

HOW THE LONDON FASHION UPRISING HAPPENED

Fashion is always a reflection of its time and of the individuals who channel it. It has plenty to say about what we're getting up to, what we want to escape to and what we're hiding from. So how does this strong wave of design – which came both from graduates barely out of university and from established brands that rebooted themselves – illustrate all of these things?

It is notoriously hard to freeze fashion long enough to take stock of what's happening – it's a medium that contains so many different characters, so many moving parts, and rushes forward in such a blur that it rarely bothers to look in the rear-view mirror. But what is common to all the people in this book is one extraordinary and bizarre fact. They are all part of a London fashion phenomenon that put on its creative and commercial growth-spurt at the very worst of times, precisely when financial markets were crashing, and a pall of economic depression was falling over the world. Time and again, foreign fashion observers stand back and look at London fashion, with its energy, confidence, and its knitted-together organization, and ask: *how was that possible?*

That is the mystery that can be unravelled, in all

its intricacies, through the first-hand accounts of the individuals within this book. The shortcut collective answer to it, though, is simple. In the broadest of terms, London's designers concocted the perfect antidote to the hideously dark times – right in the middle of what threatened to be the most desperate crash since the 1930s. Together, they came up with doom-busting stylistic escapism in the form of colourful, exuberant, witty and, in many cases, beautifully made clothes. While the fashion establishment was paralysed, quaking in fear of taking risks or of causing offence by being too showy, London's designers ran in exactly the opposite direction. They acted as individuals, together. Their answer to the general miserableness confronting their generation was an all-filters-off experimentation with print, colour, showing off and dressing up.

They were a new breed.

'I suppose it's quite uncool. I rebel with lace and tulle.'

Erdem Moralioglu, US Vogue, February 2007

Previous British generations of young designers had rebelled through punk, amateurish aggro-chic and a general attitude of hackles-raised non-cooperation (and



A model poses on the catwalk wearing clothes by student designer Christopher Kane during the Central St. Martins College of Art & Design show at London's Fashion Week, 18 February 2006. Kane won the best show award.

always clad in black). This new cohort – kids in the Nineties, young adults in the 2000s – rose up with a completely different consciousness. They grew up loving Kylie Minogue, Britney Spears and The Spice Girls – or, in the case of Erdem Moralioglu and Christopher Kane, watching TV (Merchant Ivory in Erdem's case, in Toronto; Hammer Horror in Kane's case, in Scotland). Their vividly cheerful, multicoloured uprising overthrew everything that observers had come to expect from 'British' fashion from punk onwards – underground extremism, shock-theatrics and, ultimately, a tedious inability to deliver their collections.

The young designers who turned up next rebelled with their professionalism. They didn't identify with their immediate elders – and frankly, they had even harsher realities to fight against. Theirs was a revolt born of self-reliant optimism: a backlash against the anti-business attitude that had gone before.

But it always takes far more than a fresh sense of style and youthful hopes to turn fashion enthusiasm in to something real. Previous generations of London fashion designers in the early Eighties and the late Nineties had risen and crashed, or joined a steady exodus to show or take jobs in

Looking up at the imposing Georgian frontage of number 30 Welbeck Street, you might feel as if you're about to go in to see a senior specialist. That's quite true, in a way. Two turnings west of Harley Street, right in the midst of the area which has long been occupied by the British medical establishment, lies the practice of the most distinguished expert in his field – Mr Manolo Blahnik, CBE.

As it happens, the world's top expert in the beautification of feet, famously an Anglophile, polymath and gentleman, is also someone who wears a white lab coat at work. As he descends into his elegant first-floor showroom, he's fresh from performing surgical adjustment to the cut of a prototype on the floor above. Hastily plucking off a pair of white cotton gloves, he cries, 'Please excuse me! I've been upstairs working! This, you see, is what I have worn every single day to work; these Italian factory things'.

Manolo Blahnik has never stopped applying his fastidious hands to drawing, carving heels and refining lasts since he started his shoe collection in London in 1971. That he became a shoe designer at all is something he credits to Diana Vreeland: 'Do extremities!' she told him. His is a mind which races across time and cultures, art history and reminiscences, his conversation a glamorous tornado of high-energy chat, self-deprecating anecdote and glorious overstatement. The fact that he's relocated his studio to this West End establishment after twenty-five years on Old Church Street, followed by Kings Road and Sydney Street in Chelsea, is a move he says that was occasioned not so much by choice, as by the landlord's redevelopment plans. 'I was in the same little room for twenty-five years up there in Chelsea, and the house in King's Road; then we moved to Sydney Street – and here we are now!'

It's marked a definite change of scenery from what was an arty, haute bohemian area, but today's new premises have all the grandeur of a 'house' of fashion that you'd be more likely to find in Paris. 'I think it was the Russian Embassy here – something like that,' he remarks. 'We bought it from some kind of pop stars!' He walks to the back window. 'See? Just there, that little dome is an Orthodox church, quite charming!' His whirlwind tour of the house begins in the elegant hush of his double-fronted drawing room on the first floor, surrounded by fur-trimmed booties, satin slippers with sparkling buckles, and myriads of Manolo 'pumps' that are perched in alcoves and on antique furniture beneath a huge Regency chandelier. 'I designed the carpets myself: a squiggle, and

– boom!', he exclaims. 'I don't like fashionable interior decorators!'



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of trading to the world – is not just down to his phenomenal, quicksilver creativity or his technical finesse. Like so many fashion businesses that have

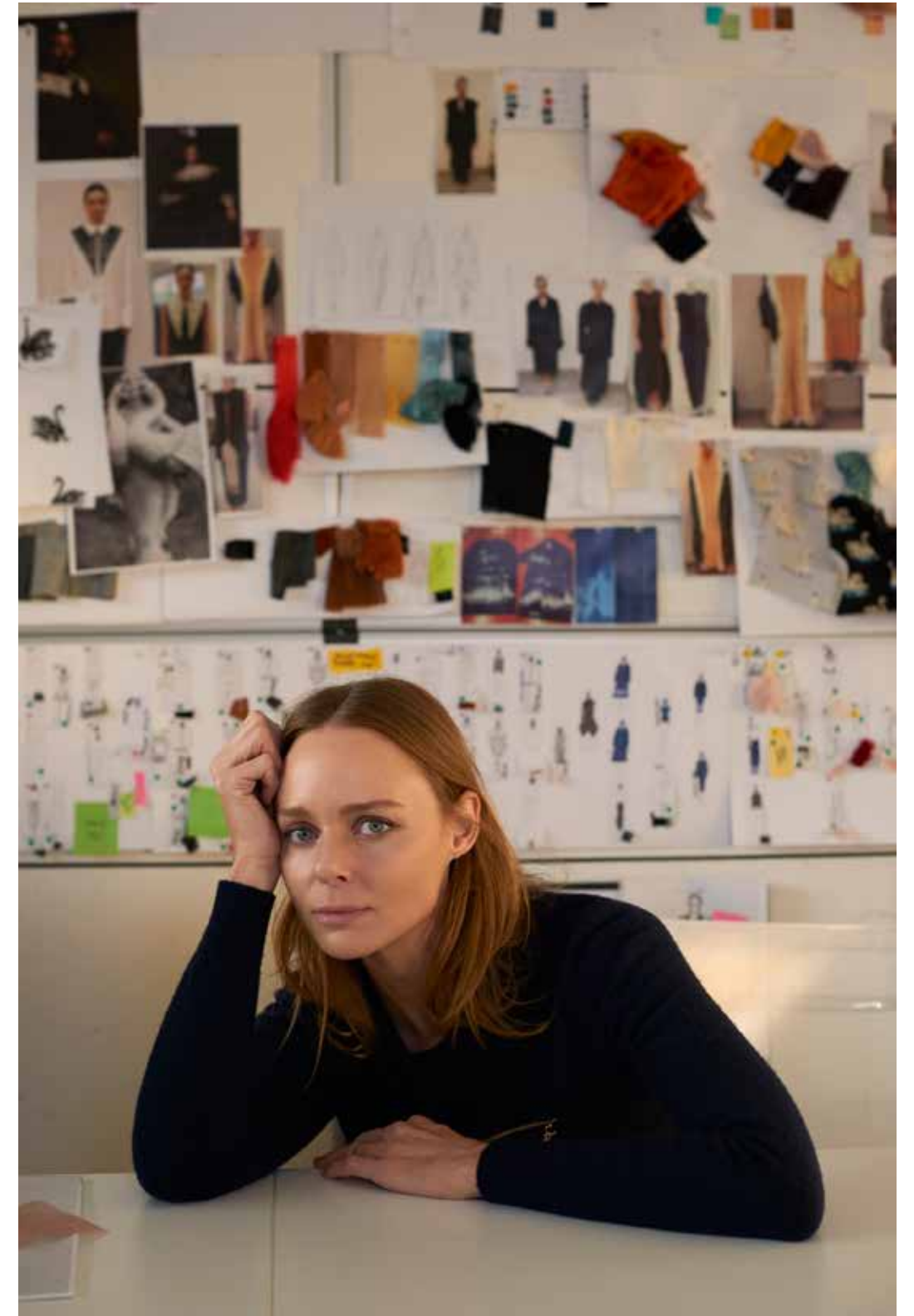
School, they drank in their education, went to life-drawing classes at Glasgow School of Art, and played at fashion at home from the time Tammy was thirteen, and Christopher was eight. They spent hours after school making clothes and textiles on the sitting room floor, avidly watching Jeanne Beker's 'Fashion Television' shows via their father's new satellite dish – and naughtily staying up watching rented horror videos, and late night TV serials when their Auntie Sandra baby-sat. 'People always say it's bad for kids to watch too much television,' laughs Christopher. 'Well, it was great for me!'

Great, because it went in, and then it all came out – a great visual library of pop-cultural, film, music and fashion imagery, stored up for later, nothing forgotten. 'I've got a lot of research, a catalogue, like a diary, I've built up!' Christopher also found out about Central Saint Martins in London, the school with the best reputation for fashion in Britain. 'There was no question, whatever it took,' Tammy remembers, 'he was going to find a way to get there.' She herself forged the fashion school trail, studying Textile Fashion Design Management at Borders College, in Galashiels, Scotland, and coming out with a first-class degree. Christopher got into Central Saint Martins, travelling to London at 18 to start at Foundation level, take a three-year Fashion BA, and then go on to a Masters, under the famous tutelage of Professor Louise Wilson.

Professor Wilson, Course Director of Central Saint Martins MA Fashion degree, forged a generation of fashion talent with her fierce ability to isolate the potential in someone, and make them hone it till it impressed her. 'With Louise,' Christopher remembers fondly, 'it was always, "Show me something I haven't seen before!"'

Even then, Christopher preferred to work in private, at home. Professor Wilson, who died at the tragically early age of 51 in 2014, not only tolerated that, but approved, waiting in her office at college until Christopher could bring Tammy in to model for him when she'd finished work. Times had been tough at home in Scotland. Christopher and Tammy's father had died, and the responsibility for winding up his businesses – a pub and an engineering company – fell heavily on Tammy's shoulders. Nevertheless, the hardship was also a sharp form of business training. She learned about dealing with finance matters, and came down to London to work in sales at the Aston Martin showroom in the West End, joining her brother to support him at college.

STELLA



Stella McCartney
photographed by
Mary McCartney
February 25th, 2016

MOWER

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she says, 'it was a really precious moment. We were going to The Globe, The Cow, Notting Hill Arts Club, Subterranea in Ladbroke Grove, the Wag club in Soho.



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Everything was always West at that time.' Stella's 1995 graduation collection was a combination of antique lace and satin lingerie dresses, and Savile

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Even from its naive first inception, though, her brand (though no one ever uttered that term then) had the