

Expert Interview I with Tessa Thompson, Owner and Designer of Tessa Fay
Including | thoughts on utilizing creativity in day-to-day life and pursuing a
career in fashion.

>> Tessa guest curated Strands on July 28, 2022. [Read it here.](#)

Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?

I'm Tessa Thompson, owner & designer of clothing brand, Tessa Fay, a grandmother/daughter duo brand that specializes in handmade feminine & eclectic clothing using salvaged upholstery and drapery fabrics.

I've always had an interest in fashion, enough to pursue a degree in it. My final semester hit the same time as COVID and I had no idea what I wanted to do. I created an Instagram account to share my fashion alteration projects, which evolved into making and selling masks, then eventually clothing. My grandmother, Fay, taught me how to sew and still does the handwork on our garments today.

What excites you most about what you do?

The best part about what I do is not only being able to utilize creativity in my day-to-day work life but doing so in a way that reflects my own unique point of view, whether it be the way I chose to use my resources, or design and market my clothing. The most rewarding part is that the sum of all those decisions IS the brand. Plus, getting to spend so much time with my grandmother is priceless.

What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?

For now, the only person I am truly responsible for leading in day-to-day practices is myself. Being a recent college grad, this has been a bit of an adjustment! I have sharpened my work ethic by implementing the "just get it over with!" approach, which I coined just now. It's... self-explanatory. As for leadership practices, I am a pretty laissez-faire, passive 23-year-old so my biggest challenge when it comes to leading

or collaborating on projects is trusting my own voice. My imposter syndrome is most amplified when working with other creatives. My strength? Hearing and truly valuing everyone's opinion. My weakness? Having confidence in my own. My goal? Achieving balance of both. I think that's what makes a great leader.

What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on, and why?

Probably releasing my first collection. Which was basically just the same dress in 5 different fabrics that I made using my home Singer sewing machine (with questionable garment construction techniques, looking back). But it led to my first purchase which was my confirmation to keep going. Any growth since then has just been a series of micro-opportunities to learn and level up.

We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?

This is very important, especially in the historically-not-so-inclusive (to put it lightly) fashion industry. It is my goal to make sure every person is represented that wants to wear our clothes. All of our garments are made to order so there is an unlimited range of options and sizes. We aim to reflect this in our marketing and who models our clothes as well.

Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?

Welp... how do you answer this if your career revolves around your core personal interest and passion? It can be either of two extremes depending on the day or who you ask. Check back in a few years maybe? For now, my answer is yes. Balance is



something that I seek (or at least consider) above most other things. My WLB approach is a bit intuition-based mixed with the aforementioned “just get it over with!” work approach. Peace of mind is a priority for me, which can’t be achieved unless I feel like I’m caught up with work. So, work then play, and when the lines are blurred, a specific 75 work/25 chill/play boundary is set for the day or week ahead. It is important to acknowledge that there is no right way to approach this! Unless you’re Faris & Rosie.

What’s your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?

You get one guess! Hint: I’m a millennial/gen z hybrid. Yep. Instagram. Mostly. I am not proud of this answer but it’s my truth. I mean there’s Reddit, NPR, TikTok... the classics. For inspo: old movies, new places, interior trends over the last 150 years and bad ass women.

As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What’s the best piece of advice/knowledge you’ve stolen, and who/where’d you steal it from?

Whoever said “follow your heart” summed it up nicely.