



THE PEOPLE MEMBER Q&A

Melissa Del Bono: Fashion's Playful Innovator

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[Melissa Del Bono](#) with her cult 'Bon Bon' bag

Inner beauty. That's what helped launch [Melissa Del Bono](#) into the fashion stratosphere.

In 2005, the handbag designer gave 36 of her bags to the front-row set at London Fashion Week. When they peered inside the bags, they found the lining printed with an address book of essential numbers for useful Fashion Week services - Bliss Spa, for example. Made of the softest metallic-tinted Italian leather and inverted handles, Del Bono's bags, sold under the Meli' Melo' name, had external pizzazz too, of course.

Skip to three years later and Meli' Melo' s coterie of fans includes Scarlett Johansson, Sienna Miller, Fergie, Kimberly Stewart and Kate Moss. "I'm thinking of doing one for New York and Paris as well," said the 29-year-old former fashion PR when we caught up with her at her South Kensington mews studio in early June. "They were quite popular."

The Meli' Melo' bags are about playful innovation - think sculptured not structured. From the fringed 'Bon Bon' with a leather and chain strap, to the supple and roomy signature 'B.B.,' designed to hang elegantly from the crook of your elbow, Meli' Melo' bags are regularly

featured on the pages of Vogue and Tatler. Eva Herzigova and [Charlotte Dellal](#) - friends of Del Bono's - are proud owners of personalized 'Bon Bons.'

Her design style comes from her Anglo-Italian heritage. Del Bono describes her work as "quirky and fun British with an Italian focus on materials and practical design." That eccentric and very British quality appears in the line's colour range and embellishment, while the soft high-quality leather is distinctively Italian in origin. "It's like butter!" declared Del Bono of her raw material.

A passion for accessories began early for Del Bono, who grew up on the Aeolian island of Lipari where her family built the Carasco luxury hotel. "When I was seven, I would carry this big wicker basket to the beach," said Del Bono. "I would always end up with my brother's book and my Dad's sun cream." The family has returned the favour by being supportive of her subsequent business efforts. Del Bono's brother, [Luca Del Bono](#), co-founder of Quintessentially, gave her the final push that helped her launch Meli' Melo'. "Luca told me that the fashion world only knocks once," said the designer. "It was what I needed to stay put and commit." Her parents have also been enthusiastic supporters, attending Paris Fashion Week to see her work on display. "My father went to the Ritz lounge and came back with Vogue's André Leon Talley to look at my bags!"

The future holds the promise of more hits if her Fall/Winter 2008 collection is anything to go by. Del Bono gave ASW a peek at a super-hip, completely chain mail bag called the 'Lancelot,' which features metal handles and ripples as you walk. The 'Shimla' bag is the ultimate glammed-up mid-sized bag with delicate fish belly detailing offset by a heavy gold and black chain adorning the front surface. Beyond that, Del Bono gave us a scoop on what's next. She's working on a 'Mummy bag,' which should help those fashionistas recently visited by the stork carry everything while still maintaining a certain chic.

See www.melimelo.it for information on where to purchase Meli' Melo'. The line will be available for sale online from July.



Meli' Melo' Cappuccino Bag

When did you join ASW?

I joined in 2003-2004. Back then it was a well-kept secret.

How do you use ASW and what's your favourite site feature?

I use ASW when I am travelling. When I was in Marrakech and in Turkey I used the Guide to find cool restaurants and bars. I also use it to keep in touch with my friends who are all over the world really.

What makes you happiest?

The little things make me the happiest.

Where is your favourite travel destination?

Punta del Este. I've just been on a two-week road trip around Italy with my boyfriend and I've been to the most beautiful places. I've been to Le Sirenuse in Positano and the gardens in Ravello and then my home in the Aeolian Islands. Panarea is the party island and my parents have a hotel on Lipari. We grew up shoeless on our island! Dolce & Gabbana have a vacation home on Stromboli now, which has an active volcano. These places are very undiscovered. They're not like Capri.

What is your greatest vice?

Chocolate and travel

What are your top hotels?

Hotel Raya on the Aeolian Island, Panarea. The Raya is just a dream place - you can dance the night away shoeless. Le Sirenuse in Positano. J.K. Place in Florence.

What is your favourite restaurant?

Locanda Locatelli in London and the Aubaine Brasserie in London. In Italy, Nobu in the Milan Armani.

What is your favourite museum or gallery?

The Royal Academy in London. In Italy, anything in Florence. I also love the Frieze Art Fair.

What is your favourite beach?

Fernando de Noronha. This is one of the most exclusive islands ever. It is in the north east of Brazil. Most people go to the south of Brazil. You have to book three months ahead because they never let more than 500 people on the island at one time. It is UNESCO protected so it's like a jewel.

What film has had the greatest effect on you and why?

Le Mépris with Brigitte Bardot. It was filmed between Rome, which is a city that I love, and Capri.

What is your favourite book?

Jonathan Livingston Seagull by Richard Bach

What is your favourite ski resort?

Cortina

What cause is closest to your heart?

Burma, first. The Pro Alvear charity Polo Match on June 20, in Richmond. I am involved with the Didyma Foundation's charity gala dinner that will take place in September. The foundation works for breast cancer patients who need mastectomies. It will have 60-80 guests at the new Dunhill Club in Berkeley Square. I am part of the committee, as is Yasmin Mills, Natalia Vodianova, Yasmin Le Bon, Sara Parker Bowles, Assia Webster, Tess Daly, Anya Hindmarch, Lauren Kemp, Caroline Lynch, Kelly Hoppen, Kate Martin, Carolina Tong and Eva Karayannis.

What is one thing you would like to change about yourself?

I'm impatient.

Who is your favourite historical figure?

Elizabeth I, because she was such a strong woman. She put her emotions on one side and then she just went and did what had to be done.

What upsets you the most?

People who don't get it. I'm perceptive. I think we should all preempt a problem and fix it and not complain about it after. Some people just wait and complain and don't see it.

What's the craziest thing you have ever done?

I can't tell you!

What is your favourite bar?

The Kasbah Café in Lipari, my brother Sacha's place, and Blakes in London

What gadget can't you live without?

My Blackberry and my Nespresso machine

Where do you love to shop?

Everywhere! Portobello Market; Gio Moretti in Milan; Barneys in New York and Harvey Nichols.

Who are your favourite designers?

Alexander McQueen and Chris Kane

What's your favourite cocktail?

Since my Italian road trip, we have been drinking gin & tonics, but only with Tanqueray!

What are your top three songs?

I love Amy Winehouse, Brazilian reggae and Coldplay's new single.