If You Can Make It There...

These little town blues are melting away
I’ll make a brand new start of it
In old New York
If I can make it there
I’ll make it anywhere
It’s up to you, New York...New York.
Ne-eww York!
Frank Sinatra’s and Liza Minelli’s recordings of *New York, New York*, the John Kander tune with lyrics by Fred Ebb, are the two versions of the song most heard and remembered. And Ebb’s lyrics definitely fit the experiences so far of MSU College of Arts and Letters apparel and textile design alumnae Sarah Bach, Katie Jingozian and Lauren Paulauskas.

**BACH IN THE USA**

Sarah Bach went directly from her 2010 graduation from MSU in East Lansing to a textile tour of Italy with her mom, including “a dyeing workshop in Tuscany. And we went to all these different little cities like the one that had the very first spinning wheel, and one that was known for its soaps. And we also stayed on an alpaca farm in the town of Umbertide that was really fun. So we did dyeing and we did fiber studies.”

From there, Sarah came back to the U.S. where, in 2011, she was accepted into a one-year program comprising two years of work studying textile surface design at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York City.

“I took courses in prints, patterns, illustrations, screen printing; anything you can do to affect either the actual formation of the textile, the quality of the textile, or the color that happens with the textile. And, of course, I took classes in weaving, knitting, screen-printing, and computer-aided art, including how to use computer programs for weaving, the different software programs for textile design, and networking.

“We actually got to see a lot of different types of development or artwork, and learned how to paint with different forms of media: so, gouache, watercolors and India ink.”

After that one year, Sarah began working as an accessory designer with another woman who sold jewelry direct to customers.

“We did trunk shows through Equinox, a gym in New York City, with a bunch of different locations targeted toward a higher-end market. They have a clothing store just inside the door but outside the gym, close to a smoothie bar, just before you go into the locker room. And you can buy sports gear at this clothing store, so we’d set up these jewelry trunk shows outside it. Then someone might be taking a class and think, ‘Oh, I can buy a necklace here.’ The place was called City Jewels—and was run by just one independent person.”

**DINOSAURS TO BOUQUETS**

Sarah then began working for a home furnishings firm on prints and patterns for sheets, comforters, and pillowcases. The company did a lot of private labeling, so that meant working with a variety of ranges from juvenile to contemporary to men’s bedding.

“So one day we’d be drawing dinosaurs, and the next day we’d be doing bouquets of flowers, then stripes and polka dots,” Sarah says. “Polka dots are always on trend.

“You’d make the layout, and put it into repeat, and check it out, and make sure it worked. I’d taken a wallpaper design class at FIT, and had to work...
with large repeats, so that was helpful (for this position). Because, for instance, with comforters you can have a flower that’s 18 inches across!”

The next year, Sarah returned to MSU at the invitation of her former professor, Theresa Winge, who had taken a research leave, to teach two ATD courses during fall semester 2012. Dr. Winge gave Sarah her syllabi and had her adapt the courses to her skill sets.

“One course was teaching Photoshop and Illustrator for fashion design—how to create your portfolio, your website and your own logo—because a lot of the students hadn’t had much experience with Photoshop yet. The students were juniors and seniors and most were just learning how to use computers for design work. That was a studio class so it was two hours in length.

“The other course taught students about sustainable design techniques and methods. I’d have them study patternmaking with zero waste, or unique techniques to manipulate the garments. It was a lot of exploration, creativity, and encouragement.

“That was really fun! It was fun to come back to MSU and see how the campus had changed and to experience what it was like to sort of feel like staff.”

Bach then worked for a screen-printing company in Jackson and on her brother’s farm, Nature’s Pace Organics, in Mayville, Michigan, before heading back to New York City, where she took various freelance jobs.

Sarah Bach explains her job responsibilities for DML Marketing/Legale

Ultimately, Sarah landed a freelance job in April 2014 that became full time in the middle of May with her current employer, DML Marketing/Legale. DML is a manufacturer and wholesaler of ladies’, children’s and men’s socks and hosiery, located at 34th Street and 5th Avenue in Manhattan, and Sarah is responsible for designing and CADing sockwear for the firm.

STITCH-BY-STITCH

“I work on the artwork and the CADs, and if they need packaging work or organizing. When samples come in from China I put them away or categorize them for different accounts. I work on a graph and do all the artwork, since it’s stitch-by-stitch, that’s put into the knitwear software program and graphed-based on whatever prints or patterns the accounts are interested in or inspired by. Earlier I mentioned working with 18-inch flowers on comforters—on socks, the flowers are just pixels wide. The socks are just two inches across. It’s crazy, the scale difference!

“I first learned and used point carré software at FIT for wovens, and now I use it for knitwear here at DML. We do slipper socks, and there’s the novelty socks, and the liners, leg warmers, tights, socks that girls can wear outside in the winter, and more! And we can lay all different types of artwork on top of them.

“DMI/Legale sells to retailers like Target, Marshall’s, Urban Outfitter, Kohl’s, Sears, J.C. Penney, Laura Ashley, and Van Heusen, to name a few, as well as to warehouse stores like Costco. And we have our own Legale-branded hosiery lines, too.

“Our accounts come through during the March or August markets,” Sarah says, “after we’ve previewed our fall line in February.”

Asked if she had ever thought about how many types of socks there are, Sarah replies, “When I was little, I thought socks were really cool because they had toe socks and different colored socks, and I thought, ‘Oh, these are fun,’ but I never thought about the person who had the designing job!”

As for whether she likes working and living in New York City, Sarah answers enthusiastically, “Yeah, it’s really fun. You can work a lot of different places; there are a lot of opportunities; there are a lot of interesting things to do. It’s open for you. Which is really nice and rewarding. And it’s a little different than the small town in Michigan where I come from where you’re always trying to find things that are going on, and working, too.

“And, I think, a lot of times for artists and creative people, it can be even more of a struggle in a small town. Here, you can find work right away—especially in the garment district.”
Asked if she feels that MSU prepared her for going out into the real world, Sarah replies, “Definitely, because I use the software programs every day that I originally learned at MSU. That’s been a huge benefit.

“Especially now I think that computer CAD programs are extremely helpful and beneficial for every company that has data to process. As computers have changed, that’s become even more so. People in their 30s and 40s are trying to learn it now to try and stay in the game, because the younger generations are coming in.

“And just as there are a variety of CAD programs for textile design, I’m sure it’s the same for architects or engineers and other fields.”

As for her brief return to MSU to teach, Bach says, “My experience going back to teach was beneficial, too, as it gave me different perspectives, and allowed me to see how I was as a student in school, and the different directions you can go.”

Katie Jingozian (left) and Lauren Paulauskas

MEANWHILE, A BLOCK AWAY…

As for Katie Jingozian and Lauren Paulauskas, Bach’s former classmates and MSU apparel and textile design grads, 2010 and 2011, respectively, the two designers work together—and about a block from Bach—for Gina Concepts and Gina Group, respectively, on West 33rd Street between 5th and 6th Avenues. But how they ended up there involved a different path for each.

Katie Jingozian moved to New York City five days after graduation from MSU! She started out working two internships and a freelance job all at the same time. She interned in design for The Sak, and also in merchandising for Peter Marcus Group, a marketing company, and she was also freelancing as a CAD artist for Jack Rogers. After two months, Katie was hired freelance by Victoria’s Secret Pink as a print designer, and, after eight months there, went to women’s handbag firm Danielle Nicole where she worked for about a year.

When a headhunter reached out to her through an agency in 2011, Katie left that job to work for Gina Concepts. She came in and interviewed, and Gina Concepts hired her as a designer. She was later promoted to senior designer, and when Jingozian’s boss left the company, Katie was promoted to vice president of design and development for her categories, handbags, tech accessories, SLGs, cosmetics and sunglasses.

Lauren Paulauskas took a bit longer to move to New York City, but says it was always in her plans. After graduation in 2011 (she took five years to finish as she transferred to MSU from another school), Lauren interned with brightlytwisted, a Livonia, Michigan-based tie-dye company. While saving up for the move to Manhattan, she worked for Madewell and the Detroit Shoppe at Somerset Mall. Then, nine months after graduation, Lauren and fellow MSU apparel and textile design alumna Jen Henry made the move together to New York City in March 2012.
Needing to find a job quickly to pay for rent, Lauren and Jen decided they needed to find something in retail to get by. So, within five days of moving, they were both hired by M&J Trimming, which operates a colorful showroom with a huge inventory of imported ribbons, laces, buttons and bridal trimmings, between 37th and 38th on Avenue of the Americas. Lauren worked at M&J for nine months.

Then, a position opened up at Gina Group, a sister company of Gina Concepts, and Katie Jingozian contacted Lauren about applying for the job. And the rest—at least to this point—is, as they say, “herstory.”

FAMILY-OWNED BUSINESS

“Approximately 100 people work here, between the two companies, Gina Concepts and Gina Group,” Katie says. “They are family-owned businesses that sell to department stores such as Macy’s, Nordstrom’s, Bon-Ton, Kohl’s, Burlington, and juniors stores like Forever 21, Aldo, rue21, Old Navy. For instance, we sell our Rampage line of handbags, that I oversee, to Macy’s and Nordstrom’s.”

Adds Lauren, “I design legwear for specific clients like Steve Madden, Nicole Miller, and Charlotte Russe, but also for many large retail stores, like Bed Bath and Beyond, Spirit Halloween, Ross, and TJ Maxx. In fact, I was surprised when I my boss handed me a project for Meijer [Grand Rapids, MI-based operator of 200 stores in five states]!”

As for their time at MSU—and the education they received—the two designers have definite opinions.

“We did a lot to prepare, which was good,” Lauren says, “but I think, because we were leaving the College of Human Ecology and coming into the College of Arts and Letters, the department was being torn in two different directions. On the one hand, some wanted the program to be more technical, and on the other, there was a movement toward being worthy of displaying our designs as part of [the Department of] Art, Art History, and Design.”

Says Katie, “We were taught the skills we needed and given the basic skills—design, sketching—everything there was in respect to the ‘need to knows.’ As for what I’d add to the program, being an accessories designer, I think it would be good to have an option that touched on shoes and accessories.

“And, in the portfolio-building class, it would be great to have a section about writing professional e-mails; such as how to write an e-mail to a factory or to a buyer. Because I feel that’s a really important skill you should have. Especially knowing how many times that has to be taught to someone.”

“I agree,” Lauren says. “Talking to a factory in China where English is not their first language can be really difficult. I have two ways of writing e-mails: to Americans and to Chinese people. For the U.S., you can write the way that’s most comfortable for you. But, to Chinese recipients, it has to be more formal, clearer and more succinct—using numbers and bullet points—because they aren’t going to read five paragraphs of English.”

READY TO COMPETE

“But, definitely, in terms of being prepared, I feel perfectly comfortable competing with the FIT, the SCADs, the Parsons of the world,” Katie says. “Part of my job is hiring for my own department. So I’ve interviewed people from Parsons, people from FIT, and I feel that my portfolio looks just as good. There are some things that were a little bit different, but they were really quick fixes.

“So, in terms of preparedness, I didn’t feel like I was lacking, compared to people who went to an actual fashion school, at all. Which is really saying something for Michigan State.”

As for their feelings about living and working in New York City, the women echo each other’s sentiments.

“I love it,” Katie says. “When I moved here, Julie Stamos moved here at the
same time, so there was just the two of us. But then she moved back home for a bit, and I was here with no other MSU alums for the next few months. But I think it's worked out perfectly. I've been here three years now, and I really like New York. And I'm in my first year of grad school at Baruch College [one of ten senior colleges of The City University of New York] studying for my MBA from the Zicklin School of Business.”

Says Lauren, “It took me a while, but I truly enjoy living and working in New York. The fashion industry can often be catty, but it’s not like that here. And it’s great having friends from MSU here, too. We’ve all stuck together pretty well; at least the ones that I’m aware of.

“Plus, there’s a lot of people out in L.A. that we keep in contact with, too. Even Jen Henry and I, between college and moving here, we took a trip to L.A. together. Because we’ve been here a million times, but thought maybe we should go there to check and make sure we didn’t fall in love with it immediately.

“And we met up with Kendra Anderson, Mel Vongpunsawad and other ATD grads while we were out there. I think way more of us network with one another than people from other majors at Michigan State. In fact, Sarah Bach and I just had lunch together a few days ago.”

STAYING CONNECTED IMPORTANT

Says Katie, “I think we have to stay more connected for networking purposes. Every time I’m hiring an intern or assistant designer, I always reach out to Dr. T (Professor Winge) and Rebecca (ATD Instructor Rebecca Schuiling). And I tell students to call or email me to follow up, and ‘Don’t be afraid to be annoying.’ You can’t believe how many people send me a resume and cover letter and then nothing. I don’t hear from them again.

“Never underestimate the power of networking, following up and sending a ‘thank you.’ After all, even if they say ‘No,’ they’ll still pass your information on to human resources. When it comes to networking, being an irritating person may just get you hired. Just don’t expect to walk into a job and be the design director, or be unable to take critiques. And, understand that even if a job is low paying now, you’re building for the future and what you ultimately want to do.”

Besides Sarah Bach, Katie and Lauren also give a nod to New York-based alumni Amber Bembnister at LaLa-Land; Elizabeth VanFleteren who was working at Vera Wang for a long time; Jen Henry, who works at The Jones Group; Kaylei McGaw, who worked at Anne Taylor Loft and is now an associate editor at lonny.com; and James Pina, who’s been designing for menswear company W.R.K.

“Oh, and we see Julie Stamos (who is a men’s merchant for J. Crew) and Allison Yee from time to time, too,” Lauren says. “So MSU and the College of Arts and Letters ATD program are very well represented in New York City.”

Which brings us back to Frank’s and Liza’s renditions of the Kander-Ebb classic:

“I want to be a part of it, New York, New York.”

Or to add an MSU flavor to rapper Nas’ lyrics from his 1994 debut album: “Nothing’s equivalent to the New York—‘State’ of mind.”