

Donatella Versace

A Gift To The World

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Background of designer

Fashion icon, socialite, model, and businesswoman Donatella Versace was born on May 2, 1955, in Reggio Calabria, Italy. She is the youngest of three siblings. Her family molded her into what she is now. Her father Antonio Versace worked as a salesman, her mother, Francesca made clothes, and most importantly, Gianni Versace, her older brother, was the one who decided to submerge the family into the fashion design business when he first opened the Versace boutique in Milan in 1978. Donatella moved to Florence for her university studies but it didn't last long since she went back to being side-by-side with Gianni and his newborn business. The Versace boutique swiftly drew the attention of the people and was escalating into success, it was considered one of the trendiest clothing stores at the moment. Donatella Versace first started in the family business as the Vice President, hand-to-hand with her oldest brother ("Donatella Versace", n.d.). Versace got married in 1983 to Paul Beck with whom she had two children, Allegra Versace, and Daniel Versace; this marriage lasted until the 2000s and then she remarried Manuel Dallori in 2004 with whom she was married for only a year, finalizing their divorce in 2005 (*Donatella Versace marriages and divorces*, n.d.)

Gianni and Donatella had a close relationship, to the point that Donatella was a muse and one of the first ever to have the right to critique his work. In July 1997, Gianni Versace was murdered suddenly at the front door of his Miami mansion. Gianni was one of the many victims that Andrew Cunanan took lives from during his last killing spree (HISTORY, 2010). News broke all around the world, leaving Donatella heartbroken and with a big responsibility for the Versace brand, which was to live up to Gianni's expectations for the brand. The next five years were incredibly tough, she even considered herself lost and acknowledged all the mistakes that she made, some of which turned out to be one of her biggest battles: cocaine addiction (Cartner-Morley, 2017). By that time at her daughter Allegra's eighteenth birthday

party, Elton John, Donatella's good friend, offered her help that only took her some minutes to accept and get on a plane to make her way to Arizona where a place in a rehabilitation facility was waiting for her. Fortunately, the treatment was successful and now she is fully recovered (Milligan, 2010).

In December of 2017, Donatella was awarded the Fashion Icon of the Year at the British Fashion Council's The Fashion Awards (Eytan, 2017). Donatella's designs are meant to empower women and make them feel confident in their skin, she considers herself a feminist, and her work advocates for this purpose, she is a woman for women.



Figure 1. *Donatella Versace*

The Market Segment

Versace is considered a high-end leading international luxury brand due to their premium materials and exclusive designs that compete with other products in the luxury market (Versace, 2023). Donatella's designs are inspired by women in their late 20s to mid-40s. They are upper-middle-class women who have discretionary incomes from \$100,000 to \$150,000. Most of them have a bachelor's degree or higher, and they are professionals with high-profile occupations like celebrities, business executives, and women

who work in creative industries (Riley, 2017). These women choose Versace because they are drawn by its quality and durability, along with the renowned brand name status that Versace has well earned. They like to live an opulent and lavish lifestyle and aren't afraid to look glamorous and extravagant when needed. They also value luxury pieces of clothing and are willing to invest their money in pieces that will be heirs to their kids and grandchildren one day. Regarding style, most of these women consider themselves into fashion and like to take the lead in their looks, they are empowered, sophisticated, and overall, fashion lovers.

Design and Manufacture

When Donatella Versace took the reins of Versace's future, the world had high expectations of her work and the brand's reputation. She first wanted to keep Gianni's legacy and tried to immerse her designs into something that Gianni would have designed himself, yet, she regretted that (Cartner-Morley, 2017). As time went by and she dealt with the loss and grief of her dearest older brother, she came back on track and started to take care of the designs, gifting us Jennifer Lopez' iconic look in the 2000s at the Grammy's red carpet. After 26 years, Donatella is still the head designer of Versace. Something that she loves to do is honor her brother's memory by taking looks out of the archives and re-designing them by adding her personal touch. A big example of this is the refresh of the butterfly cut dress that was first worn by Elizabeth Hurley (originally designed by Gianni) and then Donatella created versions inspired by her brother's design that were worn by Naomi Campbell in 1999, Cristina Aguilera in the 2000s and most recently, Dua Lipa for the Grammy's red carpet in 2021 (Meda, 2021).

In Donatella's version of Gianni's design, we can appreciate the incorporation of silver shimmering crystals all over the fabric, there are a couple of baby blue and baby pink

butterflies added to the front of the dress in the same shimmering crystals mentioned earlier that playfully makes a reference to the name of the dress “butterfly cut”, the end of the dress simulate a waterfall that falls onto Naomi’s left leg and gives an impression of movement, the length of the dress is also shorter, considered to be a mini dress and it suits close to the skin enhancing Naomi’s curved silhouette, using her body as an accessory to the dress. The addition of these small but calculated details to the design made it more feminine and gave more of a youthful look.

Versace’s main headquarters are in Milan, Italy but since their USA market occupies a big portion of their sales, they also have one in New York (Versace, 2023). Manufacturers are 82% located in Italy, the rest is divided between European and Asian countries. Just like every other high-end luxury brand, their official manufacturers are kept confidential for competitive reasons.



Figure 2. Elizabeth Hurley in iconic butterfly-cut dress designed by Gianni Versace.



Figure 3. Kate Moss, Donatella Versace and Naomi Campbell in a butterfly-cut dress designed by Donatella Versace.

Fabrics

The most popular fabrics used in Versace's designs are silk, cotton, acetate, viscose, lambskin leather, wool crepe, polyester, satin, cotton, and spandex all of which reflect the high quality of the brand and are used for their dresses, shirts, skirts, jackets, and jeans. The choice of the fabrics relies mostly on the theme of their collections, reflecting the brand's commitment to detail and craftsmanship. Their fabric materials are Italian-sourced. Versace is known to like heavy gold and silver pop-up colors on their dark color fabrics and this is one of their signature designs along with big gold safety pins on their dresses and tropical prints shown previously in their Spring/Summer 1992 and Spring/Summer 2020 runways shows (DeLong, 2022). A relevant and important fact to mention is that Oroton fabric was invented by Gianni Versace in 1982 with the help of some engineers. The fabric looks like a metal mesh, it looks similar to silk and is shimmering and was with this fabric, Gianni created the iconic Oroton Gold dress, this fabric was made out of a suppleness of silk with a mix of the metals' texture to add shiness and a touch of glamour (Icon-Icon, 2016). Donatella has been applauded for her immersion into fashion sustainability, one of the biggest and most important things she implemented for her brand was the decision to go fur-free, she says "Fur? I am out of that! I don't want to kill animals to make fashion" (Versace, 2018). She even received a CNMI Award at the Green Carpet Awards due to her commitment to sustainable fashion for a better quality environment (Versace US, 2023).

Promotion

Donatella Versace and her team approach publicity in multiple ways to make their products popular all around the world. Some of the promotion strategies that they work on are

fashion shows and events, digital marketing and social media, celebrity deals, collaborations and limited edition products, traditional advertising, and visual merchandising in which she expanded her brand's inclusivity and diversity to welcome potential buyers to each campaign (Team TBH, 2023). Models like Cindy Crawford, Naomi Campbell, Carla Bruni, Linda Evangelista, Bella Hadid, Kendall Jenner, and Gigi Hadid have walked their runways wearing Versace's most iconic looks. Celebrities like Jennifer Lopez, Taylor Swift, Dua Lipa, Cher, and Madonna have worn Donatella's looks on various important red carpets, their worldwide tour, music videos, and appearances on TV (Okwodu, 2015). Donatella always has a table for guests at the Met gala, and every year she makes sure her designs stand out on the red carpet as a reminder for everybody that she knows how to make the place shimmer.

Versace counts with accounts on platforms like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, TikTok, and its website to send e-mails to their customers when they sign up for information about upcoming products. Versace uses their various social media accounts to connect with the younger target audience, they specifically use Instagram to connect with millennials (Tovar, 2022). Their website had around 10.5 million views worldwide between July and September 2023, they have an average of monthly visits of 3.502 million views, the USA being at the top of the list with 31.10% of traffic share (Similar Web, 2023). In addition to social media, Donatella Versace promotes the brand traditionality as well, using big billboards in metropolitan cities like New York, London, Milan, Tokyo, and Paris, cities in which they are popular and that concentrate most of their buyers. Versace's biggest selling market is situated in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa with a revenue of 468 million dollars as of the year 2023, second place is occupied by the Americas with a revenue of 408 million dollars, and lastly, Asia with a 230 million dollars revenue (Versace revenue, 2023).

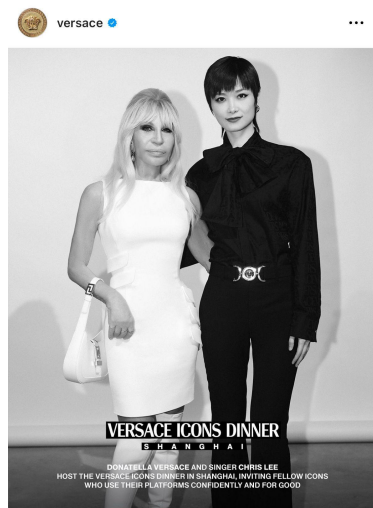


Figure 4. *Versace Icons Dinner*



Figure 5. *Dua Lipa for Versace*

Significance of Donatella Versace for the Fashion Industry

Donatella Versace's brand means sophistication for the fashion industry, she is considered a walking fashion icon that continues to demonstrate why her name is so acclaimed by others (Britannica, 2023). Throughout her career, she has received several awards for her work, charity contribution, and sustainability alliance, some of the most important fashion awards under her name are a Bambi for Fashion, this being one of the first awards she ever received in 2004, "Fashion Icon" from the Fashion Awards, "Fashion Icon Award" from the GQ Awards, the CFDA awarded her with the International award on 2018, and she was pronounced "Designer of the year" by British GQ and GQ China (Business of Fashion, 2022). Donatella is not one to be left behind as the fashion industry evolves, she likes to take under her wing new fresh talents and dress them on red carpets, the fashion house has been favored by celebrities for their designs (Liu, 2022). Her looks never fail to appear serious with a hint of youthfulness, if there is something that characterizes her, it is her role in fashion innovation, Versace is all in for innovation but tries to never lose their essence along the way.

The author of this paper believes that Donatella Versace is a master at creating a balance in her designs between elegance and modernity. Versace's runway shows are a work of art, a celebration of empowered women's looks, so impactful and sophisticated.

Donatella's creations reflect the beauty and youthfulness she once enjoyed by Gianni's side, throughout her work people can see her evolution as her own self and not a continuation of what Versace was previous to Gianni's death. Donatella will continue to impact the fashion industry as years go by and society as well with her charming way of being, no doubt her name will go down in the history books, but for now, it is on us to enjoy this living legend's work.

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