



# TRENDS CLAIR-VOYANT

LIDEWIJ EDELKOORT

Written by Stacy Seiler ART EDITOR  
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"THERE IS TALK THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO EXPAND FLYKNIT KNITTING INTO FREESTANDING OBJECTS & KNIT SKYSCRAPERS WITH ROBOTS. IT JUST MIGHT BE SO THAT TEXTILE IS GOING TO BE THE BIGGEST THING OF THE 21ST CENTURY."



Lidewij Edelkoort  
Photographed by  
Anthon Beekes

**Lidewij Edelkoort** can see the future. She is, in fact, a time traveler of sorts. Yet her renowned ability to predict future trends for the fashion and design industry, years before they manifest, does not require a time machine. Instead, it is a gift that has been with her since childhood. What is Li's ability, you ask? It is her intuition.

In 1975, Li's intuition manifested into an invaluable service with the opening of her Paris-based consultancy agency Trend Union, which produces bi-annual trend forecasting books for the textile, fashion, interior design and beauty markets. Each book is a carefully researched and studied oracle that guides the industry on what forms, colors, fabrics and styles will be on-trend two years in advance. Yet, even with Trend Union's incredible success and international distribution, Li did not stop there. Sixteen years later, just before the Internet would connect the world globally, Li remained one step ahead by founding the consultancy bureau Studio Edelkoort. With locations in Paris, New York City and Tokyo, Studio Edelkoort expanded Li's coveted insight to include the research, analysis and identification of future consumer attitudes, lifestyles, and economic trends. From there her accomplishments have continued to manifest at lightening speed. Over the past 40 years Li has worked with companies such as Gucci, Estée Lauder, Coca-Cola and L'Oréal, to shape internationally branded products while offering strategies for product identity and development. Through the publication of multiple trend-focused magazines, online applications, books, articles, ground breaking lectures, exhibitions, university education development and humanitarian work, Li has earned her reputation as one of the world's most famous and influential forecasting experts in the design industry today.

IRK magazine was lucky enough to receive a warm invitation into Li's West Village home and share in an intimate conversation on the fascinating start to her career, along with her personal predictions of how technological innovations in textile design are redefining the future of the fashion industry.

**IRK: As the founder of Trend Union and Studio Edelkoort you've spent a greater part of your life predicting future trends. How did your childhood or young adult life spark a passion for trend forecasting?**

Li: I'm lucky that I was born [in Wageningen, Netherlands] five years after the war, 1950. I had a childhood with nothing. Very little. I would rarely get an ice cream of 10 cents. We would go to a restaurant or cafe maybe once a year, and I would take tea because it would last longer. So, I had to invent everything. I made my own world from cardboard. I made huts and homes. I was completely in my own world. I could just indulge in my fantasy. I think that has been a very powerful drive in the sense that I can imagine things. I can see things that are not there.

Then our local newspaper held a competition and asked the readers to design a carnival costume. For some odd reason I did that I designed a micro dress and a sash that said 'CARNIVAL' with a little short under it, because the dress had become too short. In the end, the jury did not give me a prize, but gave me a special mention. They said the dress was a bit too serious to be carnival. But they were really amazed because they had just come back from Paris and on the runway they saw this type of clothing and couldn't imagine how a kid in the middle of nowhere had this flare. So I wrote to them and said, "Do you think this should become my profession?" They responded yes,

Illustration by Elena Fuks www.lentov.com

Lidewij Edelkoort  
Photographed by Ruud  
Van Der Peijl.



Solar Curtains  
Photos courtesy of Inside  
Outside Petra Blaisse.

“PETRA BLAISSE IN THE NETHERLANDS IS NOW WEAVING SOLAR CELLS INTO CURTAINS. SHE'S TESTING THIS TECHNOLOGY, SO THE UGLY SOLAR CELLS NOW BECOME SEQUENCE HIDDEN IN BEAUTIFUL WOOLEN CLOTH.”

and that I should go to a good art school. And that's what I did. [Li received her degree from ArtEZ.]

**IRK: Today designers and organizations from all over the world consult with you to help anticipate the needs and wants of their customer years in advance. What is your personal process of forecasting future trends?**

Li: That's what my profession is, that I am able to read everything a bit earlier than others. But it's not my ownership; it's a gift and it's the way I use that gift that makes me creative. The thoughts themselves are universal. They belong to all of us. I call it my intuition, but basically it's a tool that belongs to more universal truths and it's just connected to me like an umbilical cord.

**IRK: If we all share these truths, is it fair to say that you are also paying more attention to them? In other words, you are tuned in like a radio station, while many only hear static.**

Li: Yes, I am broadcasting, I'm amplifying and I listen. Then my brain stops at a word, and I say, "Oh, why do I think 'emancipation'?" There must be something there. Then I start researching and working on 'emancipation', and two years later two million women are in the streets [Li speaks of the 2017 Woman's March]. That's how it works. So bizarre is it! It's sometimes eerie I must say.

**IRK: In addition to forecasting, you are also making great efforts to preserve traditional forms of design by merging past and future craft. For instance, this past September you launched New York Textile Month as a means of educating and elevating interest in textile design. How is technology aiding in the revival of the textile industry?**

Li: There are two simultaneously important currents. One is slow craft, the revival of craft with yarn straight from the farm, straight from the animals, woven or knitted into incredible beauty. Then there is biotech and computer engineered fiber, luminous fibers. There are all sorts of promises of new yarns that will have amazing qualities. They will hide us in the dark, warn us if we are sick and heal us. We will also put textiles in our body, medical fabric and surgical textiles, which are super amazing because they hold our organs together and heal them. Then, further on, there is talk that we will be able to expand

Flyknit knitting into freestanding objects and knit skyscrapers with robots. It just might be so that textile is going to be the biggest thing of the 21st century.

**IRK: You are always guiding us on the future of the industry, but what is the forecast for Li Edelkoort's future?**

Li: I'm working with Parsons, The New School on creating the MFA in Textiles. The idea is to bring together Silicon Valley and Hudson Valley (New York). Hudson Valley is focused in handcraft and Silicon Valley stands for technology. If we can bring these two opposite directions together and embed high-tech into soft craft, we are going to see something incredibly brand new. High-tech always wants to look high-tech in the beginning. People want to send it to the moon and beyond, but it is an aesthetic that doesn't last and we are in that period now.

The next step will be to take the 3-D printing, laser cutting, robot knit-making, biological silks, all of this brand new high-tech along with the embellishment of textile, the quilting, layering, embroidery and you normalize them and embed them into our lives. For instance, Petra Blaisse in the Netherlands is now weaving solar cells into curtains. She's testing this technology, so the ugly solar cells now become sequence hidden in beautiful woolen cloth. Technology will all be integrated directly into our clothes. So the future is amazing and that's the sort of angle I want to explore.

**IRK: As this is our 'Future' issue, if you had the limitless ability to create any future technology, what would it be and what would it do?**

Li: I would clean up all of the water and the oceans so that I could swim everywhere. As soon as I see water I want to swim and I am frustrated, for instance in Venice I want to jump from the boat!

ART EDITOR **STACYSEILER**

PORTRAITS of FASHION A/W  
2018-19, the new forecasting  
books created by Lidewij  
Edelkoort C courtesy of Trend Union.

