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## FWD Insider: Fashionable Immigrants

### Legal Eagle Will Get Your Visa -- If You Pass His Test

By Nelson Mui

FWD New York November 3, 2000 - You've heard the foreign accents everywhere: at the canteen at 4 Times Square, on a shoot at Pier 59 Studios, at the latest boite, when an exotic-looking type juggles engagements and friends on a cell phone. And you wonder: How do some of these foreign fashion folk - some of them more expert at the ABCs of LVMH than the bizarre letter-number combos of U.S. immigration visas - get to work here?

The answer: Daniel Aharoni, one of five leading immigration lawyers specializing in the "creative" industries - and a badly-kept secret among celebrity clients. He's the one Naomi Campbell turned to for her green card, and the same guy Madonna relied on to get her tour troupe's visas at the last minute.

The client list is long, and judging from the signed memorabilia that line Aharoni's midtown New York office, it includes artist Diana Krall, Iggy Pop, Sade, not to mention numerous Conde Nast art directors, countless but not faceless models, fashion stylists and photographers. His success rate recommends him well - over 98 percent for first time petitioners - and grateful clients pass his name along. Aharoni gets almost all his clients from word of mouth.

"American immigration law and the court system's like a banana republic, and I like being a hero," said Aharoni, whose clients are completely reliant on him to get them to the promised land of green cards and worldwide taxation. "I like nurturing people and help them develop their potential and their cases to the INS."

According to Aharoni, American immigration law puts artists, photographers and stylists in a separate category with its own criteria. But only those "artists of distinctive merit" and more importantly, those who can demonstrate extraordinary ability, are allowed visas and green cards. And while egos may run big in fashion, Aharoni says that his clients are generally realistic about whether or not they have that "distinctive merit."

"I don't think they're out of touch," said Aharoni. "I show them the test, which is made up of seven factors. The more you can meet, the better the odds are, but I like my clients to gather more than enough proof - be it numerous awards, group showings, etc. - to guarantee success."

But even still, Aharoni says that among his clients, models tend to be the worst to work with.

"They're more prone to temper tantrums," said Aharoni. "Actors, rock-and-rollers are good. There are a few spoiled brats - and I can't name them because of client confidentiality - but it's not often. People view me as a doctor and someone who can help them."

If there's one caveat, Aharoni warns, is for aspirants to stay on the right side of the law.

"Sometimes, you get people with really bad pasts," said Aharoni. "You see these drug convictions earlier in their lives, and you think 'There but for the grace of god, go I.'"

Below, a summary of general factors not to be overlooked by potential fashion immigrants, according to Aharoni:

Magazine types: Art directors and editors - proof of the individual's contribution in shaping style and visuals. Nominations for magazine awards. Increases in sales of the magazine resulting from the contributions. Critical praise. Recognition as prominent and distinctive among your peers.

Photographers: Covers of magazines. Press coverage. Solo exhibitions. Letters from photography experts.

Models: Celebrity status. Modeling awards, magazine covers.