

Suzy Furrer, Founder, CEO & Educator, Apparel Arts Productions
Madison Brito for Middlebury Costume Shop, March 2021

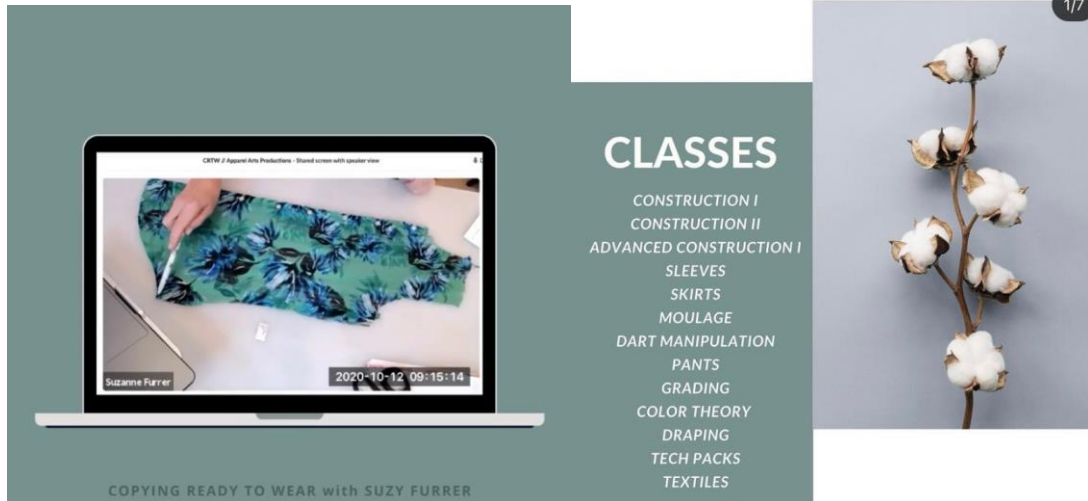


Suzy Furrer, founder and CEO of Apparel Arts Productions, has crafted a career that combines it all - creating, educating, and learning herself. From starting her own knitwear line to founding an entire school, Furrer is ample inspiration for making it your own way, but it was not without the ideal combination of hard work, experience, and even a bit of serendipity that she was able to get there. After graduating from the Academy of Fashion and working as a freelance patternmaker for more than 10 years, she started to teach classes in San Francisco on the side for the extra cash and immediately saw a huge - and growing - interest from students who wanted the flexibility and affordability that she offered. “It started so organically,” she says. Within a year, she saw a spike in both students and interested teachers as she continued to add structure and organization to her program. Now, these educators are in their 25th year and Apparel Arts Productions is an entire world of sewing, fashion, and costuming. But if not for her education and work experience, Furrer would not have been able to ask the questions necessary to successfully jolt such a business into being; Furrer thought, “what was missing from my education?” and “what would have helped me work in the industry?” to create the curriculum she has now.



An image of the Apparel Arts school from 2019

COVID-19 presented altogether new challenges to Furrer and her business, albeit one that her creativity and entrepreneurial spirit disposed her well to overcome. Furrer and her team were “just forced to figure it out - and fast. But what she has found is all the gems that come out of the challenges, the ways in which people adapt to create something entirely new. She says how “the students were forced to meet instructors halfway, creating more inventiveness, more experimentation.” Apparel Arts was built to be flexible, tailored to the learner, offering them what they need. So, naturally, the resourceful nature of both its teachers and students came through to create something new in the face of challenge. She even notes the increased spike in creativity everywhere within the last decade and during COVID-19, and cites this as one of the reasons her business is moving more towards teaching those interested in skills rather than working in the fashion industry. She explains how “learning for reasons of personal gain often feels more creative. And, there is more joy in it.”



A clip of one of Furrer's online classes

Online class offerings from Apparel Arts Productions

Furrer, as all successful business owners and educators likely must be, is all about accepting challenges. When speaking to her experiences teaching, she says “it is a constant newness - new students, new ideas, and a constantly evolving fashion scene.” She sees most challenging experiences as an opportunity to learn how to be a better business person and instructor. “The experiences people bring, interacting with students, the creativity it generates, it keeps me young,” she tells me.

Furrer's career affords her many things - freedom, more control over her hours (despite those hours being many), the ability to work hard but pull back when she needs to, and the creativity, decision making, and learning experiences it generates. But Furrer does not see it all through rose-colored glasses, and she is honest that it is not something you can just up and do. For one, she says, “do not start your own business until you've worked for somebody for 5-10 years. You need to learn first and seek out people to learn from as an employee.” You also need capital, a way to get your product out there, and “a lot of energy.” But above all, she tells me that self-care is the major key to success. “You have to know when to say no and give yourself downtime to also be more inventive yourself. You are more creative if you do,” she says. Balancing the energy you need to do it and the wherewithal of when to say no and take care of yourself is an axiom we perhaps all need to hear more.