

A moment with

JOSEPH DIRAND

Renowned for his deft, minimalistic Parisian style, Joseph Dirand has become one of the most highly sought after architects and interior designers in fashion, creating stores for Givenchy, Rick Owens and Alexander Wang's Beijing outpost, amongst many others. With a reputation for projects that are as radical as they are classic, we wanted to delve into what made Dirand the exceptional minimalistic maverick he is today.

*Interview: Sarah Mendes
Text: Mark Lawrence
Portrait: ©Adrien Dirand*





E Your father was a renowned interior photographer and your mother a fashion designer who produced many of Cacharel's fashion shows. How did your parents' careers and your home environment influence your work?

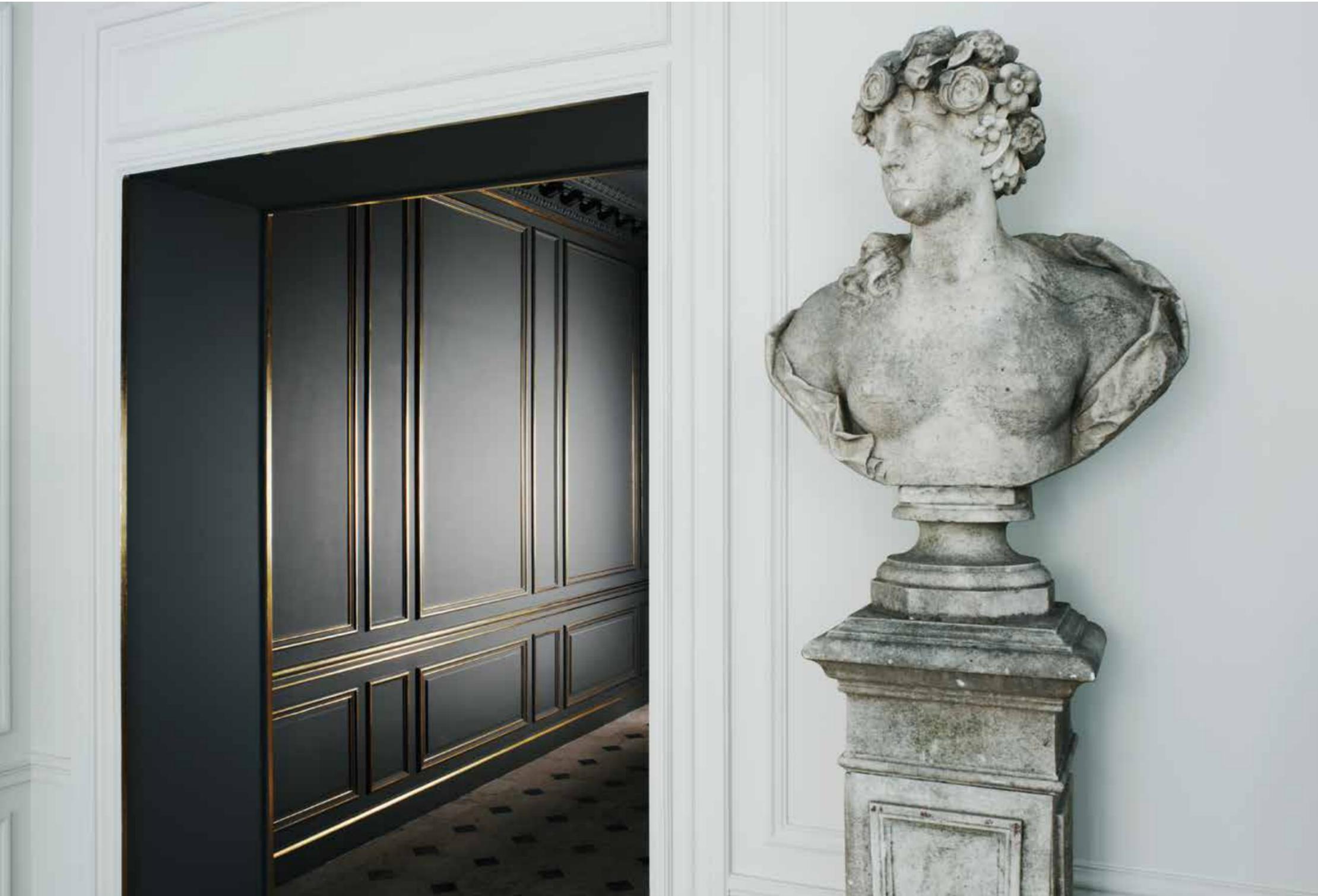
“He taught me that mixing is an art and that everything is possible if you know how to combine the right elements.”

JD I grew up in a very cultural environment, surrounded by a somewhat artistic crowd – many painters, writers, sculptors and designers who were at that time, my parents' close friends. My father was a very creative man, a self-made designer who was also extremely passionate about architecture, so I breathed all this in from a young age. As he never had the opportunity to develop himself within the field, he decided to capture the beauty of these buildings through photography. He traveled the whole world and photographed the most amazing buildings you could imagine – from classic and baroque to modernist architecture. When I was a child, he used to come home and show me all the photographs he'd made that day, talking with real excitement about the different rooms and objects he'd seen. His passion absolutely fascinated me. He was also very eclectic in his taste, to the point that we never had two of the same chairs at home and our interior was in constant evolution. I think much of the feeling of freedom I have nowadays when creating, as well as my desire to keep experimenting with different styles, comes from those moments I had with my father. He taught me that mixing is an art and that everything is possible if you know how to combine the right elements.

E You've had an amazingly successful career, but can you tell where it all began?

JD My first project was a small store in Paris called Junk, owned by one of my mother's friends. I was 21 and still following my studies, so being able to work on this was a wonderful exercise and at the time, a big challenge. After that, I had a few other small commissions, but the word about my work only got around when I designed my own apartment. It was quite an interesting and charming loft in Paris, with minimalistic design, brick walls, lots of light and contrasting elements. We had quite a lot of press and my first big gig quickly followed as I was asked to design a huge apartment for an American producer. This client gave me total freedom to create anything that came to mind, challenging me to explore my concepts and ideas and pushing my creative boundaries. The result was a bold statement of extreme minimalism: a black and white environment with almost no furniture to be seen. It was received as a huge success and the apartment was featured in dozens of leading magazines. A little while after, I was in charge of the redesign of Balmain's store in Paris, which lifted my career and status as a designer to a whole different level.





UN UNFORGETTABLE PROJECT

E Could you tell us a bit more about what you did for Balmain?

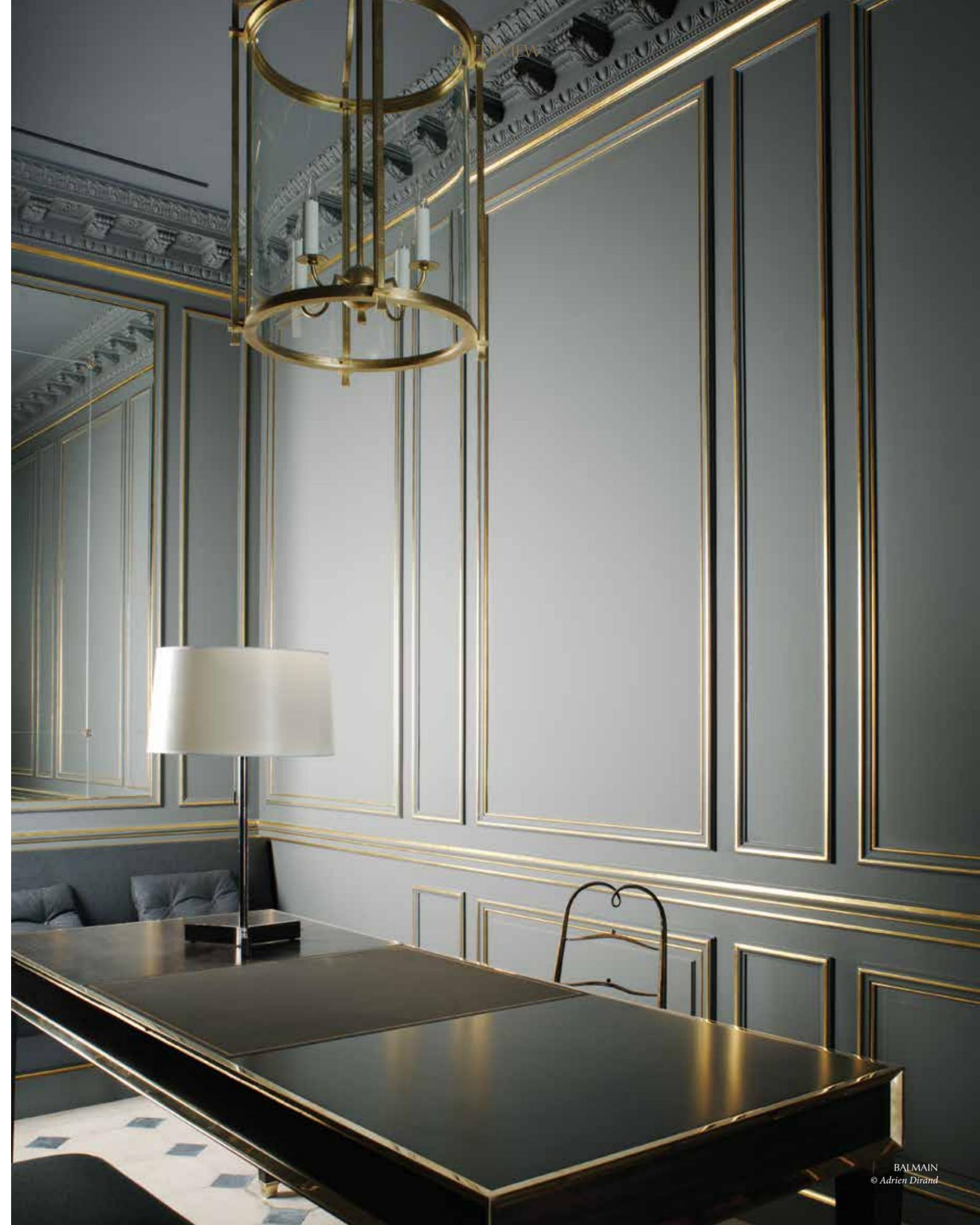
JD Balmain was an unforgettable project! At that time not many brands focused on their heritage and brand DNA to design their interiors – you actually didn't hear the term brand DNA being thrown around like today. What tended to happen, was that every time a new designer was appointed, there was a whole new rebranding. As a result, most brands were following a certain style and to some extent, trends, which was causing them to lose their real identity in terms of interior design. When I visited the Balmain flagship store in Paris for the first time, the place where Pierre Balmain had once lived and worked, I was astonished by what I found. Much of the magic was gone and instead there were fluorescent lights, Sheetrock walls and a drooped ceiling. It just wasn't what I had in my mind when I thought of Balmain and its legacy.

So, I learned everything one could learn about Pierre Balmain and planned to restore the building, keeping all that could be saved from its original features. Our interventions were minimal, like a warm parquet wooden floor that now runs through the apartment, large mirrors and a beautiful marble fireplace. Such minimal interventions helped reveal the beauty of the space, adorned with typical French boiserie and bronze hardware, features that bring whoever visits it immediately back to the 18th century with its classic style. We designed many pieces of furniture in the style of the 30s and 40s also adding sculptures and other works of art of this period of time. These objects not only complimented the space, but also made it more modern and versatile, staying on track with Balmain's great past.

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“Oh, this guy knows how to tell a story”.*

After the redesign, I can say the building really is what I had in mind; a Parisian apartment where I could see Pierre Balmain working on his collection, on his knees, sewing a dress worn by one of his many models.

I think it's a real pity to start all over again when you are dealing with such a rich history... Why shouldn't we cherish it? What I always try to do is show the entire history of a brand in one place, creating a compelling experience for customers that also involves the culture of the house and that resonates on a deeper level – almost like a movie. And I can tell you, it works. When Balmain was finished, the whole fashion industry said: “Oh, this guy knows how to tell a story”.







E You have now worked for countless other couture houses, like Chloe, Emilio Pucci, Balenciaga, Alexander Wang and Givenchy. How did you end up drifting from the residential to the retail scene to become a household name within couture?

JD It all happened because of my work for Balmain. After the project was completed, we had such an enormous reaction from worldwide press that within months I'd received similar proposals from every couture house in France and also from many Italian and American designers of high fashion. I obviously had a hard time, as I could not take every amazing project that knocked on my door, but after being forced to expand my team, many beautiful collaborations followed. All these brands were asking me to help them tell their stories again, in a way that customers would feel connected to them and understand their heritage. And they were completely different brands who sit in the extreme opposite ends of the spectrum in style, like Rick Owens and Chloe. That's when I understood that they weren't after me because of my style, they were after me because of the way I could showcase their style, their history. That's why I don't care about style anymore. In a way I hate style, I hate design. In these cases it's about history, life and the feeling of passion that a specific brand can tell its consumers. This feeling is always different. Every single time. So you have to be able to grasp it.



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