

Walking into the Rose Bakery on the fourth floor of Dover Street Market I spot him instantly. There's something about him that says young Italian photographer, though there's also an aura of debonair businessman about him. This confused split personality seems to be at the heart of Alessandro Vasapoli right now. He explains "I'm a business student, in my second year". He has been in London for four months and will spend the third year of his MA in Management, in Paris.

Originally from Turin, Alessandro was curious about photography as a young boy. "I wanted a camera when I was young, but my father's instinct was that if he bought me one, as a child, I would treat it as a toy, break it, then throw it away". But Alessandro's interest persisted and aged 18, just three years ago, he got a camera for Christmas. "At first I was very interested in nature. I shot in South Africa a lot, I went on hikes and found wildlife. I actually used to hate taking pictures of people". However, when he returned to Turin and a friend asked him to take pictures of her for a book he decided to give it a go. "It was nothing too serious, we shot at home in my basement". And that's how Alessandro started. Since then he's been making serious headway in fashion photography.

"At first I thought it'd be a nice way to earn money. I was never taking it too seriously". Then came a new camera, a rare Canon. "I was in a camera shop one day, I had the camera with me. I was asking the salesperson some advice and showing him the camera. Then another guy in the shop asked me about it. He tried out the camera and liked it and we got talking". Alessandro ended up showing him his pictures and the guy, Davide Esposito, a fashion and glamour photographer told Alessandro he simply had to come with him and shoot. They shot together the very next day. "Davide was extremely kind, he taught me so much even though glamour photography isn't the type of picture I'm interested in. But thanks to him I had help getting started. I learnt how to put myself out there. We're good friends now".

Having been in London only a matter of months, Alessandro already loves it. He enthuses over the opportunities that London presents. "In Italy everything is Milan-based, it's not practical. But you have everything you need in London; everyone comes here". So far, he has been soaking up the culture and finding inspiration everywhere he looks: the Royal Opera House, the theatre, the Saatchi gallery, the Tate, the National Gallery... I must be looking at him with a typical Londoner's look (read: cynicism) because he then says "it's a normal environment for you, but for me it's so completely different and that's why it's inspiring. There's something about the space, something in the air". And it is a gorgeous late afternoon. He's chosen a good day to wax lyrical about London; the light is just escaping beyond the buildings. "People look at this environment with a British eye and think it wouldn't look good to shoot here. But I have a more European eye."

In a way, Alessandro has to find inspiration in London's streets as he is now without a studio. "In Italy," he explains, "I have a studio, but I also have contacts who can provide me with permits for location and studio shoots". At this point it becomes clear: Alessandro is nothing if not professional. He reckons business school has made him highly attuned to the professional aspects of the industry, though he's always been professional in everything he does. "My family make fun of me because with me it's

all or nothing: I do it professionally or not at all. It can be hard though”, he continues “I’m constantly caught between being an artist and a businessman. I struggle with this. Though it’s a good selling point,” he interjects. “I can manage a budget! I’m focused and I’m not afraid to be direct. Sometimes my friends even tell me I’m too honest”.

Organisation and dedication are obviously Alessandro’s strengths. He constantly seems to have had a strategic plan, “I’m always thinking about the worst case scenario, so I’ve always got a plan B”. It helps that he’s got chutzpah: he’s not afraid to ask for help and learn from others. He’s recently got in touch with hair and make-up stylist Mimmo di Maggio, who’s worked on shoots for “everyone” (Haper’s Bazaar, Vanity Fair, Italian Vogue, to name a few), and simply asked for feedback. Di Maggio liked what he saw so much that he plans on shooting with Alessandro as soon as he can. Another great mentor is Rachid Tahar, a make-up artist and stylist with whom Alessandro put together a shoot on location at an old fabric factory which was shut down in the 1960’s. “It was the most challenging, most beautiful editorial shoot. At the end I was so exhausted but so happy”. Rachid styled the shoot using just old scraps of fabric found around the factory (though in the images you’d think they were couture) and Alessandro claims this shoot helped him grow as a photographer enormously. “I loved the direct way they spoke to me – they didn’t beat around the bush! I’m indebted to so many people”. For the 1883 shoot, the starting point was a Craig McDean ballet-inspired shoot. “We wanted to do something similar but somehow different. We ended up interpreting it quite heavily”. Although the inspiration behind the shoot is evident, it’s not literal. The result is classical, minimalist: “there are few props but you can feel the theme of ballet, you can follow the theme in the garments”.

So where does someone so focused see himself in the future? Honestly, he’s not sure. Being constantly torn between the suit and briefcase and the lens Alessandro doesn’t necessarily have a life plan. To be sure though, he does know what he likes. “Sometimes when I’m a little down I think about Helmut Newton. If he could go through everything he did and still succeed then I can too”. Having recently read Newton’s biography, Alessandro is a fan not only of his achievements, but of his work. Newton’s striking celebrity and fashion shoots are certainly something to aspire to. Other favourite photographers include Richard Avedon “for his black and white photographs”, Mario Testino “for his fashion shoots, particularly the group shots”, Paolo Roversi and Steven Meisel. Alessandro makes it clear “I don’t like ever single image they’ve ever taken” but he certainly respects them and aspires to their iconography. His ultimate goal is to have his own exhibition and to work for Italian Vogue. “It’s not just about the name”, he emphasises, “I just feel we’re on the same wavelength, we share the same views”. Above and beyond that he wants to be constructively criticized, he wants to grow and he wants to share images with people who will react not by saying ‘what a beautiful girl’, but ‘what a beautiful image’”. And who can argue with that?

By Katie Rose