

[How Vanity Fair's Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Cover Came Together](#)
Emilia Petrarca, *The Cut*, October 30, 2020



Photo: Tyler Mitchell/Vanity Fair

On Wednesday, *Vanity Fair* revealed its December cover starring U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In an image taken by photographer Tyler Mitchell, the congresswoman smiles with her signature red lipstick, her right eyebrow slightly arched. She wears a custom white suit — a nod to the suffragettes — by the New York-based brand Aliette. Jason Rembert, Aliette's designer, is a Black man from Queens, which is part of AOC's district. "I wanted to bring attention to designers of color," *Vanity Fair* fashion director Nicole Chapoteau told the Cut in an email on Friday. "I also wanted to show that you can be a powerful woman in politics and still look incredibly fashionable."

In a tweet on Wednesday, AOC said she also felt strongly that "as many people working on [this piece] as possible repped BIPOC, women, LGBT+ & working class experiences." According to Chapoteau, AOC's team wanted to know about the pricing on everything. But in the end, Chapoteau felt it was "more important to bring awareness to designers of color that would not normally get such a fantastic opportunity." That includes Rembert, whose pieces fall under the high-fashion category and are priced accordingly.

Of course, this was met with backlash online. Some critics assumed that AOC had purchased the clothes for the magazine spread herself. (She did not.) AOC responded, writing in one tweet: "Republicans are Very Mad (again) about my appearance. This time they're mad that I look good in borrowed clothes (again)." She then went on to share her tips for looking your best, which include: "Drink water and don't be racist."



Below, Chapoteau, who joined *Vanity Fair* in August, goes into detail about the cover spread.

How would you describe how a fashion shoot comes together to someone who's not familiar with the process? Did you have a preliminary call with AOC? What did you discuss? What were her requests, if any?

It all started with a creative and conceptual call between *Vanity Fair's* visuals director Tara Johnson, creative director Kira Pollack, photographer Tyler Mitchell, sittings editor Carlos Nazario, and me, in which we discussed the concept. We wanted this shoot to feel authentic to AOC, but through a *Vanity Fair* lens.

The fashion was a collaboration between Carlos and me, beginning with a discussion about how we envisioned her. We reached out to our friends the designers Aliette and Christopher John Rogers to create custom pieces that we knew AOC would appreciate,

but that also had a bit of the *Vanity Fair* romance to them. We then had a follow-up call with AOC to discuss our concept, and what really stood out to me was that she wanted the pricing for all items and that she wanted to make sure that BIPOC and LGBTQ+ were represented.

Did you get any direction from *Vanity Fair* editor-in-chief Radhika Jones?

Radhika wanted AOC to look strong, powerful, and radiant. I believe she said she has a vibrant personality and she wanted that to shine through. In one particular call, we discussed how being fashionable in politics should not just be for First Ladies and the Kennedys.

And what was your own personal goal or intention going into this shoot?

I wanted to bring attention to designers of color. I also wanted to show that you can be a powerful woman in politics and still look incredibly fashionable.



AOC tweeted that it was important to her that “as many people working on it as possible repped BIPOC, women, LGBT+ & working class experiences.” Did this dictate which brands you pulled from?

Definitely — from the jewelry to the shoes, we considered it all. She asked about each designer during the fitting and I happily gave her a quick bio on each and every one of them. You could tell that she was genuinely interested and that it was all very important to her.



The clothes are borrowed, correct? And this is typical for a *Vanity Fair* photo shoot? Were you thinking at all about their price range?

The clothes were definitely borrowed, and AOC and her team asked for pricing on everything. I definitely considered the price range, but in the end thought it was more important to bring awareness to designers of color that would not normally get such a fantastic opportunity. We were thrilled that AOC was understanding of that as well.

I'm assuming that most of the designers credited aren't advertisers. Is this unusual for a cover spread?

I believe only one or two brands we used was an advertiser. Fashion is often used to tell a story. Whether it's using florals to depict a garden party or plaids for back to school, the fashion lets you know right away what the story is about. Carlos Nazario and I wanted the use of designers of color to tell that story on AOC.

I'd like to discuss each look in more detail. Let's start with the cover. Can you tell me more about how you landed on a white suit by Aliette? What was the discussion around it?

I'm a big history nerd, so for me the color white represents the women's suffrage movement. And I know Aliette is designed by Jason Rembrandt who is a Black man from Queens — a district that AOC represents. We all thought it would look amazing against the beautiful rose-covered gate designed by Julia Wagner. There was so much symbolism in every aspect of the photo.

Can you tell me a little bit more about how you selected the pieces by Grace Wales Bonner, Loewe, and Carolina Herrera?

The Wales Bonner piece was very important to Carlos and me. We wanted to make sure a woman of color was represented in the shoot, and Carlos also loved the look because it was an archival piece, which is a nod to fashion moving toward sustainability. Oh, the Loewe! Well, that just looked incredible on her. I think both Carlos and I were hoping it would work. It was the one look we both loved but did not have for the fitting the day before, so it was a gamble. We thought it was such a strong fashion moment, breaking through the barrier that says that people in politics cannot be both stylish and taken seriously. We both mentioned on our calls that the newer generation accepts both, and wants to see people like AOC look fashionable. The historian in me also thought about the golden yellow color in the fringe sash and how it related to the suffrage movement as well.

The Carolina Herrera look was more about what AOC would look like if she stopped by to visit with her constituents after a day on the Hill or while making campaign appearances. All of the designers — whether they work at their own house or an established one — are of a new generation, and are changing the way we think about fashion. They are all of the new guard, and progressive in their thinking like AOC.

Did AOC make any requests in terms of style/silhouette?

Nothing that I can think of.

What was it like on set?

We all had masks on and there was a health professional to make sure we abode by safety protocols. I think I heard someone call him the COVID Cop, but in a jovial way. He was a really nice guy and laughed about it.

AOC and I both showed up wearing "VOTE" masks, and she poked fun at mine for being a fancy one by Cleo Wade. In general, we were all just excited to be there. Personally, I could not believe it was finally happening.

Was there anticipation of backlash, on your part and/or on the part of AOC?

I personally was not thinking about any backlash, I was just so excited to be working with such a talented team.