

Escapism not Imprisonment: Alexander Wang

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## Background

Alexander Wang is a 38-year-old American Fashion designer and founder of Alexander Wang, best known for his urban designs. Alexander Wang was born to Taiwanese parents on December 26, 1983, in San Francisco, California. His upbringing in the Bay Area is credited to his laid-back and casual aesthetic. According to Highsnobiety,

“When he was three, he was already sketching shoe designs on restaurant napkins. He got his first taste of the fashion industry at fifteen when he attended a summer course at London’s prestigious Central Saint Martins just before he started his first year of high school. There, he designed a collection of 33 evening dresses” (Amarca, 2017).

Wang's interest in fashion was no surprise. Wang began his education by attending a summer program for design at *Central Saint Martins*; after finishing High School at eighteen, Wang moved to New York for two years, where he attended *Parsons The New School for Design*. His time at *Parsons* was a short experience as he had other aspirations; he dropped out in 2004 to begin his label. Wang gained experience in the fashion industry by interning at magazines like *Vogue* and *Teen Vogue*. Wang did an apprenticeship for Marc Jacobs and Derek Lam; Once he was confident in his career, he aspired to quit studying at *Parsons* to open his brand (“Alexander Wang: Fashion Designer Biography,” 2019). Wang's time in his internship gave him the confidence to launch his fashion label in 2005, which he never thought would impress his audience the way it did. Wang’s label started with a collection made up of knitwear based on six unisex silhouettes, resulting in his launching a complete women’s collection, selling to over 200 stores. Quickly Wang was recognized for his talents within the industry. With the support of Wang's family, his label rapidly evolved into a women's ready-to-wear collection; he presented

his first runway collection for Autumn/ Winter 2007 at New York Fashion Week (Dudbridge, 2022).

According to Alexander Wang. Fashionabc

“Wang was initially supported in his venture by his family: his brother assumed the role of the chief financial advisor, his sister-in-law acted as a chief principal officer, and the designer utilized family connections to source products from China” (Alexander Wang Fashionabc, 2020).

Vogue editor and style icon Anna Wintour was a crucial supporter of Wang’s craft; her influence helped bring attention to the young designer. After being awarded The Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA)/Vogue Fashion Fund in 2008, Wang received \$20,000 to expand his business and a year’s worth of mentorship (Dubdridge, 2022). Wang was later allowed to be the creative director of Balenciaga from 2012-2015. He was simultaneously establishing his then seven-year-old brand and his role with Balenciaga.

“Wang quickly rose from a fashion-savvy pupil to the head of one of the leading fashion houses. Yet, even at such a high post, the designer appears way too young for all the achievements he has been carrying in his hand” (“Famous designer biography,” 2022).

Alexander Wang and Adidas have done Six collaborations in their latest collection. Wang and Adidas explored the concept of the clubbing scene and classic leisurewear resulting in a futuristic look ranging from trainers to fanny packs, sports duffels, and instant must-haves like tee and pants (Talon, 2019). Another collaboration that Wang has worked on was with Uniqlo on two projects. The first collaboration featured fashionable and streetwear-ready underwear pieces using HeatTech material. For his second collaboration with Uniqlo, Wang wanted a closer range

of underwear and functional pieces. This line will feature bras, tank tops, and biker shorts using Uniqlo's hi-tech materials and cooling fabrics (Northman, 2019). It seems that Wang's success came quickly; considering his talent, it was no surprise. As we see the development of his work, it will reveal how his non-conformist attitude benefited his company's success in today's fashion climate.

**Figure 1 Alexander Wang**



#### Demographics and Behavioral Characteristics

Using the VALS system, Wang's primary vals type is most like the experiencers consumer group meaning these individuals are up to the latest fashions, see themselves as very sociable, believe that friends a significant, and are spontaneous (SBI, 2022). According to Prezi, "Wang's main customers are 20-35-year-old, young professionals who are after a careless, effortless, cool look" (2022). As Wang's Brand matured, his audience grew. His customers want the same feeling of being able to relate to the model's off-duty style, feeling effortlessly cool in what Wang references as the everyday uniform. According to "Vogue," Wang's goal was to create "Clothes

that girls want to wear.” As his brand continued to grow, not only did girls want to wear his clothes, but all kinds of women wore his clothes (Ferla, 2009). Not only were women interested in Wang's brand, but men were also. Wang’s audience comprises 43.70% male and 56.30% female (Similarweb, 2022). According to The New York Times, “His sophisticated shapes and wallet-friendly prices are now speaking compellingly to a mature population of bankers, teachers, and Botoxed social dragonflies who aspire to his brand of urban cool” (La Ferla, 2009). According to an article titled Behind the Brand: the uniqueness of Alexander Wang, “Buying Alexander Wang does not mean adding clothes to your wardrobe - it means adding true design.” The consumers Wang can connect with are successful individuals due to the luxury, lavish items, and price tag. The brand's target market is fashion-conscious, successful individuals. Consumers look forward to adopting the brand's image and attitude (Iredale, 2015).

#### Geographic and Psychographics

It is not simple to keep consumers engaged with the brand, Wang could not save everyone pleased, but he remained genuine and intentional with the luxury and adaptability behind his brand. According to the Highsnobiety article “How Alexander Wang Used Social Media To Win Fashion,” Wang was targeting consumers who were uptown women with a downtown sensibility. Wang's consumers look forward to a mix of an urban style with a classic silhouette. Wang took inspiration from the lifestyle of the downtown New York models and individuals he surrounded himself with (Ross, 2015). The author states several times throughout the article that many of the consumers and influence behind Wang’s design stem from New York culture. Wang is a designer who appreciates the value of celebrity; he is known for having the most famous hip models for his show. Wang uses the “it girl” models to promote his lifestyle by creating snippet videos of

not only portraying but living the life everyone desires. A lifestyle includes money, alcohol, late night, and rebellious youth. Wang successfully enables his consumers to feel like they are buying into a brand culture and lifestyle, not just wearable commodities (Amarca, 2017). Wang's model-off-duty style accommodated the city girl and the fashion aesthetic. According to an article titled Alexander Wang: The Energizer by Jessica Iredale, "Now, from the smallest brand to the biggest brand, it is all about, in my opinion, being inclusive" Although Wang's brand has a sense of exclusivity, it is essential for his consumers to not only feel a sense of importance with his designs but that they also intended to feel that luxury and adaptability. Wang's aesthetic is easy because consumers can easily integrate it into their wardrobe (Iredale, 2015). These wardrobe staples help the consumer get dressed easily while making their wardrobe versatile.

#### Description

About 40% of his sales come from the U.S.; the remaining 60% are concentrated mainly in Europe and Asia (Indvik, 2013). It is not surprising that 60% of Wang's consumers come from Europe and Asia, considering his manufacturing is located in Asia and Europe. According to FashionUnited, an article titled "Alexander Wang relocates 30 percent of manufacturing to Europe" by Vivian Hendriksz states, "In 2014, 90 percent of the label manufacturing took place in Asia - today this amount has been dialed down to 70 percent as 30 percent of the designer's collection are currently produced in EU countries like Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Turkey". A majority of Wang's manufacturing is based in Asia for compelling reasons. The production allowed his brand to deliver desirable merchandise while producing a great deal of profit with Wang's ideal aesthetics with accessible price points. Although most Wang's stores are in Asia,

Europe is its largest wholesale market. Manufacturing more products in Europe can reduce the costly and time-consuming process of transporting the goods (Hendriksz, 2020).

Wang's design can be described as androgynous, not overly sexy, but subtle inclusively. "Most of us are not a Size 2," Ms. Chu said. "It is nice to be able to wear sexy but comfortable clothes that are not overly girly. I am kind of over that look" (Ferla, 2009). Wang states that he is not looking to change the way; he wants to tweak it to his standards. Wang was always looking at Japanese fashion magazines because he felt they were the pioneers of street style, which was always a significant influence on his creative process (Amarca, 2017). Street style has a considerable impact on Wang's brand with the combination of his laid-back personality; he was able to translate that into his brand. Wang wanted his brand to be an extension of himself.

According to an article titled Alexander Wang, Luxury Brand by Jennifer Girard, Wang uses various fabrics and textiles "His preferred materials are chiffon, silk, cotton, wool/cashmere, jersey, denim, leather, rayon, Spandex, and sequins." Sustainability influences Wang's brand as he uses several natural fibers. With these fabrics and textiles, Wang can convey his fashion, defined as simplicity, cutting-edge silhouettes, and a virtually monochromatic black palette (Girard, 2022). According to a worth point article titled Alexander Wang, Luxury Brand by Jennifer Girard,

"His most popular pieces include coats/jackets, dresses, cocktail dresses, pants, shorts, tops, blouses, sweaters, sweatshirts, athletic wear, and accessories ( hats/gloves/scarves/belts). Also collectible are his handbags/backpacks/duffle bags, wallets, sunglasses, key chains, boxing gloves, and footwear."

A few of his most famous designs include a Spring 2009 mesh dress with graphic detailing, \$965 **Figure 2**, and Fall 2008 stretch leather pants, \$1,295 **Figure 3** (Thurmond, 2015). These popular designs showcase the evolution of fashion being Recyclable.

**Figure 2 Mesh dress with graphic detailing**



**Figure 3 Stretch Leather pant**



After a three-year hiatus from catwalk events, Wang returned to the runway with a show celebrating his Asian American culture. This event took place in Chinatown Central plaza in Los Angeles with a total of 800 attendees, 500 of whom were members of the public. According to CNN, an article titled Inside Alexander Wang's Controversial Return to the Runway “Featured a lot of denim and leather, from oversized gilets worn low on the hips and paired with micro bra-tops. Boots were crotch-high, shorts were tiny, and suiting was deconstructed. Knitwear was shrunken into crop tops and shrugs while leggings were rouché and layered”.

Wang stays true to his androgynous style with the squares shoulder, oversized tops, and jackets. Reimagining streetwear with denim and leather (Wang, 2022).



**Figure 4 Fortune City****Promotion/Location**

For Wang's merchandise to be successfully promoted and accepted by his consumers, he involves himself significantly in each process. According to The New York Times article Alexander Wang, for Cool Kids, and Now You, "From the very first season I would look at the numbers, check our profit margins" establishing a positive relationship with himself and the process of his brand is what set him apart from other designers. There was an attention to detail that was meticulous to Wang's brand. Although it is evident that Wang put strenuous effort into his brand, we can not deny the role that youth culture and social media played in his success. Not only was Wang's work ethic the reason for his triumphant rise, his vulnerability and willingness to communicate with his consumers benefited the promotion of his brand. Business Insider states, "He is embracing the spotlight more as a way to connect with his fans and sharing more of his personality" (Feloni & Sigi, 2019). Not all of Wang's fans are his consumers, so in hopes of connecting more with them and for a relationship where they have this connection. Not only do

they want to enjoy and wear the designer's merchandise, but it is essential to have that relatability. According to the CFDA,

“Alexander Wang opened its first flagship store, in February 2011, in Soho, New York. Following the NYC flagship store opening, Alexander Wang opened its second flagship store in April 2012 in Beijing, China. Today, Alexander Wang has over 15 stores worldwide, including its E-Commerce site shipping to more than 50 countries.”

Wang's Flagship store is located at 103 Grand Street, New York 10013, United States.

Along with being the Creative Director of Balenciaga and simultaneously working on his brand in 2014, Wang collaboration with H&M. To successfully promote the winter collection, H&M enlisted the help of Rihanna, making her a brand ambassador to build up a conversation about the group. “Known for being a style icon, the pop star receives attention for always being ahead in fashion.” This strategy immediately caught the public's attention on the internet (Verot, 2014). Wang has an outstanding online presence. The brand's website includes catwalk images, a blog with updates on the brand, and a lookbook. Wang uses digital advertising for campaigns on social media platforms such as youtube and Instagram.

### Personal Opinion

Despite the controversy Wang has faced, he still has the power to produce a look effortlessly cool with his masculine-feminine designs for his “Fortune City” runway show that celebrated Asian American culture presenting his pre-fall and fall 2022 collection (Berlinger, 2022).

Alexander Wang makes his debut on the runway after sexual assault claims. Wang held his first show since 2019 before several people accused him of sexual assault and drugging male and transgender models. Initially, Wang denied such allegations in 2020 but later in 2021 issued an

apology stating that he would set a better example. These accusations damaged Wang's brand, but he was still dressing Rihanna and Julia Fox while releasing a recent campaign with Lucy Liu. During the "Fortune City," the models sported various pieces, including shades of indigo and brown, denim and leather coats, red velour sweat suit, and oversized wool coats (Alexander Wang returns to runway after sexual assault claims, 2022). Alexander Wang is noted as the messiah of casual-luxe, sports-infused lifestyle fusing the inspiration of modelesque refinement. Wang is known for leather miniskirts, bucket bags, and draped asymmetric t-shirt dresses worn explicitly by Blake Lively. What set Wang apart from his fashion forefathers was his awareness that "fashion is a style and styles, not just the clothes you wear but its what you eat, where you go, who hang out with." Making his lifestyle just as distinguishable as his brand. Wang's streetwear and the sportswear-infused label have dominated high fashion, paving the way for future designers (Alexander Wang, 2022). Although these sexual assault allegations of Wang are challenging to look past, there is no denying that Wang's ambition and drive toward his brand have made him incredibly successful today.

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Written by Saxony Dudbridge Saxony Dudbridge was one of the first contributors to the Catwalk Yourself project. (n.d.). *Alexander Wang Biography*. Catwalk Yourself. Retrieved November 3, 2022, from <http://www.catwalkyourself.com/fashion-biographies/alexander-wang/>