





WHO'S THE BOSS

WITH CREATIVE DIRECTOR EYAN ALLEN AT THE HELM,
THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT FOR **HUGO BOSS** WOMENSWEAR.
HE TALKS TO HELEN RUSSELL ABOUT CREATIVITY,
COMMERCIAL PRESSURE AND DOING IT HIS WAY



slash of red sashays down the runway as model Kasia Struss shows off the clean lines and bold cut of this season's new cocktail dress. Metal coloured jackets formed from layers of bonded silk look sculptural but are soft to touch. Laminated wool takes the place of leather for outerwear, while evening wear is embellished with embroidered holes that show a hint of flesh through thick wools and silks. A seriously sexy collection in metal, cream and red... it's a masterclass in tailoring.

Showing their appreciation from the front row are a smattering of celebrities – Renée Zellweger, Edward Norton, Eddie Redmayne and Pixie Geldof among others – flanked by 800 of the biggest names in fashion. The autumn/winter 2013 show at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Berlin marks Hugo's 20th birthday and kicks off the brand's anniversary year. Titled 'Reflection', the new collection holds up a mirror to Hugo's luxury tailoring past as well as signposting an assured vision for its future.

The brand has every reason to be confident right now. Under ceo Claus-Dietrich Lahrs, the German fashion house saw sales up 10 per cent for 2012, double that of the rest of the market. The label, named after its founder, has grown from a small clothing workshop to an international lifestyle group with a sales presence in 110 countries worldwide. Luxury clothes, bags and watches have proved recession-proof, especially in China, and Hugo Boss now expects to treble sales in Asia

HUGO BOSS MASTERY OF STYLE

1924

Hugo Boss starts a clothing company in Metzingen, Germany

1970

Boss menswear range is founded



1984

Boss fragrance launches

1998

The fashion-forward Hugo Woman collection launches



2000

Boss Womenswear collection is unveiled along with a fragrance launch



by 2015. Champagne corks must be popping at the group's headquarters in Metzingen, near Stuttgart in Germany. But there's one man who's not celebrating. At least, not yet.

Eyan Allen is the creative and brand director for Hugo Boss womenswear, encompassing Boss Black, Boss Orange and Hugo. He's the man charged with raising womenswear from the status of little sister in the Hugo Boss family to shining star. But this takes work. So after the success of his womenswear show in Berlin, Allen bypassed the after-party to prepare for meetings, give interviews, host presentations... oh, and work on designs for the spring/summer 2014 collection.

"It's been insane," he admits. "I haven't had a weekend for a month. I feel beaten up – so I can't party as hard as I'd like to right now!" He's pleased with how the show has been received and says: "It was the most reduced collection we've ever done. I wanted a new interpretation

of power dressing for women: taking the late '80s and early '90s aesthetic and reducing it in a strong, modern way." The resulting slim-tailored suits, strong shoulders and low plunging necklines have a striking, Helmut Newton look to them. I ask Allen if this was a conscious choice: "I like to think it's quite sexy but also feminine. It's the new empowerment. But I'm doing it my way."

Allen has never been shy of expressing his individuality. Born and bred in the north of England, he studied fashion and textile design at the University of Central Lancashire before heading to the Royal College of Art in London for an ma in menswear. "It was exciting there. I worked with some great designers and we'd get people like Gianni Versace, Vivienne Westwood and John Galiano coming in to give us lectures. I had the opportunity to rub shoulders with these very inspiring people and that's when I knew I wanted to do this for the next 30 years."

TOP COAT
from far left Eyan Allen's sketches from the Hugo autumn/winter 2013 collection; the brand's landmark show in Beijing last year



2005

Women's leisurewear added to Boss Orange line. A concept store opens in Berlin

2007

Boss Orange kidswear launched. Eyan Allen joins Hugo



2011

Allen takes over womenswear at Hugo Boss

2012

Boss Black hosts menswear and womenswear show in Beijing

2013

Flagship stores open in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Hugo Boss art award launches in China



“As the Asian market gets more sophisticated, we have to offer them something different”

FROCK ON from top left Eyan Allen's take on the classic tailored dress; the little red dress is one of Allen's favourites; the designer at work; actor Chow Yun-fat (right) pictured with Gerrit Ruetzel, president of Hugo Boss Asia-Pacific; Gwyneth Paltrow, face of the brand's latest perfume

Allen got his big break in sportswear, first at Puma on collaborations with Jil Sander and Christy Turlington, then at Nike. “But I knew I wanted to get back in the higher end of fashion and I already had an obsession with tailoring,” he says. In 2007, he joined Hugo as creative director, designing for men and women before taking over womenswear across Boss Black, Boss Orange and Hugo in 2011.

I ask how being male affects the way he designs for women and he ponders for a moment. “When I was designing menswear I was always thinking, ‘what do I want to wear?’ Now I’m designing womenswear, I have to think about how to make women look beautiful. I imagine who’s wearing a new design, which model would wear it on the catwalk, whether it’ll look good on a slightly fuller figure – it’s more of a multifaceted process.”

There’s no archetypal Hugo Boss woman or muse for Allen (“I design for any woman who has individuality and style”). Instead, he keeps in mind that his customers come from all over the world. Hugo Boss is one of the few fashion brands to use non-Caucasian models on the

catwalk and, as Allen says, “The collection is designed for an international market so it’s important to show it on international models. I think it’s sad that not that many designers do this.” He wants black and Asian women who see his clothes to think, ‘this can look great on me, too.’

Allen is currently stepping up his efforts to impress Asian women. “The market is getting more and more sophisticated and local brands are becoming more important so we have to offer the Asian market something that they don’t already have. When we showed in Shanghai, I really stretched myself to bring out designs that were fresh, cool and, of course, well-groomed.”

Working with a big brand like Hugo Boss as an artist and still keeping an eye on the bottom line is no mean feat, but Allen makes it work with un-style diplomacy. “The brand respects my creativity,” he says, “and I want to reflect the true dna of Hugo Boss. But it has to be my interpretation. Take the classic tailored dress: beautiful, simple and quintessentially Hugo Boss. So I ask myself if I can vary this.”

I enquire about the little red number that featured in his autumn/winter 2013 show. “That was one of my favourites too,” he agrees, “a simple silhouette with an architectural shoulder and a plunging neckline – that’s how you reinterpret a classic. You take the expected and do something unexpected.”

The genesis of Allen’s creations can be found within the leaves of the small sketchbook he



carries with him wherever he goes. "I don't know when I'm going to get ideas so if I start to feel inspired, I'll just stop and sketch. I never leave home without a sketchbook and if I forget it, I go and buy a new one. I have whole shelves just full of sketchbooks from over the years." His adopted home of New York throws up plenty of fresh inspiration and Allen is a big fan of the art galleries and museums there – as well as the locals. "It's a great city for people-watching. If I see an outfit I like, I ask if I can sketch it or take a picture. If they say no, I write down what they're wearing and how they put it together."

Sometimes the creative juices need a jump-start: "There are weeks when I'm not in the right frame of mind and I get designer's block," he says, but a trip to meet customers or just hang out in Selfridges or Bloomingdale's can help. "People will often come up to me and say, 'did you think of this for that design?' or 'how about adding this?' And I always end up learning something!"

Now, Allen must prepare for the upcoming presentation in Shanghai in May and get to work on the Hugo collection for spring/summer 2014. Can he give us a sneak preview of what we'll be buying this time next year? "I think contouring is going to be big and we'll see a return of a very feminine interpretation of the women's suit." He adds, "I'm getting quite inspired by art – spring could be all about surrealism."

The future, it seems, is looking bright for Hugo Boss womenswear as the fashion world waits to see what Eyan Allen sketches next. ■



THE AMBASSADORS

Hugo Boss' trio of celeb faces:

CHOW YUN-FAT became the first ever Asian ambassador for Hugo Boss in 2012, reflecting the growing importance of China and the Asian market to the brand. Chow appears in advertising campaigns for the Boss Selection line, shot against cityscapes of Hong Kong.

"GWYNETH PALTROW was my first choice for Nuit Pour Femme," says Allen of the brand's biggest fragrance campaign of last year. "The scent was inspired by the classic elegance and sensuality of the little black

dress, and Gwyneth just seemed perfect: she's beautiful, elegant, an actress and a mother." In the ad, Paltrow is pictured in a penthouse overlooking Manhattan, Allen's adopted home, wearing an asymmetrical black dress.

SIENNA MILLER was signed up to support Boss Orange back in 2009. She became the face of the Boss Orange fragrance, described as the feel-good fragrance for liberated souls. Boss Orange also launched limited-edition versions to support disadvantaged children in Madagascar.