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action that would make a statement. In 1991 Pearce Fiorda won the Lloyd's Bank Fashion Awards New Generation prize, with the bonus of sponsorship to stage a catwalk show at London Fashion Week. The following year, they travelled to Istanbul to be presented with the title of Young Designers of the World.

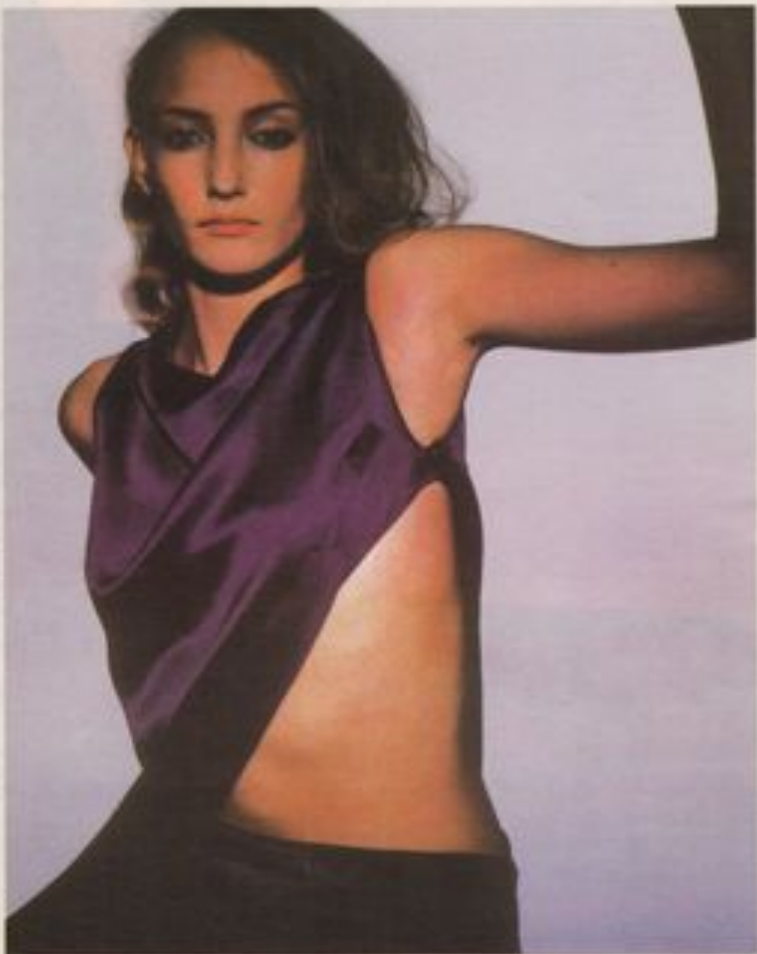
But the journey from budding to serious designers has not been without its struggles. In 1996, despite their impressive awards, Pearce Fiorda were considering throwing in the towel.

Cashflow problems were making it almost impossible to continue. But at the eleventh hour, a lucrative deal with Debenhams - which had the clout to see the designers' potential in the wider market - saved them from the abyss. The Pearce II Fiorda line, launched exclusively for the store, gave the pair a bigger audience than they ever knew existed. Since then, every collection, from their evening dresses, swim- and outdoorwear to the most recent ventures into shirts and singlets for Debenhams, has been a winner. The contract has benefited everyone, allowing the designers freedom to let their creative and perfectionist streaks run wild on their own line, and giving women who would not normally be able to afford Pearce Fiorda a taste of glamour.

'Doing Debenhams has illustrated us to do what we want for the main line,' the pair state. 'I've personally spent a month on a single jacket,' explains Pearce. 'We're still such a small team, nothing escapes our attention. It's practically a couture service.'

Although Pearce Fiorda say they are far from being a fully fledged business, they are sure well on their way. They have a manufacturer in Turin, called Appacheo, which replicates around three seasons ago at London Fashion Week, along with Fabio Piva, and Copperhead Blanket. 'Italian quality is just fantastic and half the price of that in England,' says Fiorda.

In just three weeks, London Fashion Week kicks off and Pearce Fiorda will present their line for autumn/winter 99/2000. It promises to continue evolving with pieces that look clean and modern. The current collection has already moved in that direction. Start shopping now ■



Left: late dress with white underlay, £200
Above: graceful dress, £195