

5-09-2014

Willow: a decade of style in style



Designer Kit Willow Podgornik has come a long way from the days of making bespoke lingerie in a small Melbourne studio. Ten years after her stand-out debut collection, she has grown the eponymous label into an internationally recognised, ready-to-wear brand. She marks a decade in the business this month with a special photographic project called "Willow Women: Ten women, Ten dresses", which celebrates the relationship between women and clothes.

"We create memories in the clothes we choose – fashion is so personal," said Ms Podgornik. "You might fall in love in a beautiful dress and or dance the night away in a slip . . . I wanted to create photos of great women in great clothes that embodied that spirit and feeling."

Shot by photographer-of-the-moment Mathieu Cesar, the images include a mix of fashion and art world icons modelling pieces from the designers past and present collections. "I took four suitcases, over 160 kilos of clothing, to Europe," said Ms Podgornik. "I wanted everyone to form a connection with the clothes they wore and find something special in my treasure chest to turn into their own".

The shoots took place in London and Paris with a cast that includes models Jade Parfitt and Jessica Clarke, French musician Caroline de Maigret, the granddaughter of the Clarins beauty empire, Virginie Courtin-Clarins and Editorial Fashion Director from Net-A-Porter, Gabriele Hackworthy. "I chose women who've supported the brand, been great customers – mothers, rockers, actresses and entrepreneurs".

The project was commissioned for the October issue of Harpers Bazaar and features an interview with the designer from long-time friend and Oscar winner Catherine Martin. "She's the most incredible women and wonderfully loyal," said Ms Podgornik, who asked the publicity-shy Martin to pose for the series. "Having her be part of this milestone was very important."



AWGA - News Update

One of the designer's favourite shots is of Bambou Gainsbourg, the fourth wife of the legendary French singer Serge Gainsbourg, who was married to Jane Birkin of Hermes bag fame. “We have lots of older customers,” said Ms Podgornik, whose 97-year-old grandmother was set to star in the shoot but broke a bone the week before her star turn. “It was essential that we represented a breadth of age and I was so lucky to have an icon like Bambou wear my clothes – she's the chicest, coolest 53-year-old”.

The exhibition also marks a commercial watershed for the business. After 10 years of showing off-shore, Willow has pulled out of the international circuit and all of her international stockists. “I have six boutiques, nine concessions at David Jones and a rapidly growing online store,” said Ms Podgornik. “We've moved from being a small wholesale business to a growing retail company. We needed to change the way we operated to accommodate that expansion.”

On the design side, it's business as usual. “What drives me today is what's always driven me and that's the customer. I know she moves at a million miles an hour and whether she's on the dance floor or doing a deal in the boardroom, how her arm feels in one of my jackets is what matters. That hasn't changed and it never, ever will”.

"Willow Women: Ten Women Ten Dresses" appears in the October issue of –Harpers Bazaar and will be exhibited in Willow Boutiques nationally from Monday September 9.

<http://www.farmweekly.com.au/news/lifestyle/style/fashion/willow-a-decade-of-style-in-style/2670367.aspx?storypage=0>