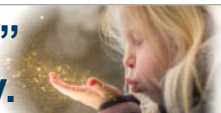


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Melissa & Doug Wooden Alphabet Magnets

The Brains Behind The Beauty South Florida Used To Be A Hit-or-miss Market For Modeling -- Emphasis On ``miss.`` But Former Models Michelle Pommier And Irene Marie Have Changed All That.

July 19, 1987 | By ELIZABETH SNEAD, Fashion Writer

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South Florida. Land of orange juice and coconuts. Mecca of Miami Vice. Birthplace of Spring [Break](#) .

And fertile ground for a bumper crop of high-fashion [models](#) .

In the past few years, South Florida has grown from a sleepy, unorganized hit-and-mostly-miss [model](#) market into an aggressive breeding ground for internationally successful model talent.

There's beauty on our beaches. And as beauty brokers Michelle Pommier and Irene Marie have discovered, very marketable beauty, such as ``hotter than Paulina`` supermodel Christy Turlington from Miami.

Industry observers agree that Pommier and Marie, the biggest players in the South Florida model business, are responsible for an intense interest in local talent.

Jerry Tobias, a Miami photographer from New York, remembers the way the Florida model scene was just a few years ago. ``There were a lot of pretty girls on the beach. But very few fashion models. Together Michelle and Irene changed the entire industry down here.``

Pommier started her agency, first called Agency South and now known as Michelle Pommier Models, out of her Coral Gables house in 1979. Marie opened her Fort Lauderdale doors, originally City Models and now Irene Marie Models, in 1981.

Today, both women run successful agencies. Both have modeling backgrounds. And, not surprisingly, they also share some personal qualities. Formidable beauty. Searing ambition. Controlled drive. And a sharp sense of what sells.

As well as drawing an influx of TV commercials and editorial, catalog and film work into the area, both agencies are recognized ``feeders`` who export their promising fresh faces into the international talent pool.

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A young model's career may get off the sand in South Florida. But, if promise [shows](#) , she soon is shipped off to Europe or traded to New York agencies.

``Michelle Pommier and Irene Marie have wonderful eyes for spotting new talent,`` says Eileen Ford, doyenne of the modeling world and head of Ford [Models](#) Inc. in New York.

And in exchange for the influx of new talent, the New York and European agencies send their top talent to sunny Florida for working vacations.

Their modeling background may be one key to the success of these two women. Pommier was a top-ranked Ford Model in the early '70s, the heyday of superstars Lauren Hutton and Karen Graham. Marie, on a lesser scale, spent time modeling in Paris.

They know firsthand the fast lane and the pitfalls of modeling. The megabucks salaries for eight hours work. And the ego-deflating days of no-pay door-knocking.

Both women also are admitted mother hens who instruct ``green`` models to loosen up for the camera. They spend hours editing test shoots with a fiercely critical eye, selecting only the best shot for the composite, one or two others for inclusion in the new model's portfolio.

But it's time well spent. Because for both models and talent, it has paid off.

CLAIMS TO FAME

Both agents boast of their top talent. The last three Calvin Klein campaigns featured [models](#) from Marie's agency: Mark Ellingboe, Robert Ionucci and Romeo, all from Fort Lauderdale.

Chiseled-cheeked Britt Bradford, also with Irene Marie, first stood in front of a camera a year ago in Fort Lauderdale. He sports an Armani suit for his meteorlike rise to national exposure on the August cover of Esquire.

Pommier's latest and greatest claim to fame is supermodel Christy Turlington, a 17-year-old Audrey Hepburn lookalike from Miami. She walked into Pommier's agency in 1983 at age 14. "I took one look at that face and I knew she was going to be a half-million-dollar model," Pommier says. She sent her to Ford in New York.

"Christy is the hottest [model](#) in the industry today," brags modeling mogul Ford. Wait a minute. More sizzling than swimsuit goddess Paulina Porizkova? "Absolutely," Ford insists.

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During Pommier's own '70s days working with Ford, her face beamed on the covers of Mademoiselle, Vogue, Harper's Bazaar and Town and Country. She also was the first brunette Virginia Slims cigarette [model](#).

Now, as the head of her own agency, she has come a long way.

After leaving New York in 1977, Pommier tried modeling in South Florida. But the professionalism she was accustomed to just didn't exist.

There were no set fees, no exclusive contracts, no agent's help and zero advice for putting together portfolios. "All the models were listed with every agency in town. And as a result, the clients could never be sure of booking anyone," Pommier recalls.

When photographers started calling Pommier begging for advice on models, she realized she was on to something. So, with then-partner Sharon Amberger, she opened Agency South in 1979, working out of her house in Coral Gables.

The Ford connection, as well as Pommier's reputation as an excellent model, was the initial drawing card. "I don't think you can operate a successful agency without a big name in South Florida," Pommier says.

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