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# Calling the SHOTS

Moldovan model and influencer Doina Ciobanu boasts serious style credentials – and she’s using her platform to push a more sustainable approach. Grace Cain finds out more

When she was growing up in post-USSR Moldova, Doina Ciobanu dreamed that she would one day become a politician. She duly studied political science and history, before fashion muscled its way in. At a time when blogging was still in its infancy, a teenage Ciobanu was one of the first to carve out a career via her own little corner of the internet. Fast-forward a decade and she has been recognised for her personal style by the likes of *Elle*, *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, has featured on a ‘Forbes 30 Under 30’ list and is finding her niche as an ambassador for sustainability initiatives such as The Global Survey and No More Plastic.

Ciobanu is quick to point out the similarities between politics and fashion. “The competitiveness!” she exclaims. “All the hard work behind the scenes. But also having a certain influence and an ability to gather a little support. That’s something you can only do within politics, entertainment or fashion.”

When Ciobanu first began blogging, the social and political climate was having a very direct impact on what people were wearing. She remembers the sartorial explosion in the years following the fall of the USSR as people took the opportunity to catch up on decades of lost freedom. “You would see the craziest combinations,” she says. “Everything that Vetements has now brought back.” Today, she attributes her own eclectic style to having been exposed to this mix, “although I also ended up preferring minimalism because we didn’t really have that”.

Her aesthetic can sometimes feel contradictory, but Ciobanu doesn’t see the disparate elements as mutually exclusive. “The fashion industry has this idea that you can’t be everything, and that’s what I am pushing against,” she explains. “One day I might be super-masculine – fully oversized, very Celine – but the next, I can be super-sexy in Versace. I don’t see a problem with that.”

Ciobanu now lives in London and says the move has helped her be braver with her fashion choices. “There’s such a phenomenal mix here,” she says. “No other city has espoused modern expressiveness in quite the same way.” She would know. As a frequent flyer, Ciobanu has developed a knack for adapting her look to suit her destination. She frequently uses famous names as adjectives. “In Italy, I like to dress very Monica Bellucci or Sophia Loren – quite feminine. In Paris, I would never dress like that. There, it’s always old-school I-don’t-care chic.”

This level of dedication to a travel wardrobe requires a great deal of Pinterest time. Ciobanu’s searches range from vintage Norman Parkinson editorials to Charlize Theron’s character in *Atomic Blonde*, by way of 1990s Calvin Klein campaigns. She is inspired by Jane Birkin, not so much for what she wore as for the way she wore it. “She was so revolutionary in her time. People now try to apply the same style, but it doesn’t have the same meaning.”

The era Ciobanu constantly returns to is the 1980s. “I have this nostalgia for the underground scene before the fall of the USSR,” she says. “Rebellious youngsters listening to Western music and wearing lots of dark leather. That’s my ideal look.” Indeed, if you happened to bump into Ciobanu on an off-duty day, this is how you would find her. “I’d love to wear that style all the time, but I understand people want to see a mix,” she says. >



Doina wears, this page  
PHILOSOPHY DI LORENZO  
SERAFINI sweater £365 and skirt  
£825; MANOLO BLAHNIK shoes  
£695; rings, Doina’s own.  
Opposite page PRADA dress  
£2,875, shirt £605 and trainers  
£740; rings, Doina’s own

*“The internet is just the digital version of your voice. You can use it to spread a positive message”*

The followers influencing the influencer? Ciobanu shrugs. “I think everyone influences everyone. If people contact me to say they’d love to see how I wear something, I’ll definitely accept the challenge.”

She adds her name to the long list of fashion insiders who feel bereft in a world without Phoebe Philo’s Celine, although she also loves the ease of Isabel Marant’s clothes. And having recently picked up a classic tuxedo from Ralph Lauren, she is now firmly of the belief that every wardrobe should have one. “I can style it as workwear during the day, and for the evening I’ll wear it with heels, red lips and nothing underneath.”

Versatility proves to be a recurring theme as Ciobanu rattles off a list of must-have pieces. “Oversized jeans you can wear with a corset, or with a T-shirt for something more casual,” she says. “A pair of perfect stilettos, because you never know when you’ll need them. And some comfortable shoes that work with everything, from Stan Smiths to Chanel ballerina slippers.”

Given her passion for a more eco-aware fashion industry, it’s not surprising that Ciobanu advocates quality over quantity. She’s one of a growing number of influencers who are making sustainability a focus, but she never resorts to preaching. Instead, she is quick to admit that she is not perfect, inviting her followers along on the educational journey. “I’m a very solutions-focused person, and I think that is the best way to get through to people,” she says. “I only listen to criticism if it’s constructive.”

She recently created a post with the United Nations for World Environment Day, in which she wrote down all the unsustainable aspects of her lifestyle – for example, the flying her job requires – followed by everything she does to try to compensate. “Someone responded: ‘But do you know that flying is really bad?’” She holds up her hands in despair. “They hadn’t even read the post!”

Ciobanu’s best advice for fashion enthusiasts is simple: never throw anything away. “In Eastern Europe, when you stop using something, you give it to charity or a relative. When I came here and saw rubbish bins filled with clothes, I was shocked.” She



### DOINA'S ECO-CONSCIOUS INSIGHTS

#### Quality over quantity

*“Luxury fashion is already quite sustainable because it’s about buying clothes you will wear for a long time.”*

#### Complete the circle

*“Even damaged pieces can be recycled; there are plenty of start-ups out there that can repurpose the materials. We need to create a more circular economy.”*

#### Demand better

*“There’s no excuse for luxury brands to use unsustainable or unethical materials. People need to talk about this more and demand better from designers.”*

suggests selling or donating unwanted pieces, or – in the case of damaged items – recycling them.

Ultimately, she says, it is up to the fashion industry to make significant changes at every level of the production chain. She cites two brands that are setting a good example: Stella McCartney (of course) and Mother of Pearl. She also mentions French furrier Yves Salomon, who recently created a range of coats using only repurposed vintage furs. “Synthetic fur is completely unsustainable,” Ciobanu argues. “You can’t exclude one material for ethical reasons and then substitute it with another that’s bad for the environment. It sounds good in the press, but it’s not a solution.”

I wonder if Ciobanu feels a responsibility to her followers. “A lot of people approach the internet as this evil thing,” she says. “I don’t find it evil at all. The internet is what we make it. It’s just the digital version of your spoken voice. You can turn it into a platform for hate, or use it to spread a positive message.” In a way, I muse, Ciobanu is still following her early political aspirations. She laughs. “Maybe! I can’t say that I’ll never go back to politics – but perhaps it will be from a slightly different angle.” □

*Doina wears OFF-WHITE jacket £1,450; DIOR top £1,200 and skirt, price on request; ROGER VIVIER boots from a selection; rings, Doina’s own*

*Womenswear, First Floor; Harrods Shoe Heaven, Fifth Floor; and harrods.com*

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