

MODERN
RENAISSANCE
MAN

DESIGNER, PHOTOGRAPHER, COLLECTOR, CYCLIST,
INTERIORS ENTHUSIAST AND ARCHITECTURE ADVOCATE –
PAUL SMITH IS ALL OF THESE AND MORE. HELEN RUSSELL
DISCOVERS THE MANY SIDES OF THE CELEBRATED ICON

Monday

Monday mornings and fashion don't normally go together. In a notoriously tardy industry, where things often run late or come together at the last minute, 9am starts are rare. I'm half expecting the interview to be cancelled, or postponed, or at the very least to speak to a subdued and monosyllabic designer. But for the ebullient Paul Smith, this is practically lunchtime.

"I've been awake since four!" he booms. "I went for a swim, then started work at 6am." Isn't he exhausted? "Oh no, I'm up at 5am most days."

The 66-year-old, with his distinctive grey mane and finely cut suits, has been a fixture on the British fashion scene for four decades – and he's showing no signs of slowing down. Famed for his classic yet quirky designs, Smith is a man of endless enthusiasm and multiple passions that he somehow manages to fit in while running a multi-million-dollar business empire.

Last year, Hong Kong got a glimpse of Paul Smith the photographer when the exhibition *Day Dreaming with My Camera* visited Ocean Centre in Kowloon. We persuaded Smith to share more of his images exclusively with Hong Kong Tatler.

"I've enjoyed photography since I was a child," he says. "Dad was an amateur photographer and would shoot with a 1958 Rolleiflex." Smith was given his own camera when he was 11, and was soon taking pictures every day. "For me, it was all about observing – I liked to find those caught moments, like someone scratching their nose." Inspired by Cartier-Bresson, Smith even covered the shiny parts of his camera in black masking tape to allow him to take pictures discretely and perfect his candid shots.

These days, Smith is never without his Canon PowerShot G10 and captures anything that inspires him on the way to work. When he gets to the office, he drops off the memory stick with an assistant, who prints out thumbnails. "These go to our display manager and the textile print team – so a snap I take one week could end up on a fabric, or the wall of a shop, the next." In the new womenswear collection, there's a shadowy patterned print that came from an image of some Venetian blinds Smith spotted, and the team are currently working with another image he snapped of light filtering through mesh. "I just saw it and thought, 'That would make a lovely dress print.'"

As well as speedy snaps, Smith photographs all the company's promotional campaigns, and has also shot for *The Face* and *Arena* magazines. Famous for his very British sense of humour,

Smith was commissioned to create UK Tatler's Diamond Jubilee collector's edition cover last year. He raised a few eyebrows (and many a wry smile) by eschewing high fashion and shooting a corgi in a crown.

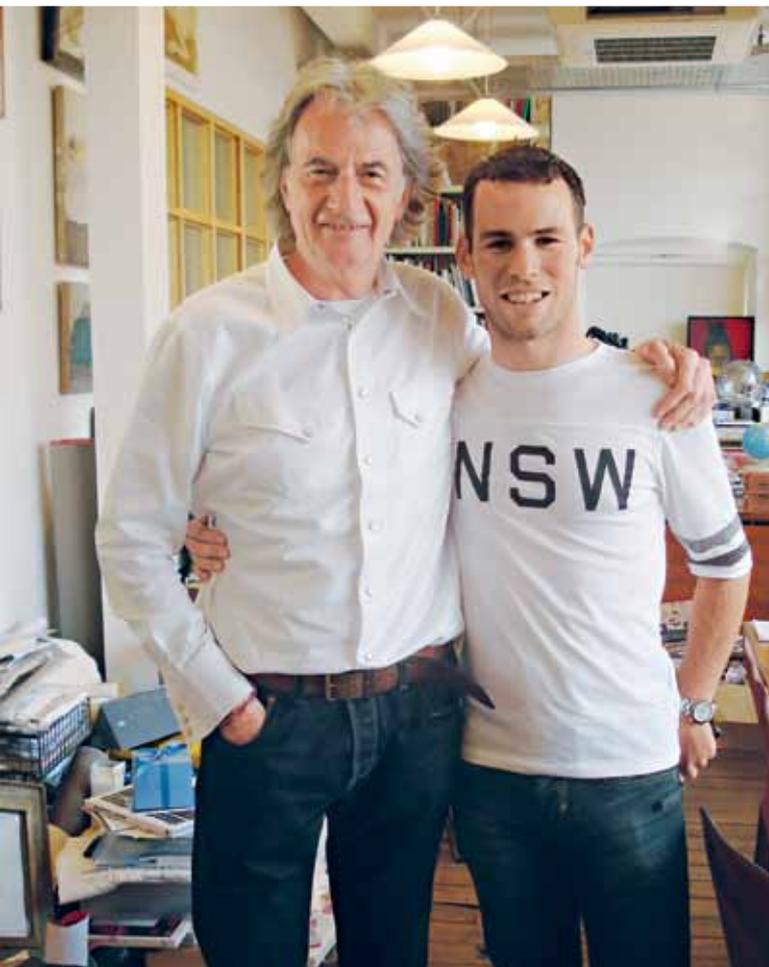
Fashion and photography weren't Smith's first love. As a teenager, he dreamed of becoming a professional racing cyclist, so he left school at 16 to work in a warehouse and fund his training. "I joined a club, learned about teamwork (which helped a lot with my career in business) and raced any chance I got." But at the age of 17, everything changed. "I had a crash and spent months in hospital. When I eventually got out, I arranged to catch up with other patients I'd met. We went to the pub and there were all these art students there. They were talking about Bauhaus, Kandinsky, pop art... all these things I'd never heard of before." The Nottinghamshire teenager soaked up the new ideas like a sponge – and a love for the arts was born.

Smith learned more about fashion and started evening classes in tailoring before setting up his first shop in 1970 with the help of his girlfriend (now wife), Pauline. Today, the Paul Smith business employs 1,500 people, has 41 stores worldwide and boasts an annual turnover of US\$618.8 million. The label's founder was knighted in 2000 for services to design – but Smith prefers not to shout about it. "I don't think 'Sir Paul' suits me. But it was very nice to be acknowledged by the Queen."

Still a bike enthusiast today ("but now it's more about keeping fit"), Smith combines cycling and style whenever he can. He designed a jersey

MULTI TALENT

clockwise from top left: The organised chaos of Smith's office; the designer backstage at the spring/summer 2013 men's show; the brand's spring/summer 2013 campaign was shot by the designer himself; the Paul Smith boutique in London's Covent Garden; the interior of the brand's Paris store; Smith and cyclist Mark Cavendish





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to celebrate the start of the Tour de France in London back in 2007, dressed British Olympians for official engagements and created a pop art-style leaders' jersey for the Giro d'Italia.

"I've become a sort of spokesman for cycling as a non-professional," Smith says. "If the British press wants an opinion on something bike-related, I'm their go-to guy." He's also got some of the biggest names in cycling on speed dial, including Bradley Wiggins ("Brad's a good mate"), Victoria Pendleton and Chris Hoy. As we talk, a text buzzes through. "Oh, it's just Mark Cavendish," Smith says, casually, of the former world champion. "He's a mate, too. He was just telling me he's on tour in Qatar."

As well as cycling, photography, fashion and running a global empire, Smith likes to keep several other plates spinning. A dedicated polymath with seemingly limitless energy, Smith has a hand in every product that bears his name and oversees the design of all his shops.

Each store is individually themed and styled, from the impressive two-level heritage-listed building in Melbourne, decked out in walnut furnishings and bright murals, to the minimalist fuchsia pink outlet in Los Angeles. His shops are filled with exciting things to discover, including clothes, bicycles, books, rugs, cameras, cushions and even Lego – eclectic "finds" that reflect their proprietor's magpie-like personality. "They might be really odd items," he says. "But to me they have a common link: they feel natural and spontaneous."

Well known for his love of collecting, Smith's office in Covent Garden is crammed with quirky artefacts and indicators of his most recent discoveries. As well as sketches, photographs, his dad's old Rolleiflex and vintage toys, there are some interesting music finds. He's a big fan of vinyl ("There's a rawness about it, when everything else in the world is so slick these days") and spends Saturday afternoons in Rough Trade – the legendary record shop off Portobello Road – browsing for albums to add to his collection. "I've known Nigel, who runs the place, for years. He supports lots of new bands and he'll tell me: 'You must listen to this!'"

Smith loves learning new things but wears his knowledge lightly, with conversational references ranging effortlessly from bikes to the work of Thomas Heatherwick and innovations at Venice's Architecture Biennale. Smith is hugely respected in the UK as a champion of the creative arts and, in 1995, London's Design Museum ran a retrospective of his work titled True Brit. In 2007, he was awarded an honorary fellowship at the Royal

With seemingly limitless energy, Smith has a hand in every product that bears his name

Institute of British Architects for his outstanding contribution – an accolade he dismisses with typical humility: "A lot of my friends are architects or designers, so it's just something I'm interested in."

Smith has attempted to explain the inner workings of his mind in two books: 2001's *You Can Find Inspiration in Everything* and last year's *Paul Smith A to Z*, the latter of which charts his plethora of passions from "A for architecture" to "Z for zebra." Both books convey the sense of an upbeat, energetic man who has somehow managed to stay at the top of his game for more than 40 years while remaining refreshingly down-to-earth. But the question remains: how does he do it?

"My business is not based on falseness," he explains. "There's no 'We should be doing this' or 'Shouldn't we do that?' For me it's more like, 'What the heck, why not?' I'm my own boss, so I have no shareholders breathing down my neck." He adds, "I live a privileged life – I work very hard but I don't get stressed."

Technology aside, Smith is genuinely curious about the world around him and fascinated by people, places and creations of all kinds. "I like kitschness and beauty, the rough with the smooth, good days and bad. I just enjoy life." This much is clear – and the fashion world is all the better for it. **T**

CAPITAL CALLING

Sharing some of his personal snapshots with Hong Kong Tatler, Sir Paul takes us on a visual tour of London

1. a new perspective: "This statue was taken at an angle through the railings of a square in St James's. I like framing things in different ways, and playing with perspective and focus."
2. city of contrast: "I'm not a big fan of the Gherkin but I like the ever-changing skyline of London."
3. milk and two sugars: "This is an old taxi shelter that's now an English Heritage site. Cabbies go and get their breakfast or their tea here."
4. haring about: "This one was taken in Shoreditch in East London – there are lots of interesting, young shops round there. And of course I like the rabbit!"
5. pomp and circumstance: "I cycle into Pall Mall to go swimming and I like looking at all the old gentlemen's clubs. I get these great long shadows in the early mornings."
6. should i stay or should i go: "These are from the wall of Rough Trade in Portobello Road, where they have an amazing wall of old album covers like The Clash and Patti Smith."
- 7-9. stop, wait, go shop! "These were taken at Christmas, one early evening. I'd been to Bonhams round the corner to buy a catalogue and I saw these lights – I thought it looked fun."

