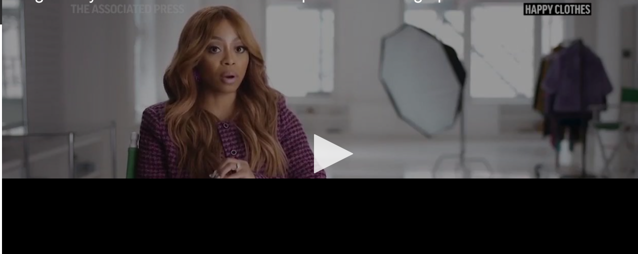
ENTERTAINMENT

Patricia Field, 'Sex and the City' designer on Carrie's iconic looks, a must-have fashion item



Costume designer Patricia Field has never liked fashion rules. The woman who put a tutu on Sarah Jessica Parker in "Sex and the City" and leather driving gloves on Lily Collins in "Emily in Paris" is getting her moment in the spotlight in the new documentary, " Happy Clothes: A Film About Patricia Field," which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival earlier this month. (June 23)

BY BROOKE LEFFERTS
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NEW YORK (AP) — Costume designer Patricia Field has never liked fashion rules.

The woman who famously combined a tutu with spiky heels on Sarah Jessica Parker in "Sex and the City," and made a plaid bucket hat cool on Lily Collins in "Emily in Paris" has a way of making high fashion feel accessible to the masses. She explains how she does it in the new documentary, "Happy Clothes: A Film About Patricia Field," which recently premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival.

The film is directed by Michael Selditch, who also directed the CNN docu-series " American Style" in 2019. While interviewing Field for that series, he found a bold character with a unique, unconventional style of mixing color and patterns and designer looks with street wear. While at first Field resisted the idea of a documentary crew following her around, she finally relented and says she's pleased with the result.

The Emmy-winning Field, 81, was behind the inventive outfits on "Ugly Betty" and is known for styling films as well, including "The Devil Wears Prada," which earned her an Oscar nod. The Associated Press sat down with Field and Selditch recently to talk about her process, that tutu, and which item everyone should have in their closet.

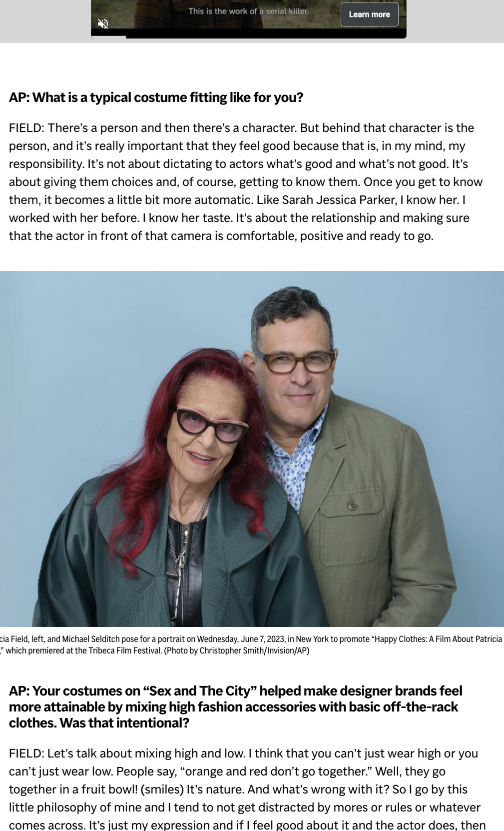
Answers have been shortened for brevity and clarity.

AP: How did you get Pat to agree to this documentary?

SELDITCH: I said to her, "You know, anybody can make a documentary on you. We can always find people to sit down and talk about working with you and say wonderful things and throw in archival footage. But that's not exactly the documentary I want to make. I want to watch your process. I want to see you shop. I want to see you working with actors. I want to really make it verite and watch you work and get inside your head and be a fly on the wall." And I said, "If we don't do it now, when are you going to do it?"

AP: What is a typical costume fitting like for you?

FIELD: There's a person and then there's a character. But behind that character is the person, and it's really important that they feel good because that is, in my mind, my responsibility. It's not about dictating to actors what's good and what's not good. It's about giving them choices and, of course, getting to know them. Once you get to know them, it becomes a little bit more automatic. Like Sarah Jessica Parker, I know her. I worked with her before. I know her taste. It's about the relationship and making sure that the actor in front of that camera is comfortable, positive and ready to go.



Patricia Field, left, and Michael Selditch pose for a portrait on Wednesday, June 7, 2023, in New York to promote "Happy Clothes: A Film About Patricia Field," which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. (Photo by Christopher Smith/Invision/AP)

AP: Your costumes on "Sex and The City" helped make designer brands feel more attainable by mixing high fashion accessories with basic off-the-rack clothes. Was that intentional?

FIELD: Let's talk about mixing high and low. I think that you can't just wear high or you can't just wear low. People say, "orange and red don't go together." Well, they go together in a fruit bowl! (smiles) It's nature. And what's wrong with it? So I go by this little philosophy of mine and I tend to not get distracted by mores or rules or whatever comes across. It's just my expression and if I feel good about it and the actor does, then it's fine.

AP: The white tutu and gold "Carrie'" necklace have become iconic items. Do you know when you're putting something like that on an actor that it's going to hit?

FIELD: I don't always have that same formula of knowing beforehand what it's going to be. But I have my taste. It's not haphazard for me, and I guess it's my formula and I guess it works for me. It's very important. Dressing someone, man or woman, it's a two way street. They're in the clothes, they need to be happy. I offer the clothes, I have to be satisfied. It's always best to establish a positive relationship and when the actor trusts you, you're home free.

SELDITCH: One of the things I really love and admire about Pat is that she goes with her gut in her work and in her life. And I think that what you're looking at there, like the tutu, it's just in her gut, it felt right to her. Other people might be like, "Why?" But to her it felt right. And it turned out to be. And her gut isn't ordinary or obvious. It's fun and crazy and exciting. And that's one of the things that people respond to in Pat's work.

FIELD: I think the tutu industry will thank me. (laughs) I can't stop seeing tutus! Years go by and there's always tutus on the rack. I saw this (skirt) in the showroom, and I pulled it out of a basket on the floor and I immediately thought of Sarah Jessica because she's ballet trained and she's also fashion. She'll understand this. She's not going to treat this with a pair of ballet slippers. She's going to put on a pair of spiky heels and have this little thing. And I said, "Darren (showrunner Darren Star) if it's a hit — and I think it will be — that tutu will be classic through time."

AP: You worked with Molly Rogers on " SATC" and now she's the costumer for "And Just Like That…" Do you think she's been consistent with the style on the new show?

FIELD: I think she's great. She has experience. I've worked with Molly for many years. I met her in my shop on 8th Street and I hired her and we've been together ever since, doing different projects. It's a very long and loving relationship. There is definitely a consistency. But at the same time, it wouldn't be as good if she just tried to copy me. She is creative. She has her own way of looking at it. I think they're doing a great job. I would probably be very disappointed if they weren't.

AP: What's an accessory you think everyone should have?

FIELD: I like a belt because the belt defines the waist and you know, all this like loose, shapeless clothing-- I don't find it very exciting. So I'm definitely a belt girl.