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HIGH FLYING

Gabrielle Lane profiles Highgate resident David Reiss, the entrepreneur behind one of the most popular British clothing brands

Reiss Headquarters at 12 Picton Place
Project designed by Squire and Partners
Photography: Will Pryce



“**M**aybe in two or three years’ time I’ll sell and it could be to a private equity firm.” In May 2008, in an interview with *The Independent*, David Reiss reflected upon the eponymous business he had grown from a single store selling men’s suits to a retail empire – in the space of three decades. He didn’t sell, and one imagines a man who confesses to ‘always being happy when not standing still’ is now positively elated.

In 2010, Kate Middleton, now Duchess of Cambridge, selected a Reiss dress (the Nanette) for her official engagement portrait. And then chose another (the Shola) when meeting the Obamas a year later. The brand had no idea she would do so but most certainly felt the after-effects as the Reiss website crashed with a 500 per cent increase in traffic and media requests poured in from as far afield as Hong Kong and the States. It was not merely hype: at the beginning of this year the company reported a £4.2m increase in its UK profits and can now boast over 100 outposts across the world, including a prestigious concession in Bloomingdales, New York.

Never one to underestimate the impact that the royal association has had, David Reiss has been careful not to trade on it either. At the height of demand for the pale peach Shola dress that Kate wore, he re-ordered just 600 more, acknowledging that shoppers would not want the same outfit as ‘everyone else’. And it is this steely commitment to the luxuriousness of his products which both analysts and the man himself credit with the ability to flourish during a recession and attract a discerning clientele. A trip to the Hampstead Reiss store, which was amongst the first five outlets opened, reveals pieces which owe their origins to a team hand-picked from designer stables such as Gucci, Givenchy and Stella McCartney. The rails include elegant dresses with a modern twist, as well as coats, sophisticated accessories and shirts – the items which sell out week on week.

The new Autumn/Winter collection is set to be one of the best yet. Viewing the forthcoming range at the company’s head office in Picton Place, just off Marylebone High Street, an army of fashion editors queued to admire the detailing of the new line – glitter-encrusted heels on navy courts, beads scattered liberally over chiffon blouses, starched statement collars and clutch bags with ruffled panels.

‘Understated luxury’ is a term which could simultaneously be levied at David Reiss as an individual. Living for years in North West London, he has shied away from the social pages that some other entrepreneurs frequent, leading some journalists to describe him as ‘intensely private’ and ‘elusive’. He has also avoided the temptation of a jet-set lifestyle, and has matter-of-factly addressed the question hanging over many business heads during difficult economic times. “I live full time in the UK; I pay all my taxes here. I don’t live in Monaco and there are no financial skeletons in my closet,” he said recently.

Reiss currently lives in Highgate in an apartment designed by David Chipperfield. ■

www.reissonline.com



Q&A

WITH DAVID REISS

founder and managing director of Reiss

Is it difficult to balance the continuation of Reiss’ trademark style with the desire to try new things?

It gives me great satisfaction to know that the original vision I started out with – to create an iconic, sexy and modern fashion brand – is just as effective today. Reiss is one of the very few fashion companies that are still founder-owned and private.

This gives us clarity and vision and allows us to remain faithful to my beliefs.

What part of your working life is most enjoyable?

I oversee every aspect of the business. Reiss has been my passion for 40 years now and something I continue to relish. The design and buying process is always a key area for us, but so too is entering new markets and of course the growth of our online business.

The company has grown in challenging times. Do you find your role easier or more difficult than when you started?

Today, our customer is more discerning than ever. They want something special but we are well placed to provide it.

How do you unwind?

I’m an avid sports fan; I am a diamond club season-ticket holder at Arsenal. I run and play tennis and golf too.

Do you have any restaurants/local businesses you particularly like to visit?

Carob Tree in Highgate, Villa Bianca in Hampstead and Toff’s of Muswell Hill for fish and chips.