



CEO DAVID REISS



POLYESTER DRESS, £189



LEATHER BOOTS, £195

# 15 MINUTES WITH... DAVID REISS

Meet the man who dresses Kate Middleton and, yes, business has never been better



The story of Reiss and the royals is by now the stuff of fashion legend. Not familiar? Well, here's a recap. On 24 May last year, the Duchess of Cambridge went to meet the Obamas at Buckingham Palace. Her outfit? Not McQueen or Erdem, but a nude £175 Shola dress from Reiss, left. Kate might have worn the label before – the Nanette dress for her engagement portrait – but this moment proved a total game-changer for the brand.

Overnight, Reiss went from smart British high-street shop to global fashion name, the company's website buckled under the weight of six million hits and by the end of the year, profits had nearly doubled.

But here's an interesting thing: though Kate's dress sold out in hours, the company's CEO and founder David Reiss would allow only 600 more to be made. The reason? The good old-fashioned rule of scarcity creating demand. He knew that oversaturation can kill the hype. Such a considered approach is in Reiss's DNA. The clothes whisper rather than shout, with muted colour

palettes and classic tailoring aimed at women who want to make a low-key nod to the trends, rather than immerse themselves in them. A Reiss dress has become a staple for weddings, business meetings, garden parties and cocktails at 6pm. No wonder the Duchess is such a fan.

*InStyle* went to Reiss's immaculate central London HQ for a rare interview with the man behind the label. In many ways, David Reiss's profile is as discreet as his clothing: he might be the biggest founder-entrepreneur in British retail, but you won't find him hobnobbing with his celeb clients. Instead, he's quietly taken the gentlemen's outfitters he inherited from his father on Petticoat Lane and turned it into a £150-million fashion success.

The high street has received a battering in the economic downturn, yet business at Reiss is booming, with more than 100 stores globally and 19 new ones set to open this year alone. So what's the secret to creating such popular, affordable luxury? Well, he says, it certainly helps inspire you having your name above the door...

## HOW DOES IT FEEL TO SEE KATE MIDDLETON WEARING REISS?

"Kate's been a customer of ours for years. What was so extraordinary about the dress she wore to meet the Obamas was, you had two of the ▶



HIGH-STREET HOT SPOT

REISS FANS, FROM ABOVE LEFT, CAMILLA BELLE AND KATE MIDDLETON

WORDS BY LUCY PAVIA. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALPHA PRESS, GETTY IMAGES. STILL LIVES THROUGHOUT BY 3 OBJECTIVES PHOTOGRAPHY



# STYLE CANDY



SILK SHIRT, £110

REISS DEVOTEES, FROM RIGHT, BEYONCÉ AND FEARNE COTTON



**“My aim has always been to create clean, cool contemporary clothes that make people feel special”**



LEATHER DRESS, £295. PRINTED LEATHER CLUTCH, £149. ALL REISS (020 7473 9630)



ON THE HIGH STREET 56

most photographed women in the world standing together in the palace. Mrs Obama's wearing a thousand-pound designer dress and Kate's wearing a dress for £175 and the world identified with Kate. It became a phenomenon – I ended up on the news talking about it! I can honestly say in 40 years of business, I'd never experienced anything like it.”

#### WHY DO WOMEN LOVE REISS?

“I'm a purist. I don't like fashion for fashion's sake and I don't believe in creating garments to make women look trendier. My aim has always been to create clean, cool, contemporary clothes that enhance the way people look and make them feel special.”

#### HOW INVOLVED ARE YOU IN THE DESIGN PROCESS?

“I'm very involved; it can get quite lively in the design room when my team become defensive about certain looks, but I'll often say, 'No, that may be very on-trend, but it's not what Reiss is about'. Every season, we have pieces that give the brand kudos, but they're not necessarily what the public is going to be fighting to buy, so it's important to keep a balance.”

#### DID YOU ALWAYS LOVE FASHION?

“I've always had a love for clothes. After college, I nearly went into estate management, but I was hungry to do something I felt passionate about and I wanted to make money.”

#### WHAT MADE YOU TAKE THE LEAP INTO WOMENSWEAR?

“When you've got an entrepreneurial spirit, one thing you mustn't do is listen to people who say you can't do something. Back in the late-Nineties, when it was menswear, we had so many girlfriends and wives coming in



and going, 'Why can't Reiss do womenswear?' They loved the cool look of the brand, so we decided to try launching a capsule collection.”

#### LET'S TALK A/W...

“There are lots of clean lines and the sporty aesthetic of the Nineties, but we're also paying homage to the Forties with waspish silhouettes – I'm very much in favour of a nipped-in waist, it gives a shape that makes women look feminine and sexy.”

#### DO YOU LOOK OUT FOR WOMEN ON THE STREET WEARING REISS?

“Absolutely. I'm a *voyeur* – when I walk into a restaurant or store, I have a real hawkeye and can instantly tell if someone's wearing something by us. It makes you feel proud. Sometimes, I want to go up and say, 'Do you enjoy what you're wearing?'”

#### DO YOU DEAL WITH CUSTOMERS?

“I've always been very hands-on and it's one of my frustrations that I can't get out there and chat to people as often as I'd like, but at least one day a week, I'm out visiting stores and speaking to customers. It's great if they like the clothes they've bought, but it's equally important for me to hear if they *don't* like something.”

#### WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR JOB?

“I'm fortunate to be doing something I'm passionate about. I'm far more excited now about the fashion business than I was 40 years ago. When I saw Kate in our dress, it dawned on me later that we're now part of history. Thirty years down the line, I can look back and say to my kids, 'Look, I dressed her!'” □



POLYESTER MESH DRESS, £189

HERE'S SOMETHING REISS MADE EARLIER



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