



CHANGE THE RECIPE

The Italian-Haitian designer on why chef Massimo Riccioli's recipe for cacio e pepe oysters mirrors her own approach to life and work.

Photographer —— Claudia Ferri
Writer —— Laura Rysman

"My way is to create an opening with beauty, and then to fill it with something of substance," says Stella Jean, as she stands at a countertop shucking oysters. She refers not to the recipe (baked cacio e pepe oysters) but her endeavours to change Italy's fashion industry from within. It's been a busy year for Jean. In addition to heading up her namesake womenswear line, she has become the leader of a movement calling for greater diversity in Italy's fashion industry. Born and raised in Rome to a Haitian mother and Italian father, she is the only black member of Italy's chamber of fashion. After the initial flurry of support for Black Lives Matter from fellow Italian brands, Jean agitated for more concrete action: a diversity think tank to collaborate with brands, a public database to encourage more inclusive hiring, and more space for black designers on Milan's fashion week calendar. "Fashion is avant-garde. Why should it reflect the retrograde side of the country's culture?" she asks. "Fashion, after all, influences – it says you should wear bell bottoms, or polkadots, and you do, so let's use that influence for the public good."

Today, she is in the kitchen, at work on a recipe that recalls the classic Roman pasta dish featuring hard cheese and black pepper. It was created by local chef and Jean family friend Massimo Riccioli. And today he stands in attendance at the apartment above his restaurant, the Trattoria La Rosetta. "Massimo would never share the secrets to this dish with me, until now," says Jean.

She sweeps back one side of her dark curls to reveal a grey streak she chalks up to the time and effort invested in the past few months, when her work as a designer morphed into activism. "I'm the only one speaking out about this in first person," she says, as a glass of wine is poured. Jean recently organised a diversity roundtable that saw the

participation of almost every major fashion house in Italy, and helped produce the Black Lives Matter digital runway show during September's fashion week, which put five young black Italian designers in the spotlight. "We have to impose ourselves," says Jean, maintaining her ever-present smile. "They have to see our faces, our names. And fashion is a great tool for this – its impact is positive because the impact of beauty is always positive."

Jean's own clothing line, launched in 2011 after she won *Vogue Italia*'s prestigious Who's On Next? competition, creates its bright prints and details by collaborating with craft communities around the world and using sustainable materials. It is a design approach that reimagines traditional styles of dress with a twist of Italian fashion. "When you're formed by métissage, you learn to approach the world that way and to convey it in everything you do," she says, pointing to her Italian-Haitian upbringing and to experiences from her childhood, such as going to Haiti's pâtisseries, that fuse French tradition with the bright colours and flavours of the Caribbean island.

Jean also credits Haitian tradition for her penchant for expansive hosting: before restrictions dictated otherwise she would think nothing of packing at least 60 guests into her Rome apartment for a buffet meal. As the traditional Haitian dishes she likes to serve – queen conch, meat marinated in bitter orange, or *Riz Djon-djon* (mushrooms and black rice) – are often two-day cooking affairs, the designer delegates the kitchen concerns to her mother or to friends who like to help. Today, thanks to Chef Riccioli, she is making a long-time favourite herself. "It's another métissage, it's a marriage of the rustic aspect of cacio e pepe and the sophistication of oysters," Jean says. "It's just like what I do as a designer." —— K

Cacio e pepe oysters

Ingredients

4 eggs
300g grated pecorino cheese
Coarse salt to fill a small baking tray
6 oysters
Lime
Champagne or white wine
Fresh pepper
Thyme branches
Sliced truffles (or, as a substitute, fresh herbs such as citronella or dill)

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 250°C. In a small bowl, whip three whole eggs with one egg yolk, gradually sprinkling in the pecorino.
2. Allow the combined mixture to sit while preparing the oysters.
3. To open the oysters, hold in a towel-covered hand, use a small shucking knife to pry into the shell's hinge, then slide it along half the lip of the oyster, and pop off the top. Be very careful.
4. Fill the baking tray with a layer of coarse salt, and place the opened oysters face-up on the salt.
5. Squeeze a few drops of fresh lime on each, followed by a few drops of champagne. Grate a small amount of fresh pepper on each oyster.
6. Place thyme branches in the tray's salt to aromatise the oysters, and bake for 2 minutes.
7. Remove from the oven, and scoop a tablespoon of the pecorino mixture onto each oyster. Add a slice of truffle to each, if using, and bake for 3 minutes.
8. Serve with fresh herbs on top, if not using the truffle. Chef Riccioli recommends an accompanying glass of Côtes du Rhône.

