Finding Fashion Beyond Borders

Grace Chen

Grace Chen is a senior at North Carolina State University studying Fashion Design. Her academic interests include haute couture, textiles, and designing elevated special occasion pieces.

Studying abroad at Central Saint Martins in London was an experience that challenged me both creatively and personally. As part of the Advanced Fashion Design course, I was pushed to approach design in ways that were different from what I had experienced at home. Being surrounded by students from different backgrounds, working in a city with such a rich fashion history, and constantly being exposed to new perspectives made me rethink what fashion could mean to me. More than anything, my time in London taught me to be comfortable with uncertainty, embrace change, and see fashion as something that exists far beyond one country or one culture.

One of the most meaningful parts of my time abroad was experiencing London Fashion Week from behind the scenes. I worked as a production assistant for George Keburia and as a styling intern for Yuhan Ao, two experiences that gave me completely different perspectives on the fashion industry. With George Keburia, I experienced the fast-paced and unpredictable nature of producing a show, helping with everything from preparations to making sure the moving pieces of the production came together. Working with Yuhan Ao allowed me to experience the industry from a styling perspective and understand how individual garments can be transformed through the way they are presented, layered, and photographed. These internships showed me that fashion is not created by one person alone. Behind every collection and image is a network of designers, stylists, producers, models, photographers, and assistants working together to bring an idea to life.

My experience in London also gave me the opportunity to experience fashion on a global scale. I was no longer simply learning about designers and cultures through a classroom or a screen; I was living in a city where people from all over the world came together to create, study, and work. Traveling throughout Europe made that perspective even broader. From riding camels through the desert in Morocco to solo backpacking through the Albanian mountains in Theth and Valbona, I constantly found myself outside of my comfort zone. Traveling alone through unfamiliar places taught me to trust myself, adapt when plans changed, and become comfortable navigating situations I could not always predict.

Those experiences have influenced the way I approach fashion as a designer. Traveling showed me how much creativity can come from simply being curious about the world. Seeing different architecture, landscapes, traditions, craftsmanship, and ways of life made me more aware of the importance of cultural context in design. It reinforced my interest in incorporating traditional techniques, particularly Chinese craftsmanship and embroidery, into contemporary fashion while continuing to learn from the cultures and communities around me.

Perhaps unexpectedly, one of the most valuable parts of studying abroad was the friendships I made. Moving to a new country meant leaving behind the routines and people I was familiar with, but it also gave me the opportunity to meet some of the best friends I have ever had. We navigated unfamiliar cities together, traveled on weekends, worked through stressful assignments, and created memories that I know I will carry with me long after leaving London. Having a community in a place that initially felt unfamiliar made London begin to feel like home.

Living abroad forced me to adapt in ways that a classroom never could. There were moments when I felt overwhelmed, homesick, or unsure of myself, but each challenge taught me that I was more capable of adapting than I had realized. I learned to embrace the unexpected instead of being afraid of it. Whether I was figuring out a new city, working backstage during Fashion Week, traveling alone, or

developing a collection at Central Saint Martins, I became more independent and confident in my ability to navigate unfamiliar situations.

Looking back, my semester at Central Saint Martins was about much more than studying fashion. It taught me how to look at the world differently. I experienced fashion through design, production, styling, travel, craftsmanship, and most importantly, through the people I met along the way. My time abroad expanded my understanding of what it means to be a fashion designer and strengthened my desire to build a career in an industry that is constantly connecting cultures and ideas across borders. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have studied, worked, traveled, and grown in London, and I know the lessons and relationships I gained there will continue to shape the designer I hope to become.