USD 7 million dollars for the organisation. A star-studded charity event at the United Nations helped to raise USD 2.7 million dollars for both Unicef and Madonna's Raising Malawi charity. In 2008, she enlisted Rihanna's help to promote the Tattoo Heart collection dedicated to Unicef. Giannini was also named to the Board of Directors of PPR's Foundation for Women's Dignity and Rights, an organisation that fights violence against women and helps to empower them. This inspired her to commit herself to supporting Mary J Blige's Foundation for the Advancement of Women Now.

In person, Frida is witty and gentle, yet driven by passion. One senses in her the thrill and responsibility of guiding this fabled house with its own state of the art design studios and prototype departments, finely honed to make products of exceptional quality and lasting value. It is this unique mix that has brought her international fame and resounding success in the fashion world. ■