

Matt: Welcome to Cooler than Me, a First Ascent Design Series, showcasing the people that are, without a doubt, cooler than we are. We are so lucky to work with and surround ourselves with amazing members of the local community that are each trying to make the world better in their own way. Here we hope to bring their stories to you. Let's jump in. Hey everybody, I'm Matt. I'm an intern here at first ascent. I'm excited to bring you an interview that John led featuring our next guest, Michelle Fite from Fite Fashion. Michelle is the CEO and principal designer at Fite Fashion. Michelle has a really awesome story and we hope you enjoy listening. To keep listening, check out the Instagram Hashtag Cooler Than Me to see more content from the series.

John: All right. Hello everyone. My name is John with First Ascent and today we're interviewing someone who is definitely cooler than me. Michelle, Fite from Fite Fashion. Thanks so much for, for coming in and chatting today. Michelle is the CEO and principal designer at Fite Fashion an organization founded in 2018 that is focused on launching luxury clothing, dress and accessory lines that do not compromise sustainable and ethical practices for design. After graduating with a degree in fine arts, Michelle turned her focus to fashion, graduating with a masters in fashion design from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. Michelle's first collection is set to launch in 2019 here locally in the Delaware region. Sort of. So we start with kind of a lighthearted question break the break the ice a little bit. Is a, is a hotdog a sandwich?

Michelle: You know, I know that the Stephen Colbert himself has wrestled with this particular conundrum and even went so far as to ask Sonya Sotomayer about it. Um, I know that she personally, I believe, has ruled that it is indeed a sandwich. Um, I don't really feel like I think about hotdogs very often, so that's not something I ever put my intellect to. I, I feel like because of the shape and the fact that it does have a meat filling like something like a Hoagie, I mean sure the meat in a hoagie is sliced and the meat in like a cheese steak, is sliced, but it's also kind of in tube form, like as far as the bun shape and it's not a hot dog bun nor is it two separated pieces of bread. And if you consider those things to be sandwiches, like we say a cheese steak, we don't call it a cheese steak, um, puppet or something like I don't, we don't come up with like another weird name for it. So we, we call that a sandwich and then set some point people called a hoagie a submarine sandwich because the shape but they still put the word sandwich on it. So um, and you're a sandwich artists if you work at subway and then you the same non separated type of oblong buns. So I'm going to say that... sure.

John: I love the question because we get different criteria from everyone. That's the first time I've heard about whether the meat is sliced or not.

Michelle: Yeah, I think that maybe that could be what's holding people up because the meat itself isn't in tube form and then the roll itself is kind of a tube form as well, so that I think that the double tube form is really throwing people through a loop. But if you go to Germany and you go to the beer hall, you get a very different ratio of, which is hilarious, and definitely not what I would call a sandwich and that is because the bun is very small. Like you know my palm, which is small, but the meat in tube form is very much larger. It's like a foot long hotdog in like a dinner roll size. Now that is just hilarious. It was not a sandwich in my opinion, that is a problem that has not been solved. It is, yeah. So that's my take on it. I'm not saying it's definitive.

John: No. I think by the time we have 20 interviews, we'll take a poll. We'll make it a little infographic on it. Yeah.

Michelle: You really shouldn't make a hotdog shaped infographic.

John: All right, so let's take a take a hard right and go back and ask what a, and tell us a little bit about Fite Fashion.

Michelle: Well, I've been working on this project for a really long time and um, the original shapes and design idea is based on my very last, uh, design class project. So the last one that I did before I graduated. And um, so the way the fashion school worked was when you had a design class for a semester, usually you did three different projects and you'd have about five weeks a piece to work on these projects. So what that means is you have to come up with an idea, you'd have to make a mood board about it. You have to edit that you have to go get fabric swatches, do sketches, all these sorts of things that I don't ever do now because they're not part of my natural process. Um, but what I came up with, for that very last project was something that just kind of really clicked in my brain. And for some reason after all these years, I'm still interested in working on it. And those shapes have just really stuck with me. Kind of like, like a thumbprint. And I think that as a designer, that's something that you really look for is, you know, what, what is your, you know, I would say kind of loose signature as a designer, something that doesn't box you in but identifies you something that just is that kind of internal click. And those,

the way that I worked on that project, the way designed it, those shapes, they just kind of rearranged my brain a little. Um, and I feel like they kind of came to me, you know, um, I wasn't trying to find a way to make those shapes. It just was very an organic process with my dress form. Um, and just letting myself try and create in response to other shapes like architecture, um, and natural forms and, and Origami and just kind of letting those things percolate and then working them out. And that's what came out of it. So what I'm hoping is that then you'll have this kind of response to it as the, that's my vocabulary. You know, like for me, when I look at other designers work, I can tell like, oh, that's an Alexander McQueen shoulder. I can tell the way he makes pants hang, you know, that those are probably his pants, you know, and the proportions that he chooses, you know, and I can usually tell like if a calendar is a Zac Posen and gown or a Vivienne Westwood gown or you know, that sort of thing. So I'm hoping that this kind of starts to be how other people identify me. Um, and then I'll be able to kind of just follow, keep following this, the trail of, of these shapes and, uh, the way that it feels for me to make them, um, and just experiment and expand out on it and, you know, alter proportions and, um, different types of fabric choices, obviously, because I don't want to keep making the same collection. I'm not like Thomas Kinkade, you know, I don't want that much of a fingerprint. But, um, yeah, I, I just got inspired all those years ago by those shapes. And it was a weird period in time for me. I had felt really kind of confined, um, like my design teachers were kind of formulaic in their approach and kind of forcing me to work in ways that just weren't, are not how my brain works. So for me to kind of stumble upon this little thing and, and just tell my teacher like, look, I don't want to sketch first. I want to drape on my dress form and take photographs and have that be my sketch and here's what I want to make. Having finally a professor who said, yeah, just run with it. That's really meant the world to me. And so I will certainly give her a shout out once I complete all of this and it doesn't kill me, you know? Yeah.

John: So, and I, I know the beauty of the designs will always be the, the first thing, the first thing that draws the eye. But I know Fite Fashion has a huge push in sustainability and being environmentally friendly and in the arena of dresses and gowns that would be comfortable at a charity gala, for example. So tell me what, what's unique about that? So that, that seems to be a very unique proposition for that tier of dress.

Michelle: I think, you know, people have been flirting with it and then, you know, you see designers like Stella McCarthy talking about it a lot. So I'm by no means the first person to

discuss this sort of thing. Um, you, I know she's working really hard on creating, you know, further transparency in production and supply and materials. And I think that that's really great. So I, I'm not the only person doing it. I think that just what she's making is just different. And I don't think that we have the same target customer. And when I think of people who are doing like really, you know, kind of high fashion, um, glamour things that you would associate with like, you know, the upcoming Oscars, red carpet, I don't, I don't put her into that category because that's really not kind of what she's making, you know, so I'm, I don't mean to discount other people. I just think that. Some people have flirted with it. Some people are definitely greenwashing. I know there's been quite a backlash against Vivienne Westwood for saying that she's an ethical designer and then tracing the her supply chain and, and people coming up with like a lack of transparency there or just saying that, well, using silk from my storage room from 20 years ago and then making dresses out of it now that that's enough. Or just telling people not to buy so much and she does that and that and there is a valid point like we shouldn't over-consume. That is a fundamental issue, um, that we all can and participate in and change. Um, you know, but it's also kind of classist because you know, why, why are people buying fast fashion? If you don't make enough money, if you're making your living on starvation wages and your, you know, the minimum wage hasn't changed in how many years? And you have kids to feed and a car to fix and bills to pay, where are you shopping? You're not like, oh well I'm just going to save off and buy, you know, just that one thing at Bergdorf Goodman's instead of 10 things. Oh, it's such a sacrifice for me to not buy 10 things today. You know, people, people will have to buy what's in their budget. And it is important that people like H&M are doing things like pushing the organic cotton market and making better tee shirts and better basics. And I totally support that. But I, I don't think people are really, uh, tackling the editorial kind of space, you know? And I think that if that doesn't happen, there's still going to be this stigma against sustainable fashion. And that's my concern, which is why I'm targeting the red carpet market, so to speak. Like, I want to show that any major celebrity could wear a gown of mine and outfit of mine to a major industry event next to somebody who's already kind of conquered that world, like Christian Siriano or Zac Posen. And that you're not gonna look at that item and say first like, Ooh, that looks so, um, kind of rustic or whatever the terminology is that people are using. Um, the, you know, there's, there's just this, this issue with people's mentality that they have to sacrifice something that it's, that it's not made as well, that it's not as beautiful that it's going to land you on the worst dressed list, that you can't be taken seriously and that these things only come in like beige. I don't wear beige. I understand that concern. Like I don't own a single item

of clothing that's beige. Um, I will never probably make anything beige. You know, I, I just, I think that unless these items make their way to those lists and to places like Vogue, then there's still going to be that hesitation and, and you're not going to get the influence or attention that you need. And let's face it, like our markets have changed a lot and like Vogue is not the main influencer anymore who is part of that scene and they do what they do and they're going to be around for a while, whether I like it or not. But we've moved into a different world where, you know, we've got tons of celebrities as influencers and then people just doing their own thing in social media or via, you know, youtube channels that they set up and they've got subscribers and, and they, you know, push markets, they, they drive, um, desires, people's buying habits, whatever you want to call it. So I just think that not enough people are really committing to that. They're there, they're minimizing that. And I'm not saying that I'm an expert in that field because I have not launched yet. I don't have experience. I don't actually really sometimes understand why I think I can do any of this. You're just like, "I do feel like I'm about to jump off a cliff," but what keeps me going and what has kept me on this project for so long and what's kept me researching materials since 2007, which makes me want to like bang my head on the wall because it's so difficult, is the fact that if I succeed, the real thing has nothing to do with me. The real, the real success is going to be what can be peripherally accomplished. And that's what keeps me from going insane. You know, just like that idea of like, it's not about the pretty dress. I could never keep going with absolutely no results for all of these years and all of the time that I spend researching and dead end and dead end, you know, if there wasn't this greater goal that had nothing to do with me. Um, so yeah, that's, that's why I'm picking, what I'm picking and why I've stuck with these designs instead of ready-to-wear or casual.

John: That's excellent. Uh, so, and I mean it does, it does. I'm excited to see that in the future. To See your address next to another in the same industry that potentially is made with materials that can't be ethically sourced, but you see the two next to each other and you can't necessarily tell the difference. I mean I'm excited for that, for the article that will come out around that in the future. Um, I do know this is a fascinating interview for me because you're, uh, you know, the entrepreneurial side, but you also have the design side. You're doing everything in the business as most small businesses have to do when they get started. Um, so, um, one question to ask you is, can you tell me a little bit about the process of designing? Uh, again, cause I know the materials do affect form and, and material reflects what you can do with the art. Uh, but I'm

curious what the process is. If it's not the stereotypical way that an art school might tell you to do it.

Michelle: Yeah. They want you to like come up with other people's images and put them in a grid with Photoshop or rip them out of a magazine and make a little collage. Now I'm great at collages. Yeah, it's true. You know? Um, and I, I've spent an inordinate amount of time on Pinterest, that's for sure. Uh, it, you know, because I'm such a visual thinker, it lets me give people a, like a little smidge of my brain, you know. Um, so, you know, when I'm wrestling and I'm, and I'm thinking like, what is this missing piece? Like what, what is it that is gonna push me forward? I do look at a lot of vintage garments. I like zoom into photographs to see where people are putting seams and darts and, and if I can tell from a photograph, like whether it's an editorial photograph or a runway photograph, whatever it is, how other people are using a type of fabric that I want to use and that that informs how these pieces kind of come together. But for me, like this collection was kind of about what if I put, you know, these kind of ideas of, of light and shadow and manipulation, you know, from Origami and you know, these kind of really natural forms like, you know, maybe like Calla Lilies and which are softer like this, the shapes around or we think about Origami having a lot of like more pointy kind of sharp, uh, creases. And I thought about how that's interesting in the way that it plays is interesting, but it's doesn't, when you start draping that stuff, you realize how different those shapes are than the female form and how the female form necessitates a softening. And that's really kind what happened. So I started with this idea of like these shapes and kind of folding things. And then I started like, you know, kind of trying to make it like make it, you know, force it on the dress form and the dress form was like ha ha, you're funny. That's not what happens on the female body. Right? So I wanted to just kind of take the idea and like set aside the literality of it. You know, the literalness of one for one kind of translating a different word on each shape and you know, then then that was really great because what propels a woman to buy an outfit, generally speaking is not a trend or some like wacky avant garde fashion show. It's the, you know, whether or not it's gonna be flattering on her. So I started to think about those things. So for me the design process kind of is, you know, this nebulous kind of suspending different ideas that are maybe even contrary in my brain and just kind of letting them percolate for a little while. And then I'll get on my dress form and sometimes I'll have a couple days where I'm like, Eh, you know, and I can't quite make it as, it's like when you're in, you're doing a rough draft or something and you can't quite get the sentence to make any sense and you know exactly what you're trying to say

and the words like, you know, when you rewrite it 50 times and then you just walk away from it for a little bit and you come back and then you see it, you know? So my design process is usually that and I, I've found that that's my sketching is being on the form. And honestly, when I'm working on my form and I see myself translating what's been stuck in my head, those moments are really a part of what I live for. As a designer, you know, that that gives me such peace. You know, I feel such alignment inside of myself. Like I know that this is what I was meant to do. You know, it doesn't feel like work for me at all. Like, I actually, sometimes am waiting for someone to come in and be like, what are you goofing off for? You know, like, like get back to work, you know? Cause those moments are just, yeah, it's not, it's, it's just play. Yeah. And then, you know, then I gotta get down to like, okay, well at some point I had to take this off the dress form and make it to like a thing and now I have to draft. So then I take that off my form and I, I start drafting the patterns and then I have to do like a mock up. So then it gets into all the technical stuff that I, and that can be really boring and tedious and frustrating, which I also do. So I, you know, come up with a design. I work it out on my dress form, I take it to the paper, you know, I square up all the corners, I get everything to match. Hopefully not always, you know, I go through those prototyping processes. Really any engineer, you know, so it's, it's, it's not unlike that or like an architect making blueprints and then you make your mock ups, make sure all the pieces fit together and then you can really kind of finalize what fabrics will do the thing that you want. Uh, because you know, if you've watched Project Runway at all, you will know that you have to pick the right fabric and that you will not win a battle against the fabric. Like you will always lose it. You will cry. And that's it. Um, so that, that's another, a whole other thing. I mean, you really, by the time you have a couple fashion lines under your belt should have an encyclopedic knowledge that you can just pull from. And that's a lot of trial and error. It's a lot of like, what happens if I do this?. There's often no other way. And sometimes, you know, I'd get, I'd come into class with like a little sample of, of a part of a dress that I'd made in the real fabric and I'd get gasps, like, oh, you know, you draped that and I'd have sharpie marks all over it. He'd be like, you draped that in a real fabric that's like \$30 a yard. And I'm like, there's no other way. Yeah, I'd rather, I'd rather do a sample of a yard in this to get this form because I also play a lot, like my designs are about a certain look, but the process is really about just the right amount of tension. So like, like I really kind of think that I'm dancing with tension a lot. Like I can't make my, my shapes about tension and that involves, you know, understanding grain line and that determines how a fabric behaves. So if you are thinking about how to use a particular fabric, the real question is who, what part of the grain are you using? And I drape a lot on bias,

which has completely different behavior. Like I couldn't make any of the shapes that I make without understanding the bias line and within the fabric. So there's all these kinds of technical things that you learn in process and you have to just really pay attention to it. So it's almost just like how far down can you focus your personal attention in order to really almost get inside a material and then, and speak through the material. You know, because I don't, I don't use words, typically nobody. I don't tell him. I don't really talk to people about what I do, you know? Yeah. It's just me, you know? And so, and I know that I can't, I couldn't rely on that anyway because what I learned from fine arts is, you know, you should be able to walk into the gallery and have your own experience with that work. Like once you put it out, it's not yours anymore and you should control as much as you can with it. So how do you want people to approach it? How should it be lit, you know? Um, do you want it on a pedestal or on the floor? Do you want it suspended from the ceiling, which I've done with other pieces that I've made, you know, should it be framed? Or should it not be framed, you know, all these sort of things that I pull from my fine arts background, you know, make me understand that my work should speak for itself. So I don't, I am always a little reluctant to explain too much because I also don't want to put too many filters in front of other people. I don't want to tell people what they should think and how they should feel if they inspect my garment. Right. Or if they try it on. So, you know, I don't mind talking about it. It's not like super secret. It's just that I don't want to be a dictator about my own work, you know?

John: That was good, that was great. What is something that someone could do to get involved with either Fite Fashion or with sustainable fashion in general? What advice would you give to an everyday consumer?

Michelle: Well, the one thing that I'm going to do for people, whether they buy my things or not is on my website, I will have a really comprehensive directory that will give people a whole slew of resources and stores that they can purchase from. So it can be anything from housewares like bedding to, you know, uh, whatever, you know, pajamas, kids clothes, supplies, that sort of thing. Because I want to forward this. I want to make sure that these people that are have worked so hard, which I know they have, in order to just make you know anything simple. Like, uh, I know a woman who's just did a crowdfunding campaign for you know, Yoga Pants, but it's taken her probably a year and a half of work because she really, really wanted sustainable products. So she made sure she got all of her fibers are recycled plastic bottle fibers. The

leggings are reversible, so they're print on one side and solid on the other. And so she needed to make sure that they were printed using a low impact dyes. And so then she has to take that and send it to L.A. and they had to do it there and then they get cut and sewn in America. So she wanted all the products, all parts of her product to be traceable and ethical and low impact. And I'm, you know, I bought a pair of her leggings. I have to actually get them I think next week. But I'm, you know, I understand how much work goes into all of these things and that I, because I am above all, like trying to combine my concern for the environment with my concern for, you know, just a normal average worker, that I want other people to know who's doing what. And I know that everybody is really busy and they do not spend as much time researching this as I do. So I want to put a compendium together and make it easy for people to be like, I want good yoga pants. I want, you know, good sheets for my house. I want some these supplies I can buy, you know, those type of, um, you know, recycled glass beads or whatever it is from these different suppliers. So that's one thing. Whether you buy my gowns or not, you can use my service. Um, but as I expand I'm going to need to hire people obviously, and I'm going to need to have a workspace and I'll have money that I can, you know, put toward different, you know, projects or whatever. So as I make a profit at some point, hopefully not too long from now...it's been a long project. Um, I would like to make sure that I'm investing in a green portfolio for example, that I'm doing, you know, impact investing and I would like to make sure that I'm hiring in a way that supports my community and that everyone who works for me makes living wage. And I'd like to institute profit sharing. So at some point people could help me by helping me reach out, you know, connecting those dots between, you know, are there community outreach programs that have people who would be a great fit for the type of work that I need. You know, like job training for example. Like I think that I could hire... I had this really great idea the other day about how I could hire, um, blind people. There was a particular job that I had that I thought I could train someone for. Just simple, simple things. Um, but you know, from, from my personal experience and what I've, I've gone through in my own life, I, I would like to figure out how I can work with maybe, um, domestic violence organizations to help women who are in that crazy limbo of like they removed themselves from a situation. But so often women leave those situations with nothing. And they, you know, can be in situations where their partner is an abuser, not just, you know, physically or emotionally, but very often has complete control of finances. And a lot of that kind of a person also does not want their partner working. So a lot of these women are leaving the situation without a lot of job skills, without, um, maybe anything in their bank account. And they also, you know, need to be in a sensitive environment where the

people around them are not going to be stressing them out. And, you know, giving them that kind of space. So I mean those are things that I would like to incorporate. So at some point I'm going to need to reach out to other community members and figure out what makes the most sense for where I am, how I could maybe do some sort of job training and just create a space that is positive for everyone. You know, because I'm going to be there all the time and I am not going to be putting up with any shit personally. So you can imagine, um, I get a little fierce about that kind of thing. I'm a very protective person and um, so I'll probably make that very known that if someone is unkind, um, to one of my workers that they will personally be dealing with me and they probably don't want that.

John: I'm glad to hear you say that, especially as a, as a new business. As a new organization because sometimes it takes a few years for that to coalesce, I know it did for us. You know, we have a rule about not working with, or hiring, or interacting with bullies in general and that's a stated company rule. But it took him three plus years for us to take that gut feeling that we had and codify it. So it's really exciting to hear that come from a new business.

Michelle: Well, I think that, you know, we have such an opportunity to, to set a tone, you know, it's not just your job as the person's starting it. It's, you know, like a project or a business or whatever. It's not just your job to understand how those materials work, what your timeframes are, how much supplies you need, what's your target goals are for the quarter, like that stuff. Sure. That's all well and great, but it's a really, you're missing so many other things I think. And I think that a real leader, you know, is someone who provides an example, you know, a way to move forward. Right. And you don't, you don't get to tell people to follow you. It's just not how it works, you know? So if you want people to trust you and to give you their, their full attention when they're at work and to want to stay with you and feel invested in something, then what do you have to do? Right. So that's what I think about. I think about, you know, yeah, this is my project, but there's no way I'm scaling any of this alone. So if I want the best people and I want them to stay with me, then I can do really great things. And I mean, personally I'm sure you would agree with this, it's far better to have a waiting list of people who want to work for you than it is to have high turnover, right? And I mean for, for me when I look at with longterm fashion houses is the people who, when they're interviewed about what they're doing, they always talk about all of the different components. Like all the people who run the different parts of their teams. And these are people with them for a long time. You know, that's priceless.

Especially since the stuff that I do, like I said, I'm not making by gangs or small ticket items, things that are simple. I'm making things that take years, you know, to learn how to make like this skillset is, is dying and if I'm going to invest in finding the right people and training the right people have to keep them. Because if I'm a jerk and I'm running around my studio like a diva and people are rage quitting on me and I've got 10 you know, if I'm lucky enough to have 10 gowns on order, I can't have the one person who knows how to do some obscure technique being like, "I hate you. I'm done." You know

John: I wish more businesses in general thought that way and put a value on the people that work with them. I think it's, it is a uniquely small business thing to have that perspective, to know that those, those top 10 people can really make or break you.

Michelle: Yeah. I mean it's, it's always so obnoxious that, you know, people think of very well known fashion designers and they just think of that name. You know, they just think about Ralph Lauren. They just think about Calvin Klein right now. How many people work for Ralph Lauren? He's done none of that on his own. Same, with Calvin Klein. One of them was just, Oh yeah, it was Ralph Lauren. He was just like a tie designer. Hmm. That's how he started out. And Calvin Klein had like this freak discovery where people got off at the wrong floor and walked into his studio and they were, I think in the building to see someone else's potential buyers. Right. And um, he randomly got discovered that way. And I will tell you, none of these people do all of it alone. And so what was really interesting to me when I was in Paris for a class is in the city hall there, they had this really wonderful exhibit called "les petites mains." It means the little hands. And they had this whole kind of glass-covered trough of all the little white gloves from all of the [inaudible] workers from the Couture studios and every garment displayed in that exhibit listed the number of people who worked on it and how many hours it took to complete that garment. And that is so important. That's the kind of stuff that I want to include in my, in my work, in my literature and my website, all that sort of thing. Because while I can do all of this right now by myself, because I've had no choice but to constantly up my skill set, like I'm taking a bra class next week I'm going to learn how to make bras, you know, and then I'm going to train people. But it's, you know, it's not anything any of us do alone. So what I'd like to see on the billboard besides Calvin Klein is how many people work for him and what kinds of jobs they have. Because you know, there's one person who just designs the underwear. And in fact, I know somebody who actually was working for a different underwear company and now is in his men's

underwear chain. And I went to high school with totally random. But you know, I just, I don't think you can think about it as you and your name. Like it is your, your yourself on the line. Yes. You know, and you do as a business owner, take on that risk and that responsibility. But do you really want to carry it on your own? And how do you get other people to invest in that and share it with you, not by being a jerk. You know, and I just want, I want to do different, I want to do profit sharing, but I also want to incentivize people. So because I'm not a micromanager, I believe in hiring the best people and then letting them do their job. So say we have our production goal and our goal is to finish two gallons by Friday or whatever it is. But we finished that Thursday afternoon. We're going to do something great. We're going to have fun. We're going to have an impromptu dance party or order pizza or whatever it is, people vote on, you know, and then if we don't need to be there Friday, maybe we'll just take the day off, you know? And that's, you know, an incentive to stay there to, to invest. And you know, the other thing is most business, especially like what I'm doing right now, all of the parts of the design process, you know, fabric selection, the literal designs, the literal pattern pieces are all puzzle pieces. It's all problem solving. I need help with that sometimes. And I think too many people get caught up in this idea that they have to be the one to solve the problem. And like I just tell people that's not where my ego is invested. I don't care who solves the problem. If there's something that comes up about a particular fabric or a pattern piece that we just cannot figure out and somebody does figure out a better way to do it, a more efficient way that doesn't compromise our quality, you know, helps our production move smoother, whatever it is, that person is, is going to get entered into a drawing for like a spa day or something. You know, like I want to incentivize that, not, not create the kind of workspace that so many people have worked in, which is in that I have worked in, you know, I remember as a waitress we had this problem where I, um, I had to go to the bartender every time somebody wanted to like a coke or a seven up, it was totally stupid. It was inefficient and the servers didn't have their own soda machine. So I was like 'dude'. Then they get crabby at me. Then my customers are like, I, why am I waiting 15 minutes for a diet coke? It's ridiculous. So I said, listen, I know this costs money, but we are all capable of pouring a diet coke on our own. We shouldn't be bothering the bartender and the customers get crabby about it. You know, we can give them a better experience and then I get a better tip. So can we just do that? And they didn't do it and it was dismissed. And of course, I mean, I'm guessing that if a different manager had said the same thing, maybe it would've gotten done. I don't know. But I just don't want to create an environment where people don't care whether or not something

could be done better and they don't feel like they can say it because they're this person and not that person, you know? And I just, I don't know why more places don't run that way.

John: We'll see. Yeah. Hopefully, hopefully it'll be something, another tone that you can set and then have hopefully that spreads as well. I think there's, uh, a group of successful businesses that are starting to, to come back to at least publicizing. I'm sure there's businesses that exist that treat people well, but they're at least gonna start telling that story a bit more. Yeah. So, question for 2019: What's, what's next? What's coming up, you know, where can we expect to see you?

Michelle: Well, um, I just finished booking my photo shoots, professional fashion photographer, actual fashion models. Yeah. So I'm going to be running around New York on Monday for that. Um, I have some meetings with modeling agencies and my photographer and my zipper guy in the garment district. I've got to go see Dave... zippers are a problem. Um, so yeah, I'm organizing that. And then of course we need time to edit all the photos, get everything set up on the website. So I'm looking at, um, when I talked to the photographer on Monday, I'll double check the timeframe with him, but i'm thinking mid to late June launch party at the launch party when I invite, you know, relevant people clearly, um, and have people wearing my garments. I had some local girls that model for me in Philly fashion week here or there. Um, so I, I'm going to ask them to wear those garments again. They might not be exactly the same as the ones I'm selling, but just to give people a real idea of what my work is, what it looks like to walk around in it, all that sort of thing. Um, and whatever I can have on display, I'll give people a chance to see and even maybe make purchases if they're, you know, whatever size I'm able to make at that point. Um, and then the plan for the rest of the summer is things like trunk shows. Um, just to get, get things set up, give people more opportunity to see what I'm doing, place orders, maybe try some cotton mockups on in, you know, just the very basic components so that they can see what sizes they really are in my line because it's not realistic to make every single size and every single thing and truck it around. As you know, it also speaks to the fact that I'm not interested in a production, you know, and if I, if I make 500 things and just hope people buy it and I'm not really sure what sizes I need the most of, I mean, that's inherently wasteful. And that, that in and of itself I think sets me on the platform of sustainable fashion, that I am not being wasteful in, you know, wishful producing I'm not having things stored in a warehouse. I don't make it unless it's sold.

John: We won't be finding you burning excess inventory

Michelle: Yeah. Yeah. Have no problem shaming people like that. Everyone. Yeah. That's a travesty. It's like if you want to retain your brand cache and you're so scared that if he goes to a discount store, a poor person might wear your Burberry outfit. Like, yeah, you got a big problem. Um, and they should feel bad and they should receive shame over that. You know, and it's about time. Some people are like finally not, not using fur like, this is a big announcement. This is a big sacrifice for, you know, people like Michael Kors or whoever. I'm like, really this long it's taken you, you don't get a gold star for that man. You just don't, I won't ever use those items. Any leather that's in my line is going to be like from a deadstock thing or you know, it's going to be repurposed. So yeah, no, or pineapple leather,

John: Which is fascinating. I'll put a, I'll put a link in the description, but there's a pineapple leather that you, you turned me on to this to see that this material exists and it really is fascinating. Yeah,

Michelle: Yeah. You can make shoes and handbags and all sorts of stuff out of it.

John: And so we, what, uh, is the best way for someone to get in touch with you, if someone wanted to reach out and get to know Fite Fashion a little bit more, what's the best way, email or something like that?

Michelle: Sure. And I'm, you know, I've been kind of keeping up with my Instagram feed, so I mean, I'm not the kind of person that wants to superfluously bombard people with things. I'm not going to be running around taking selfies all day long. I mean I feel like it's important to give people an idea of what I'm working on, what I might be using, get some feedback. It's just kind of fun to share like pictures of sparkly fabric or you know, the different swatches I've been receiving from going to trade shows because are a lot about becoming designers like myself, who last year was my first trade show, I had no idea how any of that worked and that, you know, you receive all these swatches in the mail and all that. So it's fun you know, you get things from all over the world. They got a bunch of things from Spain and Italy and Korea. The Mitsubishi Corporation makes fabric out of tree pulp now. I mean you learn a lot. So I like to share those sorts of things with people, maybe designs that I'm working on. I guess quite a process and you

know, to be able to really think about it and articulate it to other people is important. You know? And I do want people to fundamentally know what kind of business I am. Not that, I think that it's the real reason why someone's going to buy my product. They'll buy it because they like it. They want to wear it, and they'll feel amazing in it and they like what I do. But I mean, the other stuff I think, I think it's good because it's not visual and gives people an idea of if they're thinking about starting a fashion business or working for a fashion business. I mean, I think for myself, if I was in a position of wanting to find a job in fashion, then that's where some of this like work culture and a philosophy kind of stuff comes in that would help me make my decision. So like who I wanted to spend a bunch of time around, like, you know, well, there you go.