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## Dressing for Fame: Versace, J.Lo, RiRi Gone Rogue, and More Career Tidbits from Stylists Mariel Haenn and Rob Zangardi



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*If celebrity status is conferred in red-carpet appearances, then no actress today can compete without the help of just the right stylist. As Kerry Washington once told *Glamour* after she noticeably upped the sartorial ante, “There were a couple of actresses whom I felt were having the upper hand careerwise—because they knew how to work that red carpet.” A carefully crafted collaboration between stylist and client, the perfect look can create an indelible impact on agents, casting directors, and those of us watching from the sidelines. Straight from the epicenter of all things celebrity, we’ve asked some of the industry’s top stylists to share their experiences and impressions from their perch above Tinseltown. With our *Dressing for Fame* series, we bring you an exclusive, insider look at everything it takes to create those iconic moments captured by a million photo flashes.*

### **Rob Zangardi and Mariel Haenn**

It takes quite the fashion force to dress J.Lo for the stage, Rachel McAdams for the Cannes red carpet, and Pharrell for his many (sartorially daring) public outings, but the powerhouse styling duo of Mariel Haenn and Rob Zangardi have proved they’re nothing if not up to the task. Whether they’re commissioning original pieces to bring an idea to

life, going back to their roots on music video sets, or forging relationships with up-and-coming talent, their scene-stealing tastes draw a uniquely diverse client mix that includes the abovementioned stars and beyond. Here, the duo talks exclusively to Style.com about going rogue with RiRi (they worked with the songstress for four years), being equal-opportunity stylists, and why women are more complex to style than men.

### **How did you both begin styling?**

Rob Zangardi: I grew up in Columbus, Ohio, and graduated with a fashion merchandising degree from Ohio University. After college, my twin brother was working in NYC as a casting director, casting the audience for the VH1 Vogue Fashion Awards. He knew I would love it, so I stood in the pit to watch the show and ended up meeting a stylist who worked at MTV. I had no idea what a stylist was until then, but it sounded like my dream job. Because of her, I ended up getting hired at MTV to help with their New Year's Eve show, which turned into a full-time job—right place, right time. And the rest is history.

Mariel Haenn: I was in school at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale for fashion design and I met someone who introduced me to the music video world. I started as a seamstress on videos, and then was assistant-styling while still in college. Once I graduated, I was fortunate enough to keep getting called to assist, but in the back of my mind, I was focusing on working at a design studio. I considered styling my means of making a living until I found the job I really wanted. Cut to 13 years later, turns out this is the job I wanted.

### **What's the most memorable moment you've created thus far?**



RZ: Rachel McAdams in the red Marchesa at the Cannes Film Festival was pretty memorable. She just looked like a movie star—you couldn't take your eyes off of her. That train added the perfect amount of glamour and drama but didn't overpower the woman wearing it. It was definitely a moment.

MH: Rihanna in the Dolce & Gabbana tux at the [\[2009\] Met Gala](#). That was a special moment because we went completely rogue. It was a Marc Jacobs year and we got a call 30 minutes prior that so-and-so was wearing the same boots we'd planned on putting Ri in. So last minute, we went for plan B, and plan B ended up being this complete outlaw moment for both Rihanna and in Met history. It was something special.

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RZ: Working with Versace to re-create Jennifer Lopez's iconic Grammys dress for her most recent performances was also huge. It was pretty unbelievable to see her in the print that started it all.

### **How do you find working in New York different from working in L.A.?**

MH: Styling-wise, New York tends to be much more avant-garde and fashion-forward. L.A. is a bit more risk averse and tends to focus on glamour more so than experimentation. There's also a different level of polish. In L.A., you never want to look like you're trying too hard—it's almost as if people put even more effort into looking "effortless" than anything else—while in New York, there's a broader range in dressing up and down.

RZ: It might sound cliché, but New York's pace and tone also feels a lot quicker and has this undeniable sense of purpose. The way people walk in New York is representative of how they are. There's a bigger hustle. It feels more natural for us, honestly, since we are always on the move and juggling multiple projects. The collaborations in L.A. tend to also be more commercial. New York is a greater creative playground. We get to be more forward-thinking and innovative.

### **What's your favorite event to dress clients for and why?**

RZ: Working on tours and music videos is definitely something we both really enjoy because there is more storytelling involved. There's an entire arc that goes beyond a broad theme, so to speak. The looks have to work together with different elements to communicate so much. It's not simply a supplement or continuation of the story, it's a significant part of it.

MH: Collaborating with designers on custom pieces is a big thrill for us, too. Red carpet is fun, but there's something to be said for bringing an idea to life rather than plucking from what already exists. A great example is having had the honor of working with Versace for Jen [Lopez]'s stage looks in NYC. The experience itself was pretty surreal and the end result was nothing short of exceptional.

### **How do you manage to juggle multiple clients with multiple obligations and aesthetics all at once?**

RZ: This is where it's great to have two people rather than one. We like to joke that we are carbon copies of each other, so it's like being in two places at once.

MH: The reason we started working together to begin with is because Rob was the only one I trusted to hand my clients over to if I wasn't available for a job. The partnership was very organic. In terms of balancing the different aesthetics, you sort of train your mind to understand each client and their personality. There's a lot of relationship-building there. After that, it's almost impossible to mix aesthetics because you associate the person with the look so instantly.

### **How do you think working as a pair strengthens your styling? What has this relationship been like?**

RZ: Our taste is practically the same, yet we complement each other well in terms of workflow and personality. The relationship is like an old married couple meets brother and sister, if that makes sense.

MH: For lack of a better phrase, two heads are truly better than one. It's great to have someone else to bounce ideas off of, especially when in a more risk-taking scenario. It's also great to have someone challenge you or ask the right questions when you're dead set that something might look great but it could actually be better.

### **How do you balance dressing clients in looks by emerging designers as well as clothes by respected, longstanding favorites?**

longstanding interest.

RZ: We try to be “equal opportunity” stylists and simply pull what we think will work best for the client in that particular scenario, despite notoriety. The designers we have relationships with always end up in that mix because we sincerely admire their work. That relationship is built from using their pieces over and over as opposed to an obligation.

MH: Plus, we know which clients love which designers and will want to try their pieces no matter what, like Jen with Zuhair Murad, for example.

### **Do you approach styling men and women differently?**

MH: Men usually go one of two ways: very classic or completely modern. You have someone like Will Smith, who is just dapper Old Hollywood movie star head to toe, and then on the flip side, somebody like Pharrell, who loves to play with fashion and sees it as an extension of his art. Styling women has a much greater spectrum, and there are many more shades of gray. It’s equally important to understand the client’s personality and experiences, regardless of gender, and women, by nature, tend to have more complexity. This reflects in how many different ways you can go with a look.

### **What do you think of the “stylist as celebrity” trend?**

RZ: In a more open, share-friendly, social-media-driven world, anyone can be a “celebrity” for their craft or, in some cases, their lifestyle. The definition of celebrity has shifted in that regard. From a creative standpoint, that’s a great thing, because regardless of what you do, you can be found and your work can be followed, admired, and act as inspiration for somebody else. This creates an elevated benchmark for everybody and their work, and in turn, much more interesting, provocative, and creative end products.

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*Trends / Industry: Mariel Haenn and Rob Zangardi on Versace, J.Lo, and RiRi Gone Rogue*



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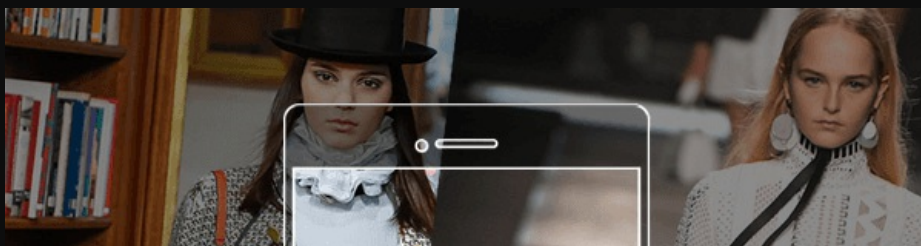
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