

PROFILES IN *Success*

A series of conversations with Fashion Group members
What they do, how they do it and why it matters.

by Wendy D'Amico

Tammy Apostol

In thinking about brands and how and why they succeed and endure, it's interesting to reflect on the impact storytelling has on a brand. Theorists, marketers and consumers agree that stories engage, forge personal connections, emotional bonds and unwavering loyalty. Compelling histories of passion, determination and, often, sheer grit, inspire and instill a sense of admiration.



Think about these: a tiny little shoe repair shop, founded, in 1887, still run by family members and the preeminent name in ballet slippers, pointe shoes and all things dance, and the company that instructs us, in a very firm tone of voice, to get out and "Just Do It."

Fast forward to Tammy Apostol; her story of coming to America and how she founded and manages a business with an enviable roster of exacting and knowledgeable, A-listed clients on whose velvet hangers are the ravishing, custom-made clothes designed, immaculately constructed and perfectly fitted for them alone by TA Couture.

We've been told that you have a fascinating coming to America story, so let's start at the very beginning...

Where were you born and raised?

I was born and raised in Maracay, Venezuela, to an American mother and a Venezuelan father, I was raised with the best of two very different cultures during the height of Venezuela's economic prosperity and before the current government regime came into power.

What did your parents do?

A graduate physical therapist from Boston's Tuft University, my mother joined the air force and was stationed on a base in Texas where she met my father. He was an officer in the Venezuelan Air Force, now a retired Air Force general, who had been sent to the US on a training mission. In Venezuela, my mother became a medical English teacher for The University of Carabobo where she was a founder of The Women's House, Birthing in Public Outpatient Clinics and Doulas of Venezuela.

Do you have siblings?

Yes, I have 3 younger sisters and a brother.

Why did you leave your birthplace?

I moved to this country to pursue an education in fashion design. After graduating high school in Venezuela, I studied fashion design for two years at a then prestigious fashion school in Caracas. Soon after completing a two-year program, I was fortunate to work as a design assistant at RORI International, a company that designed and manufactured for Christian Dior and other well-known brands.

Where, in America, did you arrive and when; how did you get here and was your family all together?

I first lived and studied in the DC metro area and lived by myself since my family stayed behind in Venezuela.

Where were you educated?

I graduated from Marymount University, Arlington, VA, with a Bachelor's degree in fashion design and took additional classes with French couturière, Antoinette Verspoor.

What's your favorite childhood memory?

I have many great childhood memories, the ones that come to mind are the weekends boating with the family at the beautiful Caribbean beaches of Venezuela.

What were your first thoughts about a career; what did you think you were cut out for?

Before I graduated from high school, I experimented with some sewing and design classes and knew then that I was going to pursue fashion as a career.

How did you earn your first dollar?

I have always had an entrepreneurial spirit. While going to fashion school, I designed handbags and sold them to stores, friends and family.

You have your own business - What kind of a business is it?

TA Couture is a fashion design and millinery atelier, where we custom design couture, serving an exclusive clientele for over 25 years. We source top of the line fabrics from all over the world and are lucky to have a highly skilled and motivated team.

What gave you the idea to start such a business?

Fashion is my passion and like most designers, my goal was to establish my own fashion house.

How did you go about starting it and when?

After graduating from college in 1994, I founded my first company with a small startup capital based on my own savings and a gift from my parents.

Did you go into the business all by yourself or did you have a partner?

For many years, I managed TA Couture all by myself. As I learned over the years, it's very challenging to cover both the creative and the administrative parts of the business. For the last 10 years, I've had a business partner who runs the administrative side of the company which allows me to concentrate on the creative and sales responsibilities.

You must have had to learn a great deal about design, marketing, finance, sourcing, professional tailoring and dressmaking - how and where did you accomplish all that?

I learned both through formal education, in my first job as a design assistant in a large corporation, and I continue to update my skills through seminars, online research, and direct interaction with my peers and other industry leaders.

Do you have people reporting to you and, if so, what's your management style?

Yes, as the owner and president of TA Couture, I do have people reporting to me, mainly the atelier staff. I recognize and work with each person's strengths and help to develop skills where needed.

How do you lead? How do you persuade people to embrace your ideas and directives - especially those who may be hard to convince?

In order to have someone embrace my ideas, I first have to believe in them, with all honesty, myself. I then translate them with passion and explain how they benefit the company, as a whole, and our customers in particular.

Apparently, you dress an impressive roster of clients who have the resources and the opportunity to shop for clothes at many fine department and specialty stores including the eponymous designer boutiques, so why do you think they'd rather invest their money, and the time for consultations and fittings, in custom designed and custom-made clothes?

There are several reasons why custom-made a special treat is and preferred by our clients. It's a very different experience when the client is part of designing an outfit from scratch. This involves selecting the colors, the fabrics, the style, the trims - it is perfectly tailored to her body, and the design is absolutely unique. There will never be another woman showing up at a party or event wearing the same outfit! At the same time, all ready-to-wear garments are manufactured with standardized measurements for an average body, but clients who don't fit into these "pre-set measurements" often turn to custom-made clothing.

You're quite active in the South Florida region of Fashion Group. What does the organization mean to you; how has it benefited you?

I became an FGI member in April, 2010, and immediately started to assume additional roles including that of a Board member. In 2015, I had the privilege of becoming the regional director, leading the organization through a period of strong membership growth. Since joining FGI, I've attended most events and have developed great business and personal relationships, not only here in South Florida but all over the country. FGI is the perfect platform from which to get involved with the fashion community and expand one's horizon. Due to the fact that FGI was founded by influential, visionary women, I believe it is our responsibility to continue this vision for future generations of industry professionals.

When you recruiting new members, what do you tell them about FGI?

I share with them the advantages of meeting new peers, learning new skills, finding new resources and most importantly, expanding the regional fashion community - and I'm doing it very enthusiastically!

What would you say are the three qualities that got you where you are today?

First of all, perseverance. Like many other businesses, we went through a difficult time after 9/11/2001 and the depression of 2008/2009. Second, providing a level of service to our clients that goes above and beyond the norm. We deliver on a Sunday and work through the night in cases of "bridal emergencies" and other time-sensitive events. Third, constantly adapting to new trends and technologies.

One thing you're exceptionally good at?

Listening and adapting to clients' ideas and needs and transforming them into products they love.

Bad at?

I'm really happy that I can count on my business partner to take care of the administrative tasks - those are not my forte.

What would be your most memorable "aha" moment?

I can't point to a specific one, there have been so many, and I still have new ones every week!

Finish these sentences...

If I had a do-over, it would be...

I would work as a designer in a large company with a 40-hour work-week - just kidding....

My greatest wish is...

Like most people - peace, love and happiness for everybody.

I'm so grateful...

to have such a loving and caring family and a wonderful network of friends that support me.

My parting advice is...

Pick a profession you are passionate about and are good at. Surround yourself with great professionals and friends and treat everybody like you want to be treated.

Tell us something about yourself no one else knows...

Can't tell you - otherwise everybody knows.

And, on a final note:

- As an adjunct professor at Miami International University of Art and Design for over 10 years, I try to share some of my experiences with the next generation of fashion designers. I teach a few classes per semester in Fashion & Accessory Design, including Hat Design, a role I really enjoy.
- At TA Couture, we also help some startup designers with their line development.
- I just aided my two amazing partners Robin & Gracy, in developing an accessory product called "Luxe Cuffs," fashionable lace cuffs that you can wrap around your wrist to transform your jacket, shirt or blouse from ordinary to extraordinary.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to Tammy Apostol for sharing her history; one that reflects, in every way, the emotional draw and personal connections built by the story behind a brand. And to Susan Glick for suggesting Tammy for Profiles in Success. (Oh: FYI, Capezio and Nike were the two brands referred to, but you probably knew that.)

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[MORE ABOUT FGI](#)



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