

# The Boston Globe

## Sizing up the fashion world

Designer Diane von Furstenberg has much to talk about as she preps for local forum



By Christopher Muther  
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Diane von Furstenberg, the designer whose iconic wrap dress first entered the fashion lexicon in 1972, has shown up frequently in the news recently, and not necessarily for reasons she'd like. Von Furstenberg, president of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, was first injured in an Aspen ski accident in January when a man careened into her. Then she found herself in the middle of "McQueen Gate," the controversy that erupted after Michelle Obama wore a dress from the late British designer Alexander McQueen to a state dinner, rather than one by an American designer. Then, there was the issue of accidentally hiring a 15-year-old model for her Fashion Week show.

In the midst of all that, von Furstenberg has work to do. She'll be the guest speaker Tuesday at the MGH Harris Center's annual forum, where she'll address eating disorders in the fashion industry. We called her last week to talk about her Boston appearance, along with what has so far been a very busy and bumpy 2011.

**Q.** Last year at the Harris Center's forum, Michael Kors made a pledge that he would no longer hire models under 16. Do you think that pledge has made an impact in the industry?

**A.** It's funny that you mention this. Prior to Fashion Week, I wrote to everybody and asked that we should not hire anyone under 16. So I personally instructed my production company and my casting agents. When I was there, I kept asking girls "How old are you?" But last weekend I get a message that apparently one of the girls I used was a month shy of 16, and therefore she was not 16 at the time of the show. I was really, really embarrassed. I immediately wrote to all my fellow CFDA designers telling them that I was horrified to find that out. And from now on I would instruct my casting agent to ask for IDs. To ask for IDs is completely appropriate, and if people know they're going to be asked for IDs, then they won't try it anymore.

**Q.** As a fashion designer, do you find it difficult to determine what's too thin?

**A.** You don't want anyone looking sickly. That's it. Clearly when you are 18 you are thinner than when you are 40. But one of the things I'm going to talk about in Boston is empowerment in general. Because one of the things one has to do is not just deal with the disease and the anorexia, but show life. Inspire people.

**Q.** When you say inspire people, you mean . . .

**A.** I'm going to talk about my story and my life and the ups and the downs. That to me is inspiring. Of course I'll mention the other things, but in a more indirect way. I talk very frankly. For me, it's always important to show the light at the end of the tunnel. I just came out of a ski accident. So that's something I think about.

**Q.** How are you doing? You looked good when I saw you at Fashion Week.

**A.** Well, no, because I had my sunglasses on. It's much, much better. It's almost completely healed. But it was really bad.

**Q.** I had read that you primarily sustained facial injuries. Were there more?

**A.** Ribs, and bruised legs and things. But the face was what showed the most. He smashed into the left side of my face. I look like Mike Tyson in the worst fight. The accident happened on a Sunday morning in Aspen, so I went first to the clinic there because I was all bloody. They told me I had to have a scan because they thought my [orbital bones, which surround the eye] might be broken, and if your orbits are broken then you have to have reconstruction. So I said to Barry [Diller, her husband], "Let's fly to LA," so we flew to LA and I did a scan and my orbits were not broken. They were talking about putting me into surgery, and I said, "I just want the swelling to come down, and then I will evaluate." And as everything is coming down, I can see that my nose isn't broken. My breathing isn't bothering me.

**Q.** Have you noticed that since the CFDA has taken up this issue of models' health that the girls coming to castings are looking healthier?

**A.** I don't know, but I think it's very good to talk about it. I never paid much attention to it, and when people started to talk about it I would say, "In the 1970s, all the models were skinny, nobody had an eating disorder." Two weeks later I'm in London and I meet a very famous model of the 1970s, I'm not going to say her name. I hadn't seen her in years, and I told her I was thinking about her because everyone was talking about these eating disorders and in our day it didn't happen. And that woman looked at me and said, "I had a horrible eating disorder." She said it lasted for years, and she started telling me about it. So it's not a new thing, and it is very good that we talk about it.

*Diane von Furstenberg's talk takes place Tuesday from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at Burden Auditorium, Harvard Business School, Soldiers Field Road. The talk is free, but registration is required at [www.harriscentermgh.org](http://www.harriscentermgh.org).*

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