

Catherine Schuller Dishes on the Plus Size Fashion Industry

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Catherine Schuller has been at the center of plus size fashion industry for decades. She was a plus size model for Ford, and an editor at plus size magazine [Mode \(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MODE %28magazine%29\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MODE_%28magazine%29). I recently spent an hour chatting with her about...well, more than I can fit into one post.



I'm making it so that
everyday fashion shows just
treat the runway as a
metaphor for life.

CATHERINE SCHULLER

I asked her what she thought of the current state of plus size fashion.

Q) Why do you think so many designers neglect the plus size market?

A) Homework. They don't understand it.

Sometimes they don't want to see their clothing on plus size women.

There's probably a prejudice there...

CATHERINE SCHULLER

Why do you think so many designers neglect the plus size market?

Homework. They don't understand it. Sometimes they don't want to see their clothing on plus size women. There's probably a prejudice there. They just don't get what it takes to do plus size – you get those curves in the way. It's so easy to design for a “clothes rack” that will hang from the shoulders. But when you have hips and a waistline and a bust and differentials like that, it just requires a lot of homework. It really requires a lot of effort. But I find the ones who get it like London Times (<http://www.maggylondon.com/page/londontimes>) and the people who did Donna Ricco (http://shop.nordstrom.com/c/donna-ricco?cm_mmc=google--Dresses_Brands--Donna_Ricco--donna%20ricco_e&device=c&network=g&matchtype=e&creative=3410026550:2c169ea2f5cbff53eb970491881edea3_t-1412188813&adpos=1t1&gclid=CMa2I6SNjMECFQMT7AodWRUAEA) have really dedicated themselves to figuring it out.

When they get it right, they reap the benefits of it. I encourage people to do it. I say, “I know you really don't do plus sizes, but I like your style and there are a few styles that would look really beautiful on the plus size woman. So maybe you want to go up to extended sizes so you can get the size 18, so that way when it comes to shopping the Missy and Petites, they can find something in a 16/18 that fills that void for the larger customer.” Maybe they don't have a W after it so it's not a plus size, but I urge them to extended sizes so that the boutiques that want to attract a larger customer have some things that look as expensive as the other styles are. They don't sometimes, and the poor integrity of the plus size clothing pulls down the integrity of their boutique. I don't blame them, but I think that having the extended sizes is a way to bridge that gap. Don't just stop at 14, go up to 18.

What improvements in plus size fashion would you like to see in the next 10–15 years?

I'd definitely like to see something in print, a real fashion magazine that isn't just targeted to the plus size modeling industry. There are a lot of magazines for plus size models, and that word "model" attracts people who feel like they want to be a model and that's wonderful but I would like that lifestyle magazine.

I worked for Mode magazine for years and I feel like that was really the heyday from 1997-2001 when [plus size] women saw that they could really be fashionable. We kept the images very high end, and people really responded to it. We plus size women don't see ourselves represented fashionably in print and in the advertisements and kind of feel forgotten. We're not motivated to shop because we're not being targeted.

I want to see the fashion week tents better representing the plus sizes. They haven't embraced curvy women. Even though Michael Kors and Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren all *have* plus sizes, they don't put them on the runway. So I would like to see that become something that the mainstream brands adopt.

In the 70, 80s and 90s, it was all about elevation and segregation. Like, you're great, come over here, we'll put you on this plus pedestal and we'll have a department store for you and we're going to have special stores that cater to you. And now I think it's about integration. Everyone wants to feel part of the entire play. They don't want their little section. So I would like to see a little bit more of an integrated platform in terms of marketing.

I don't want to see just plus people marketing to plus people. The aesthetic of being truly fashionable and of the world has to be something that's much more tolerated and we're all in this together and we can all look good.

catherine schuller

I don't know if I want the plus size departments to go away because that just makes my shopping experience that much easier. I need to go into a department store and have that section that I know has been measured and proportioned for me. I don't want to go to a rack and see 2-22 and look at the garment and it looks so petite and beautiful in size 2 and it's a lot different when it gets to be my size. I want to see it by itself. So I'm fine with it being broken out that way. I don't have time to search through everything and hope that they have my size there. So I don't mind that it's segregated in terms of sales. It's just the promotional aspects of it. I don't want to see just

plus people marketing to plus people. The aesthetic of being truly fashionable and of the world has to be something that's much more tolerated and we're all in this together and we can all look good.

I saw [Jill Alexander \(http://www.jillalexanderdesigns.com/\)](http://www.jillalexanderdesigns.com/) and she has added Missy into her line. Now she has a store and says it's just remarkable to watch how the plus size and the missy women are helping each other in the dressing room, saying "you look amazing in that" and all sizes are shapes helping each other and it's just really remarkable how kind and accepting everybody is. I'm encouraged to hear that because I feel like that's the kind of boutique I want to shop in.

I don't see it dumbed down, I see it in a Missy, and I see it in a plus size and it look great on all of those size ranges.

We love that this plus size fashion icon is nudging mainstream designers to offer extended sizing! We fully agree (but until then—and even after then, there's always [AbbeyPost Made to Measure \(http://abbeypost.com\)](http://abbeypost.com)).

Some plus size women have called for stores to place all sizes together in one spot, instead of separating plus sizes. Catherine is against it, but what do you think? Let us know your opinions in the comments!

And don't forget to come back soon for the exciting conclusion of my talk with Catherine Schuller. To be sure you never miss a post on the AbbeyPost blog, [sign up for emails here \(http://eepurl.com/be0eo5\)](http://eepurl.com/be0eo5).

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