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## Blazing a trail in Milan: *Blazé*

Blazé, a womenswear line inspired by men's blazers, is the work of friends and former stylists Delfina Pinardi, Corrada Rodriguez D'Acri, and Sole Torlonia. Masterfully tailored with extravagant fabrics – a female interpretation of Italy's menswear tradition – the distinctive, year-round blazers were launched in Milan in 2012 as a made-to-measure collection.

This determined trio, who are all in their 30s, understood what was missing from women's closets. "We knew exactly what we wanted to do and how to get there," says Pinardi. Everything would be made to order – and therefore paid for upfront – so the trio required only enough investment to cover the cost of samples. With a small Milan atelier sewing the orders, they were able to sell 230 custom blazers in their first year of trunk shows.

Rodriguez D'Acri tracked down Caroline de Maigret, the blazer-loving style icon and influencer, who became a fan. Soon Blazé was showing at *Vogue Talents* during Milan fashion week and was picked up by the 247Showroom in Milan. The well-connected agency presented Blazé's custom-made samples as examples of what a ready-to-wear line would look like so the brand could gain orders from shops without having to produce a collection first. Made-to-measure blazers are still made in Milan but ready-to-wear garments are produced by a seamstress at a pint-sized tailor in Rome. Blazé sold 500 blazers in the first season and 1,500 in the second; they are now stocked in 100 shops worldwide, including Net-a-Porter, Matches and Le Bon Marché.

Helpfully, the trio had allies from their styling years: photographers, magazine editors and a representative at the Karla Otto PR agency who continues to work with them. For more than a year they worked in Rodriguez D'Acri's living room to save costs, but by 2015, they had relocated to an apartment-like studio on Milan's elegant Piazza Castello and hired their first assistant. Today they operate a second office in Rome and employ a team of eight; collaborations with designers Margherita Missoni, Arizona Muse, and Georgina Brandolini (Valentino's right-hand woman) have helped to generate continuing buzz around the brand.

"At the beginning, we had nothing to lose except time, and no one else was doing blazers for women," says Rodriguez D'Acri. This was a low-risk, carefully planned venture that eschewed brash statements in favour of understated yet distinctive products. "We're not designers," she says. "We're entrepreneurs." **Names goes here**