

# KRIZIA, *THEN & NOW*

Krizia, was born in 1954, brainchild of Mariuccia Mandelli (1925), a woman remembered for her determination and creativity. She was brought up in Bergamo, Italy; and grew up to be a teacher in Switzerland, before packing her bags and leaving to pursue dreams of designing beautiful clothes for women. However, Mandelli's fashion career had begun as a kid, when she dressed dolls in her free time, using scraps from a boutique near her house.

In the 1950s, Mandelli's job involved a rent-free room in Rome, a supportive flat mate Flora Dolce and a sewing machine with which she made her first creations, skirts. Selling, modelling and advertising from her battered Fiat she made a living. It was within 2 years of this struggle that Krizia came to life.

## WHAT MADE KRIZIA, KRIZIA?

It is a known fact, that Mariuccia was an intellectual woman. And being no stranger to the teachings of Greek philosophers, she named her brand after a character 'Crizia' from Plato's last unfinished dialogue about the vanity of women. She always remarked that hopefully one day she would find her 'Crizia' who would squander away his money on buying priced jewels and clothes for her! Over time, the story behind the name came to be seen as a sartorial anecdote that indicated Mariuccia's intellectual approach to fashion design.

Being called many things, the Italian godmother of fashion, Crazy Krizia and quite often, a perfectionist, her designer label, once steered at the helm of the Italian fashion industry. But with the turn of the century, it was rendered a mere footnote in fashion, while its contemporaries forged on ahead. Today, the brand speaks a new language and is soon on its way to becoming a renewed force to reckon with.

Till date, Krizia has gone through many phases in its life - The Golden Age, A Juggling Struggle, An Expected Decline and finally a Metamorphosis.

## THE JOURNEY

**THE GOLDEN AGE:** Success didn't require too long a journey for Krizia.

With its first official display at the International Apparel Trade Fair, Turin (the Salone Mercato Internazionale dell'Abbigliamento) in 1957, Krizia's success story began! It was a collection of unique fruit-printed dresses that created quite a buzz. Whether it was the fruits or Mariuccia, photographer *Elsa Haertter* from *Grazia* was hooked. From there, the brand was propelled straight into the limelight.



*Fruit Dresses, 1954 (Source: Gfashio) | Black & White Collection, 196, Palazzo Pitti Florence (Source: GettyImage)*

Though Krizia worked with designer Aldo Ferrante and Walter Albini in the initial years, she was more of a one-woman army taking the 60s by storm. Her runway debut was at Palazzo Pitti, Firenze in 1964: the first fashion show portrayed a black and white collection of dresses and cardigans that won her the Critica della Moda award; an honour attributed to only one designer before - Emilio Pucci. Calculative, research-oriented and amazingly bold, she stayed ahead of the curve at all times.

Unsurprisingly, the brand's potential and its spirited owner's dexterity did not go unrecognised. On one hand, Karl Lagerfeld started freelancing for Krizia, on the other, she met her future husband-to-be Aldo Pinto, who later became administrative head of the brand.

Today, Krizia is most remembered for its whimsical animal motif sweaters. These were launched over 50 years ago, in 1967, when she added a new line, 'Krizia Maglia' to the brand's portfolio. Back then, the quirky yet charming designs caught even the fancy of Lady Diana. Krizia once remarked "I have always made very ironic animals, the drunken lion with the cigar in his mouth, the vain bears with necklaces and watches". And 2018 sees the brand bringing in Krizia's whole zoo into its collections.

But whimsical animals aren't the only thing Krizia brought to the fashion industry. She is owed by many today for her invention in 1971 of 'barely there' shorts. They were later dubbed 'hot pants' by the fashion powers that reigned, i.e media houses. This, during a period of hippie-inspired, loose and long silhouettes could have been a fatal move for her career. Instead, the brand flourished under Mariuccia's needle and thread and she was awarded the 'Tiberio d'oro' for her creation.



Krizia maglia, 1967 (Source: [gloriamagnone.altevista.org](http://gloriamagnone.altevista.org))



Ad in Vogue America, 1983 (Source: Ariel Skelley)

To add another feather in her cap, Mariuccia was instrumental in popularising Milan as a playground for RTW runway shows in the 70s; strengthening its foothold as a fashion capitol in Italy, then the world. The brand shifted base to Milan in 1985, in cahoots with designers Walter Albini, Missoni and a select few others. The headquarters were located at Via Manin, along with a cultural space (Krizia Spazio) that served as a concert hall, exhibition studio and auditorium for artistic exploration in every field.

In 1986, she was declared *Commendatore of the Italian Republic* along with Giorgio Armani, Gianni Versace, Valentino and others. However, the only title that really stuck through time was her American borne nickname 'Crazy Krizia', a reference to her experimentative style. Though, it is not too farfetched, to suggest a hint of truth in it. Constantly innovating, Mariuccia manipulated materials like anaconda and eel skin, metallized bronze, silver, gold, to create fabrics with a spine, adding an extra dimension to her silhouettes. Her designs involved cerebral tailoring, constant research and pure innovation amongst her Italian contemporaries. The FW 78 / 79 collection brought an accordion-pleated raincoat to centre-stage. This was the first of many iconic pleated miracles to come from the brand. In 1983 a pleated jumpsuit and dress, made of metallized fabrics, inspired by the Chrysler not only won her the favour of many a Japanese clientele but perhaps also served as inspiration for Issey Miyake's mastery in 1989. The 80s were a prelude to a period where fashion and art became one, on Krizia's runways.

Helen Bignaut describes Krizia's style in *Anatomy of Fashion*, as "A way of approaching art, but also of making art itself with complex structures and elaborate and sustained geometries, always looking for innovative or classic fabrics but interpreted in an unusual way".



*Krizia maglia, 1967 (Source: gloriamagnone.altervista.org)*



*Ad in Vogue America, 1983 (Source: Ariel Skelley)*

Testimonials to Mariuccia's genius come from writers and artists alike. Umberto Eco paid high compliments to her imagination, stating that 'she invents the taste of her public'. While Andy Warhol captured her trueness with a constant bob, blunt fringe, bright dash of colour across her lips and eyes that looked straight into the future;



*Krizia, A portrait, By Andy Warhol (Source: The Cut)*

In the 80s Krizia's designs scratched the status quo of fashion that revolved around a certain target, a truly feminine woman with an uninhibited spirit. Her quintessential palette of black and white, with warm pops and supporting roles of neutral tones never failed to appeal; nor did her quirky sweaters or cerebral tailoring. The brand developed a style of architectural grandeur with clean lines, synthesis of volume with fluidity and a library of go-to patterns: bold monochrome stripes and whimsical animals.

Her inspiration was evident from her patronage of art, literature and cinema. In an interview with Dario Cresto, she explained "I went to the central station to study the French who arrived by train in Milan and were so elegant, so far ahead of us. I avoided the high fashion, never present, never realistic, and always too expensive. I put in my clothes a bit of Greta Garbo, Magritte, Dali, Klimt..."

With the confidence gained by past endeavours, the 1980s also saw the brand expanding; perfumes in 1980 (K di Krizia, being the first one) and a menswear line Krizia Uomo in 1988. Later on 'Per te by Krizia' (a line for curvy women) and Kriziapoi (accessories) were also added to the brand portfolio. Mariuccia's enthusiasm didn't end at fashion. In 1985, she bought a share in the publishing house, La Tartaruga, as it printed some of her favourite writers - Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein, to name a couple. And in 1987, she designed a luxury resort in the British West Islands named K Club that unfortunately didn't stand the test of time. In a way, Mariuccia was Jack of all trades, and Queen of one. However, her rein did come to an end and Krizia finally reached its climax in the late 90s.



*Krizia at work, 1983 (Source: Alfa Castaldi Archives)*

The decade that marked the eve of the new century, proved to be both the highest and lowest point for the brand. In '98, it hit the highest turnover of 500 million dollars, since launch. In 1999 NYU's Grey Art Gallery held an exhibition called Krizia, showcasing pieces from the exhibit 'Krizia, Una Storia', which was held at Triennale di Milano in '95. Even Tokyo's Museum of Contemporary Art honoured Mariuccia's architectural fashion sensibilities with an exposition entitled 'Krizia Moving shapes' in 2001. Being the first foreign designer to make way into a Japanese museum was akin to a standing ovation by the nation. Mariuccia was designing over 32 clothing lines in a year, some produced in America and Japan. The brand had 53 single-brand boutiques all over the world and over 600 sales outlets. Krizia was a fashion powerhouse and Mariuccia was its very soul.

But hitting her 70s in the 90s, sparring through a legal tax battle and her lack of heirs, bruised up the brand. Left with no option but to open doors to fresh young talent, there began a juggle (or rather struggle) of new designers trying to emulate Mariuccia's signature on the catwalk. Since 2000, almost every successive collection was designed by a different designer. Ironically, seasonal collaborations are very much nouveau today, but back then Krizia caused quite a hubbub playing fast and loose.

#### **A JUGGLING STRUGGLE: 4 years 4 designers**

From 1995 to 1997, Mariuccia brought in Gianbattista Valli to work with Greg Myler, a constant at Krizia since 1987. But Greg exited the brand in 2000 to work with Mila Schon and was succeeded by Israeli designer, Alber Elbaz, who stayed only a collection-long (2000). The next entry was Jean Paul Knott from Belgium who joined in 2001 and cut a hasty exit in 2002. Lasting the longest, with a lead of 2 years was Hamish Morrow (2002-2004). However, none were able to work within the box of perfectionism at Krizia.

Despite wanting to inject fresh ideas and newness into her brand, Mariuccia once remarked "Nothing escapes me. It is a misfortune that I am sick with perfectionism, a very serious disease. Those who work with me must live it as a torment." Be it a case of too many cooks spoil the broth or simple idealism, the brand lost its essence over those few years, while the fashion world began a revolution. Talk about the collapse of the seasonal calendar, fast fashion vs slow fashion, collaborations, digital advertising, social media, the blogger culture and start-ups around every corner. Krizia was left behind, or rather, forgot to join the race.

#### **AN EXPECTED DECLINE:**

Krizia took over the reins once again in 2005, presiding over a squadron of designers. However, having had quite a setback, the brand was still many steps behind. During the 80s, Krizia published far and wide, with sartorial, larger than life, usually monochrome print-adverts in Grazia, Vogue Italia, Vogue USA etc. But the 2000s saw the brand's weakening efforts that led to it finally losing the attention of the media and public. Yet, as it silently



faded into the background within the European market, the brand boasted of a loyal tribe in Japan. Sanyo Shokai, Krizia's longstanding Japanese partner headed 600 sales outlets in the country. Seasons came and went, the brand failed to overwhelm until 2011, when Mariuccia opened conversation about launching a bridal line, re-launching the eyewear line and expanding to Chinese and Australian markets. In an interview with WWD, she clearly communicated that the brand had not been 'twiddling its thumbs' since 2005.

Though not all plans came to fruition, with multiple licenses, a worldwide market and numerous clothing lines, Krizia had a lot to be proud of. Calling it a wrap in 2014, Mariuccia sold Krizia for US\$35Million to Zhu Chongyun, a Chinese businesswoman with no small fashion empire. After 60 years of 'made in Italy', a new rein had begun, literally. Within a year of passing over the baton to Zhu, Mariuccia passed away. Her death was mourned by many, even the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi expressed his condolences, stating "Krizia was a protagonist of the fashion made in Italy."

But it was time to bid farewell to her and welcome Zhu. Zhu Chongyun is the founder of Shenzhen Marisfrog Fashion Co Ltd. - a group that owns multiple fashion labels in China, who took over from Mariuccia as Creative director and chairman of the board. While most of the Italian fashion industry was expecting the Krizia to visually communicate in a new dialect, Zhu maintained that she wanted to give continuity to the brand's style, revive the house and use its archive without echoing the past. Her decision to buy the brand was based on its 'glorious past' and 'aesthetic taste in common with her aesthetic imagination'.

### **METAMORPHOSIS:**

In September 2014, at the S/S '15 Milan Fashion Week, Zhu organised an exhibition as a tribute to Mariuccia and an unspoken declaration of new reign on Krizia. Fashion magazines like Elle, D Repubblica, Amica and others paid their respects by creating contemporised editorial content inspired by the brand's history and designs, which was unveiled at Palazzo Litta, Milan.

Having constantly emphasized upon the rebirth of the brand, while maintaining its Italian masonry, Krizia's very first collection by Zhu was a clear portrayal of her thoughts and plans for it. Held at the Krizia boutique at Via Spiga, the show blended the past with the future, making clear references to the DNA of the brand and its symbolic elements. Surreal installations of fibre glass cocoons for the models to step out of, spoke of a metamorphosis of the brand. While quirky animal motifs synthesized into wings and maul marks, the signature black and white colour palette remained unwavering. Though brimming with potential, there were no unique approaches that hinted at a quick restoration of Krizia's lost lustre.



Zhu Chongyun (Source: Corriere.it)



FW 2015-16 Krizia Show (Source: Music Fashion Must)

The only highlight in 2016, came in the form of designer Antonio D’Anna, who earlier worked for MSGM’s Massimo Giorgetti. Chosen by Zhu to be her wingman, the two designed the brand’s S/S ‘16 collection and came out for a bow together.

But, still waters run deep and 2017 proved it. After 3 years since its new regime, Krizia opened a store in China, the first of many to come. Simone Clemenza, who previously worked at Blumarine, Kenzo and other fashion brands, was appointed as the CEO. In an interview, she stated that ‘e-commerce is extremely important for Krizia, not only in terms of sales but also in the social media context’. The brand’s new focus is on three channels: wholesale, retail and online. The wholesale channel is to be developed through department stores and multi-brand distribution whereas retail shall be limited to European capitals.

### **CURRENT SCENARIO:**

Evidently, 2017 was not only a year of progress in terms of strategy, but also in strengthening Krizia’s design identity. Zhu and D’Anna had been working on reviving the brand’s archetypal styles with a new approach since 2015. Finally, last year saw the brand creating a re-interpretation of iconic archives with an up-to-date mannerism and a more RTW approach than ever before. Full-length pleats, bold monochrome stripes, quirky synthesized materials and the animals. The collections took on a style of modernity that comes from art and current attitude. Now, Krizia describes itself as ‘a symbol of Italian elegance and eclecticism for an original woman; curious, strong and independent in her contemporary femininity.’





Krizia Resort 2018 Collection (Source: NowFashion | MarieClaire | Vogue.com)

With a renewed brand strategy, a dive into trendy marketing tactics and new stores the corporate environment of Krizia had changed, by a long shot. The last decade was a silent period with zero to none marketing efforts made by the brand. Yet recently, fresh perspectives have been able to exploit the ubiquitous power of digital and social media, finally leading Krizia up the proverbial ladder of success. It's liaison with art has been highlighted repeatedly in 2017. The FW '17 campaign was created in collaboration with an art photographer, Andrea Artemisio, who designed a sculptural collage of 15 pieces from the collection. Another initiative aimed at bringing krizia onto the fast track was *K-factor*, a project by Cristiano Seganfredo. It is a relevant artistic collaboration that exhibits works of international and Italian talents in the boutique's windows. The brand claims that the shop window is not just a place to sell a new collection but also to open a dialogue with the city. Having always been a patron of art, K-factor is a step forward in reviving its heritage.



Krizia FW 17 campaign, Lorenzo Vitturi Sculpture (Source: industryart.com) | Krizia K Factor , Via Spiga (Source: Fusila Srl)

In addition, a tri-series of fashion films 'Dress like a miracle', produced under the artistic direction of Cristiano Segnanfreddo from Krizia and written by international novelist Gianluigi Ricuperati were launched. Each episode produced by a multi-award winning director, starring an independent woman in her 30s with a story to be told, much like the brand's audience. With such efforts being made, there's no doubt that the brand is playing catch-up, with an incredible speed and zest!

Today, Krizia seems to have evolved as a heterogeneous brand; Confident in its independent heritage yet curious to seek a contemporary presence. It maintains an uninterrupted dialogue with its past, manifesting itself through co-existing timeframes. Relentless in pursuit of creativity, it follows the codes, yet breaks the rules. It speaks of uninhibited poise. It is spirited, uncomplicated and artistic.

Krizia portrays strong values of honouring its heritage. Not only by encouraging art but also being artistic. It aims to empower the contemporary woman through fashion as it did decades ago. It seeks truth, independence and creativity.

In the recent years, many Italian fashion brands have been venturing into the Chinese market or are bought over by the Chinese. Once again proving that Mariuccia has always stayed ahead of the curve and Zhu makes the perfect candidate to revive Krizia's legacy while also adding to her own.

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