

industry profile

QUIRKY COLLECTIVE



CHILDREN > PROFILE - QUIRKY COLLECTIVE

INTERVIEW WITH QUIRKY COLLECTIVE

Born and raised in France, Michelle Marshall studied languages in Lyon, photography in the Midlands and worked as a fitness professional prior to having two daughters and realizing the nine-to-five work day was no longer for her. In 2010, Michelle founded London-based **Quirky Collective**, an online shop purveying “**Land of Make-Believe**” looks that are “fun, simple, versatile and hopefully not mainstream.” “Setting up Quirky Collective satisfied my interests in design, fashion and photography,” recalled Michelle, who also launched the **Am Quirky** blog to complement her online store. Michelle envisioned a one-stop shop where “brands with personality” could reach a community of creative-minded parents and cool kids. Michelle’s two daughters, Lola and Sissi, serve as the models and muses for the fantastically functional yet playful collection of children’s apparel.

Q. Tell us about your mission to “cultivate the I.”

It is shying away from the idea of children as mini-adults. It is more about nurturing the very essence of being a child – that spirited yet unique and innocent way of being, which sadly tends to fade somewhat when entering adulthood.

Q. You state that Quirky Collective is a celebration of childhood. How was your own personal style as a child?

I don’t think that I had a genuine interest in style and fashion until my early teens when I could make my own decisions about what to wear. Growing up in Lyon, it was all about the BCBG look, a dominant dress code that had more to do with social class and status than who you really were. So I adopted some of the look, ditched and changed parts of it. I guess the quest to steer away from mainstream uniforms in favor of my own look still remains.



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Q. You created Quirky Collective, after receiving numerous compliments on your daughters' dressing. What was it about your style choices for them that made your girls stand out?

I am not entirely sure to be quite honest. It is definitely not trends. Could it be the French influence, a case of seeing things in such a way or just simple juxtaposition of nice shapes and fabrics? If I try and analyze the process involved in choosing clothes for myself, the girls or the store, I would say that it is again, a very visual affair but also deeply emotional in that a piece of clothing will implicitly be an extension of one's self.

Q. Do your two children weigh in on what brands you carry? Have they developed their own personal style?

Although they do get dragged to meetings sometimes, they do not have much of an opinion just yet. However, Lola, who is six years old, has recently started to gain an appreciation of what makes an outfit, but I prefer it when her choices aren't so well thought out. Random is nice! As for Sissi, who is 4 years old, she is quite busy being Sissi and will happily go along with whatever her big sister does.

Q. You've stressed the importance of parental connection to childrenswear brands. As a mother yourself, what do parents look for when choosing clothing for their children?

I would say that they are after something different, ethical, that make no assumptions about who their child is or who he/she ought to be. Brands that do not enforce any stereotypes through their design but instead leave the parents to make the final decision.

Q. What are some essentials that every child should have in their closet?

Stripes are a must! Every child should own a stripy little something. Also, a nice pair of dark denim that should be allowed to get super filthy (so easily achieved with little people) before being washed for that ultimate used look.



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Q. You just finished scoping out the new collections for S/S 12. Any trends/brands/items that made an impression?

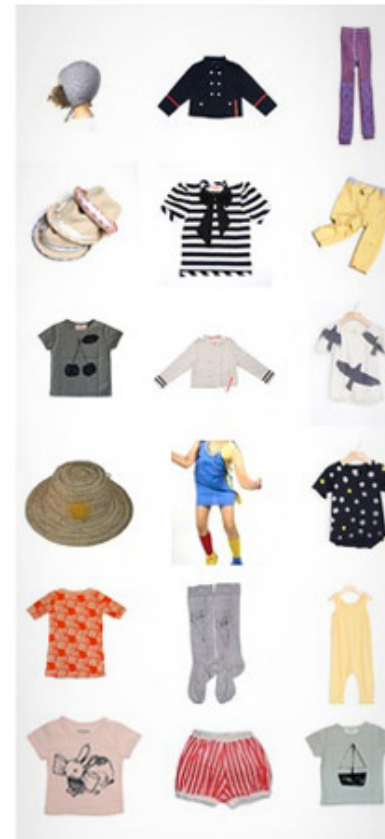
I do not tend to consciously follow trends. For me, it is more a case of a brand or garment making me go “YES!” It could be because of a particular cut, the idea behind a collection or the parallels that a brand can draw to adult wear or other disciplines while still being able to tap into the fantastic world that is childhood. It is all about the product and its ability to complement a child's personality, his/her daily adventures and how it encapsulates childhood. One of the brands that I wish I could fast forward to S/S 12 is Tannhäuser, a simple but striking collection.

Q. Which children's blogs and magazines inspire you?

To name just a few— *Papier Maché* magazine and blog for the styling and capturing my imagination as an adult; *kid's wear* magazine for the photography which reminds me a lot of *Purple* fashion magazine I used to read pre-kids; *Milk* magazine for kids' news on the French front; *Pirouette* blog for keeping up on all kids' related stuff across various disciplines; *Lula Honey* for the integrity and spirit that runs through every one of her posts; and *Sweede on fffound*, just because.

Q. What is your selection process when choosing what brands to feature?

First and foremost, it has to be comfortable, practical and good quality. I have to think about how well a given product will fit into a child's day-to-day. It has to somehow echo that magical time of life that childhood is all about and it has to be fun to wear and enticing for both child and parent. I look for great tailoring without compromising freedom of play and movement. Lastly, I look at how the different brands will work together.



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Q. Your blog iamquirky.com has very interesting photography and awesome shots of childrenswear collections. Where do you get inspiration for your blog posts?

Shooting children is a far cry from shooting still life. It is fun but at times so frustrating and technique often goes out of the window purely because there is no room to keep a check on everything. While I can plan the outfits and the shots I would like to get, I can never anticipate how willing my girls or their friends will be on the day. But by keeping the shoots short and fun, asking them to have their picture taken is (so far) more like an open invite to play silly for a little while.

The blog is a small and candid window into our day-to-day, randomly documenting our lifestyle where family, social identity, fashion, art, design, culture, etc, are key. At the same time, it adds another dimension to the store, through imagery and themes representing childhood and/or reminiscent of it. The styled shots aim to bring the clothes to life and provide ideas. My inspiration for them is drawn from all those references that I have gleaned along the way—my girls, memories, places, people, experiences, books...anything that will catch my eye, stimulate my brain and ultimately form the basis of my own visual language and a very personal representation of childhood.

Q. Would you consider branching out into brick-and-mortar shops in the future?

This has crossed my mind a few times. It would be nice, but it is not on the cards at the moment. I would love to build and maintain that face-to-face relationship with my customers and take that shopping experience further with a dedicated space. It is still too early to venture this way and with the advent of e-commerce and the current social-economical pressures, the retail high street is certainly not what it used to be.



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Q. As exclusively an e-store, what do you feel is the importance of e-commerce in today's industry?

The importance of the convenience afforded by the Internet and the digital era is indisputable. As a mother, I relish the practical benefits offered by online shopping. Yes, I do love shopping, but I loathe shopping with small children. As a small business owner, being able to position my brand on an international platform regardless of opening hours, time zones, currencies etc. simply widens exposure and opportunities which previously came with the expertise of a marketing manager, for instance, but also changes business strategies and longevity.

Q. Since you founded it in August 2010, Quirky Collective has been in full bloom. What does the future hold for the company?

How time has flown by! Quirky Collective will be celebrating its first year of business at the end of August. I am very proud to have found my own little spot among what is a huge playground of already established brands and e-stores. I am very grateful to everyone who has helped spread the word. It is certainly a time to reassess the past months in order to move forward. My company is still in its infancy and for me it is still a project running alongside family life. Very much like a third child, Quirky Collective has to fit in a little while longer with the routine of its older siblings! In the next few months, I hope to be able to dedicate more time to it, tweak a few things here and there, bring even more exciting imagery to the mix and generally build on the brand further. Stay tuned...

