



In his SHOES

FOUR DECADES ON FROM FOUNDING HIS EONYMOUS BRAND, **MICHAEL KORS** HAS ACHIEVED THAT RAREST OF FEATS: TRANSCENDING THE FASHION INDUSTRY TO BECOME A POP-CULTURE ICON. SHORTLY AFTER HIS LABEL CLOSED NEW YORK FASHION WEEK 2023, *LUXURY LONDON* CAUGHT UP WITH THE DESIGNER TO DISCUSS HIS LATEST COLLECTION, LOVE OF TRAVEL AND GO-TO LONDON HOTSPOTS

Interview by: **Anna Solomon**

In Big Sean's musical tour de force *Dance (A\$\$)*, Ms Onika Tanya Maraj, otherwise known as Nicki Minaj, intones: "Couldn't get Michael Kors if you was f*****g Michael Kors." The American designer, in case you were unaware, has become something of a pop-culture icon; a Kors piece – particularly one of his bags – is a status symbol.

Kors started his fashion line in 1981, at the age of 22, but soon ran into financial issues and was forced to file for bankruptcy. The brand, however, was restructured in 1997 with investment from LVMH, and, this time, it's fair to say that it found its rhythm.

The same year, Kors was appointed as the first women's ready-to-wear designer for Céline, and is widely credited for turning the French fashion house around. He left in 2003 to focus on his own brand; it was also around this time that he was hired as a judge on reality television series *Project Runway*, catapulting him to household-name status.

Kors is more than a designer; he is a businessman, with an eye on the big time. In 2011, Michael Kors Holdings went public; the following year it changed its name to Capri Holdings, later acquiring Jimmy Choo and Versace. In 2014, *Forbes* reported that Kors had a personal fortune in excess of \$1 billion.

People often look at the childhoods of successful

individuals and cherry-pick instances that 'demonstrate' their exceptionalism. In this instance, to do so really would suggest that Kors was destined for greatness. He even chose his own name.

Born Karl Anderson Jr. on Long Island, his mother married Bill Kors when her son was five (he reportedly redesigned his mother's first wedding dress for the occasion). Karl's surname was changed, and he was allowed to choose a new first name. Thus, Michael David Kors.

As a teen, Kors began selling designs out of his parents' basement. In 1977, he enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology, but dropped out after nine months when he was offered a job at a fashion boutique in Manhattan. A buyer saw his collections in the shop window, and agreed to stock them in Bergdorf Goodman.

Since then, Kors has dressed an inimitable list of celebrities, including Nicole Kidman, Reese Witherspoon, Kate Hudson, Jennifer Lawrence, Taylor Swift, Angelina Jolie, Jennifer Lopez, Heidi Klum, Catherine Zeta-Jones... You get the picture. His designs have also proven a hit beyond the red carpet, worn by high-profile public figures like Hillary Clinton, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Kate Middleton. Michelle Obama wore Michael Kors for her first-term official portrait as First Lady, and later sported the designer at the 2015 State of the Union address.

So, who is the man behind the silhouette? Kors has piercing blue eyes, a whiter-than-white smile and an all-American tan. He wears a lot of black, and rarely appears without aviator sunglasses ("The way other men change their tie, I change my aviators," he has said). Kors shares a Greenwich Village penthouse with his husband, and fellow fashion designer, Lance LePere, the couple having married in The Hamptons in 2011. He has two cats, and a love of the finer things – steak at Peter Luger, the beach in Capri, vodka on the rocks.

We caught up with the style titan to discover what goes on behind the shades...

How was New York Fashion Week 2023?

It was great! It's always rewarding to see my collection come to life after working on it for so long. From the setting to the music to the front row, I loved seeing it all come together.

Where's winning in the style stakes right now, London or New York?

I could never choose a winner, because I think Londoners and New Yorkers approach style very differently. I love that people in London have a strong sense of self and individual style. They don't fall for every trend and they love to experiment. It makes for some great people-watching on any city street. ▶

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ANNE HATHAWAY WEARS MICHAEL KORS TO A COCKTAIL PARTY IN NEW YORK



MICHAEL KORS COLLECTION SS23 SHOW



► **What's your favourite thing to do when you're in London?**

I always try to see a show when I'm in town – I'm a theatre fanatic. And no trip to London is complete without a meal at The River Café.

You described your SS23 collection, which is hitting stores now, as 'urban resort'. Are you more of a beach or city break sort of person?

For a true vacation, I love a secluded beach surrounded by crystal clear water and white sand. But ultimately, I live a big-city life, so I was interested in bringing some of the best things about resort style into a metropolitan environment.

The collection is still very 'New York'. What do you remember most about growing up in the Big Apple?

I went to my first Broadway play when I was five, I took acting classes in Greenwich Village when I was a teenager, and I went to Studio 54 instead of my high school prom! All of these experiences really shaped who I am and what it is I like to design.

Is it important to showcase all shapes and sizes in campaigns and on runways?

Absolutely. I've always dressed women of all sizes, ages and personalities – the truth is, our customers are diverse, and I like my runways to reflect our reality.

There was live music at both your SS and AW23 shows. What was the best decade for music?

Every decade has its highs and lows, but the '70s will always hold a special place in my heart. I mean, Fleetwood Mac, Elton John, Tina Turner, Joni Mitchell, the list goes on... it's the music I came of age to, and it always takes me back.

How do you like to describe Michael Kors clothes? For whom are they designed?

I make luxurious ready-to-wear fashion and accessories for people who are always on the go. The Michael Kors customer is confident, polished and glamorous. They want luxury that can keep up with the pace of life today.

Who, past or present, would you most like to dress?

Both Audrey and Katharine Hepburn were before my time as a designer, so I was never able to see them wearing Michael Kors. But I think my love of tailoring, glamour and modernity would have appealed to them. And Queen Elizabeth! The ultimate icon.

What is your favourite way to spend a day when you're not working?

Travelling – I love to explore new places, it's the ultimate way to relax and recharge. Or a Broadway show, when I can't get away.

What's your biggest indulgence?

A few days without a cell phone or calendar in sight.

What is your biggest pet peeve?

Clothes that don't fit.



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You've dressed a slew of super-celebs and public figures. What has been your favourite ever project?

It's hard to pick a favourite project over 40 years, but I was incredibly honoured when then-First Lady Michelle Obama wore one of our dresses for her first official portrait in 2009.

What is the purpose of fashion?

To give you the confidence and the means to show the world who you are. ■

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