

Broadly.

The Scandalous Work of the Woman Who Dresses Olivia Pope



Lyn Paolo has worked as a costume designer for TV since the 80s, but her Michelle Obama–inspired style on the hit show "Scandal" is what has made her work iconic.

With the 2016 presidential race in full swing, it's hard to think about anything that doesn't pertain to the White House at the current moment. But once February rolls around, we will all

happily become distracted by one of our favorite fictive leaders of the free world: ABC's hit TV show *Scandal* returns to television for its fifth season, captivating viewers with mischief, steamy plotlines, and, of course, fashion.

Dressing on-screen presidents and the slew of people around them has become a part of Lyn Paolo's career. As the costume designer for *Scandal* and *The West Wing*, she has solidified her place in television history (though her work on show's like *Gideon's Crossing* and *E.R.* is not to be overlooked).

With *Scandal's* immense popularity and the rise of social media, Paolo has stepped out from behind the scenes and emerged as a star in her own right, known around the world as the woman who dresses the almighty Olivia Pope. Thanks to First Lady Michelle Obama, who has ignited a synergy between style and the White House in a way that no one had since Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis, the bridge between fashion and politics has pushed Paolo's recognition forward with lightning speed. With *Scandal's* return slated for just a couple of weeks' time, we talked with the costume designer about what it's like to work with powerhouses Kerry Washington and Shonda Rhimes, why women should go for color when it comes to office dressing, and how Michelle Obama has reinvented political fashion.



BROADLY: Few would be surprised to know that costume design is about much more than just pulling already-created looks from designers and brands. Can you go into a bit of what a day in your life is like, especially during filming?

Lyn Paolo: My days are fluid, hectic, and

exhilarating. I can either be in a concept, budget, or production meeting. If I'm not in planning meetings, I'm in a fitting room with an actor. My amazing crew does the bulk of the hard work; I ask for something or I give them a rough idea of what I am looking for, and they deliver. Most days are long: I get up really early every day to work out before I head to the office. Once I am at the office, I have no idea when my day will end. It can be very stressful, but also very rewarding.

You've worked as a costume designer since the late 80s.

Have the twists and turns of your career surprised you?

The things about my job that make it rewarding are the challenges, changes, and constant reinvention of a story or a character. These are exactly the same things that make my job difficult. For longevity in costume design, I think it's important to be constantly evolving, changing, learning new tools for your career, and ensuring that you do not become stagnant. This is one of the reasons that I love to design multiple shows, as it helps me to stay fresh. If I am dressing a Gallagher on *Shameless* in the morning and then Olivia Pope in the afternoon, you can imagine the different approaches that would be needed to create these very divergent characters.

Do you feel that *Scandal's* global appeal has changed your career?

Scandal has been an amazing gift. I have met wonderful people, and I love working with Shonda Rhimes and Kerry Washington. I would also say that social media is changing how costume designers are perceived; people actually know what I do every day because of social media.



You worked with Kerry and Shonda on dressing Olivia Pope in white to make her stand out and command attention. Do you think white can do the same thing for other women in their professional

lives?

Each woman in business should try to find the color that makes her feel most powerful. I really believe that color has power; however, each of us has our own favorite. For myself, I love to wear blue: Somehow it makes me feel stronger. I know that many people think that black is the go-to color for business, but I look around and see everyone looking the same. I love it when women challenge the pre-conceived notions of how a businesswoman should dress.

Suits are so important to the show, but admittedly not the easiest to shop for. Do you have any tips on purchasing the perfect suit?

Interestingly, Olivia very rarely wears a suit. I think most people

would be shocked to know this, but in truth we pull pants from many different designers and then we mix and co-mingle different jackets and other pieces with these pants. We tailor everything Olivia wears to fit Kerry perfectly, and that is the true tip: Find someone to help you to ensure that your jacket fits perfectly.



What do you think Michelle Obama has done for American fashion and for all around the world?

I adore how Mrs. Obama dresses. She is fun and lively in her color choices. I believe she has completely reinvented dressing as the first lady.

How can modern-day women channel the effortless and graceful of ladies like Michelle Obama or Olivia?

Confidence and a great fit. I can't stress enough the importance of finding yourself a trusted tailor.