

EXCLUSIVE

KARL LAGERFELD IS WIDELY VIEWED AS A GENIUS OF MODERN FASHION. WITH HIS SEEMINGLY UNQUENCHABLE ENERGY, HE IS CAPABLE OF MORE THAN 17 COLLECTIONS A YEAR, INCLUDING DESIGNING FOR FENDI, CHANEL AND HIS OWN LINE. **MARIELLA RADAELLI** IN CONVERSATION WITH THE KING.

LIVING LEGEND

LAGERFELD

"If you like what you do, you don't count the time," says Karl Lagerfeld. Known for his relentless imagination and constant reinvention, he always accepts the challenge of a new project. The secret of his long career is working with passion. He holds that "the brain is a muscle that needs training every day".

"Only through this kind of discipline can I soothe my insatiable curiosity," he tells *Style*. He says that he learned discipline, duty and directness from his mother.

Last summer, Lagerfeld staged an exquisite show in Rome to mark Fendi's 90th anniversary, a tribute to the rich Italian craftsmanship of the Roman couture house. The longest collaboration in fashion, Lagerfeld's work with Fendi is a world record. "Nobody has ever had a contract for 50 years! I'm the only one, and I'm not tired of it at all. I even think I work better today. I have a clearer mind," he says.

And given the seismic shifts of history that he has lived through, such consistency seems all the more remarkable. Karl Otto Lagerfeldt was a child of war-torn Europe, born in September 1935 in the Hamburg countryside of

Germany and raised under Hitler's Nazi dictatorship. An enfant prodige and solitary child, he expressed an interest in design and fashion from a very early age. He often cut out pictures from fashion magazines and at 14, made the adventurous decision to move to Paris, where he submitted a series of sketches to a design competition. He won in the coat category and met his friend Yves Saint Laurent.

The future king of fashion got his first job as a junior assistant working for the French designer Pierre Balmain. His exceptional talent was soon evident, but he became creative director with another fashion house before finally striking out on his own in 1961. His extraordinary work for Fendi, Chloé and others soon followed.

Lagerfeld launched his own label in 1984, which he built around the idea of what he describes as "intellectual sexiness".

In recent years, his work has crossed over into film and photography. Also a publisher and interior designer, he maintains a busy schedule. In 2015, he opened his first Karl Lagerfeld store in Doha, Qatar. "Doing something I've never done before," is his motto.

Q: Mr. Lagerfeld, what is your relationship with time as it goes by?

A: "I am not afraid of growing old. I am not obsessed with dense buttocks as I approach 90 years. My neighbour is beautiful with her white hair and wrinkles. She looks better than many women who had their lips reshaped with fillers."





Q: Your ideal state of mind in order to create?

A: “I like the idea of craziness with discipline. Creativity is like breathing to me. I don’t just decide to be creative. Most of the things I do, I see when I am sleeping. The best ideas are the quickest. No brain involved. I can draw faster than I can talk. I never follow my second instinct. I don’t believe that you can do anything if it comes in second place. There are some people who are afraid of starting a new project, but not me! The French say, ‘appetite comes when you eat’. I think, ‘ideas come when you work’.”

Q: Rome inspires you. Aren’t you in love with Rome?

A: “Yes, I am. I first saw the Trevi Fountain when I was 12 years old. It represents Rome, more than the Colosseum. In Rome, I love photographing statues, architecture. I have been there more than 420 times. Rome is a second home to me. There, I like to walk around a lot at night – I don’t feel like a tourist. What I love the most about Italy is the fact that it has kept its identity through time – it has always remained Italian. And obviously the food... the best in the world.”

Q: You paid tribute to Roman fountains in your photography book and exhibition *The Glory of Water*.

A: “Rome wouldn’t be Rome without its wonderful fountains and I’ve seen them all. I love water and in no other city is water so visible. Water is a great inspiration, it washes my brain. Its light and transparency mixed with its freshness have been a great source of inspiration for many of my creations. I am so proud that Fendi funded the restoration of the Trevi Fountain before the monument was totally damaged.”

Q: You said that Fendi is your Italian version of creativity. What do you mean?

A: “Fendi is Italian to its core and it’s so natural to me. I disconnect from Paris and from anything else... I forget the rest. I don’t have one personality. I have three. Fendi is my Italian version, Chanel my French version and Lagerfeld is my own, what I always wanted. I never mix them up. I never made something that looked like Chanel at Fendi and never made something that looked like Fendi at Chanel: both have a strong identity.”

Q: You began working with the five Fendi sisters in 1965. Do you recall your fist day at Fendi?

A: “The sisters were courageous to hire a young designer... I had long hair and was wearing a Cerruti hat, dark glasses, a printed ascot tie and a jacket that looked like a British shooting jacket. I used to wear it together with French-style culottes and boots and I had a bag that

I bought in Milan. When I see it now I think it’s not too bad. It’s not me but at the same time I know that style represents me.”

Q: Today you and Fendi have created a new term, ‘Haute Fourrure’.

A: “It means haute couture for furs, the ‘Royal Fur of Furs’. I never do fur in France because there are not many great fur artisans and their techniques are very basic compared to what I’m used to at Fendi.”

Q: What makes Fendi’s fur different?

A: “The fur industry is part of Italian culture. You can find the most competent artisans with an incredible savoir faire. Fendi artisans train for almost 10 years before starting to cut out a piece... This is why Fendi’s furs are the most beautiful and exclusive in the world.”

Q: What is the source of your inspiration for this Haute Fourrure collection?

A: “I took inspiration from some illustrations of legends and fairy tales, very romantic but modern at the same time. There are furs mixed with feathers and other unexpected materials. All the looks have something poetic, but in a very modern dimension.”

Q: You like experimenting with materials.

A: “I like mixing things that are not supposed to go together. Everything could be tried and tested. It can work or not, but if your mind is not open to all kind of mixes you had better stop.”

Q: You also invented summer furs suitable to be worn in hot countries like the Emirates.

A: “I don’t think too much about the season. It’s warm and cold in the world. Certainly, furs are also worn in hot countries like the Emirates – they put air-conditioning in their houses and then they can wear fur.”

Q: What is elegance to you?

A: “It is a moral attitude. Some Indian and African women have such an innate elegance they look great even with the few things they dress with.”

Q: What do you like reading?

A: “I love reading magazines and biographies, but also a good dictionary. The French language has changed too much, it’s too ‘cocasse,’ crass, almost ridiculous. I am for the pure French.”

Q: What is your advice to a young designer?

A: “No advice. Everyone has their own path.” ❄️