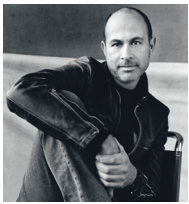


John Varvatos gives off an air of timeless rock 'n' roll—a style that men everywhere have been duplicating since the launch of his menswear brand almost a decade ago. Varvatos, who began his career working for hotshots like Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein, has made himself a respected fashion force by creating clothes and accessories men love to wear, and women love to see them in. *AFM* chatted with Varvatos and got the scoop on his brand, his inspirations, and his own personal preferences.



AFM: You worked for Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein in the 80's and 90's. How did those experiences shape your work today?

J.V.: At Ralph I learned a lot about raising the bar, about always trying to reach higher and never being satisfied, never compromising, and I definitely learned a lot about branding from both of those companies. But more importantly, I learned about product and that's the most important thing—creating great product that has its own personality. When you have something you should own it, you should never try to be anybody else but who you are.

AFM: What have been some of your most recent design inspirations?

J.V.: Every season it comes from someplace different. Generally there's always a little bit of music element in there, there's always a little bit of rock 'n' roll.

AFM: Who are some other designers you look up to?

J.V.: Ralph [Lauren] has been my big mentor over time; not for the look but mostly for how he runs his business and the culture that he creates within his company. And then I like a few of the Belgian designers like Dries Van Noten and Marty Margiela because they walk to their own beat.

AFM: What are some items you've designed that you're most proud of?

J.V.: When I was at Calvin Klein I came up with the boxer brief, which was one of those things that changed the whole underwear industry. Then, when I was working with (and continue to work with) Converse, we came up with the laceless sneaker and the laceless Chuck Taylor, which is the most copied sneaker in the last probably five years.

AFM: Can you tell me about your timepieces that launched in January?

J.V.: I've been a big watch collector since I was able to actually afford a watch. A couple years ago the people from Ernst Benz came to me and said, "We'd really like to do something with you." I said I wanted to do it but I wanted to be very focused about it. [The idea] wasn't a watch of the moment, it was something that was timeless; it had a respect for the past but it looked to the future.

AFM: What brands do you like to wear yourself?

J.V.: I wear a little bit of vintage stuff—I have a few vintage leather jackets—but I'm lucky that I'm able to pretty much design everything that I like to wear myself. There isn't a lot that I see when I'm in Europe or the stores that I've ever really been jealous that I'm not doing. I think of myself as one of the customers and I want to make sure that I'm excited about the clothes.

AFM: Do you ever intend to design for women?

J.V.: We [already] do girls for Converse, but we're going to do women's eventually. I kind of came up with the conclusion two years ago that instead of trying to take over the world with everything, you should be really great at one thing.