

Yohji Yamamoto

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Abstract

Yohji Yamamoto is a designer that is often forgotten but deserves a lot more recognition. This clothing can speak to you without having a mouth. The femininity side of clothing is stripped and Christian Dior's ideal of the "New Look" for women is drastically different from Yohji Yamamoto beliefs. Think of the most loudest outfit a woman can wear for example; girly colors of "bright pink" or even rainbows with a micro skirt with sparkly heels 6 inches tall with leopard print patterns on a tube top. Everything that has been described is the complete opposite of what Yohji Yamamoto believes a woman should look like, it is seen throughout his collections instead of using a "Barbie doll" for inspiration on what a woman should look like he uses the "independent hard working lady" as the template. His style is dark with the colors of royal blue royal red but most importantly black one might say the inspiration is Lydia Deetz from the 1988 film "Beetlejuice". Within this biography we will examine his personal life and own sense of style to see how it has influenced his career throughout the years to create his signature fashion line.

Yohji Yamamoto was born on October 3rd 1943 in Tokyo Japan growing up he was raised by his mother Fumi Yamamoto who worked as a seamstress and his father was drafted to fight in World War two. Yohji's father was unfortunately killed during the war and Yohji was still an infant but he realised only at the age of three or four he was filled with anger and hatred. He came to terms that his life will be difficult and he would need to work harder than most kids but most importantly be there for his widow mother. Throughout his childhood years to becoming a young adult Yohji has always dedicated his time to help his mother with work she was a seamstress. Yohji attended Keio University earning himself a degree in law in 1966 but after completing law school he realised that it wasn't something he was interested in and would rather continue helping his mother make clothing. As mentioned in a article called " Yohji Yamamoto" he has stated;

After graduating, he realised a law career was not for him. "I didn't want to join the ordinary society," he told BoF. "So I told my mother after graduation...I want to help you." (BoF 2020)

After helping his mother at her shop he found his new passion for making clothing and learned along the way by watching the sewing assistants that also worked at the shop. Yohji's mother suggested for him to enroll at a fashion college so he attended Bunka Fashion College, this college has been recognized to teach the greats such as Kenzo Takada, Tsumori Chisato, Jun Takahashi and many more. One preconceived notions about fashion is that the designer almost always find their calling or voice in Paris/european countries, Yohji had won a prize to go to Paris after graduating at Bunka but he went for a year but he never got his true calling to fashion until he was back home in Japan. He already had his mind certain on sticking to being a fashion

designer so he made ready to wear garments and put small shops in the major cities of Japan and later expanded to his first shop

The success turned his thoughts back to Paris, and at the beginning of the 1980s Yamamoto returned to the French capital to open his first shop.

Since then, Yamamoto has developed a dedicated global following. (BoF 2020)

Yohji has observed how women are portrayed in society and in the fashion industry, he describes them as a “Barbie Doll” where everything needs to have the general sex appeal like showing cleavage and showing off curves which is something he simply hates;

The customer's requests were always like they wanted something very feminine, very sexy very like dolls and I hated it. (M2M 2018)

The portrayal of the Barbie dolls is more focused on being beautiful and Yohji Yamamoto believed there is so much more to a woman besides her beauty, growing up with his mom he saw how independent and strong working she is and felt that women should be applauded for their hard work not just their looks. He believed that part of being an independent person is to put in your hard working and do not constantly rely on others in a clip of Made to Measure he stated;

Very often my customers they didn't pay by their own money or either their partner paid so I was shouting in my mind *bitch* I couldn't stand designing bitches clothing I was searching for some independent women. (M2M 2018)

Yohji's garments do not fit the typical look of an everyday girl his favorite color is known to be black and the clothing is a mixture between Japanese and western influences his first

collection was in Paris in 1981 which was ready to wear luxury clothing he named it “YM” by observing the photographs taken during the show it looks like the models are all attending a funeral. According to The New York Times they state;

Yohji Yamamoto has built a career on proving that black — aggressive, rebellious, somber, romantic or seductive — is beautiful. He, more than most designers, is the poet of black, the director of fashion's film noir. (Menkes 2000)

Yohji believed that the color black was quite mysterious but also modest and arrogant at the same time. He knew that the color black would be able to create sharp silhouettes and swallow light. He felt the overall message that the color black portrays is ‘you stay in your lane, don’t go into mines’. His collections over the years have always focused on the color black and only once in a blue moon will he occasionally experiment with the color but his go to is always black and since he used different fabrics the shades on black can vary. Even though his garments are in the shade of black there is differences in each garments some garments were layered and wrapped while others looked distressed with the hemlines being uneven in the article A Timeline of the Japanese Design Avant Garde realised this style of development beginning to arise in the US;

Kawakubo and Yamamoto propose a startling contrast to the excess of the 1980s: cerebral, intellectual, deconstructed, raw. Their clothes are like existential puzzles rendered in tattered scraps of black, enveloping the wearer in the cascading folds of a dissected kimono. As aggressions against the conventions of Western beauty, they exude an air of disagreement that is as satisfying to indulge as it is to reject. (Lewis date n/a)

Throughout the 1980's to the 1990's Yohji Yamamoto was a major success not only did he create a womenswear collection but he went on to create menswear in 1984 in Paris. Looking at both collections the womenswear and menswear aren't drastically different from each other one key element that stays consistent is the clothing not hugging the body of the person, it's baggy and sometimes in layers which resembles a "black cloud." Another similarity is the combination of now adding white to the black colors for men, it started off as being used with a coat for men but it eventually showed up in his collection again as his color for button up collared shirts with black trousers. Going into the 1990 Yohji started to experiment with the color white for womenswear even creating patterns like zigzags, black and white grids, and black and white trapezoids. In 1993 to 1999 he has even dabbled in the film industry creating costumes on his website it says;

1993

Designs costumes for the Wagner Opera [Tristan and Isolde] in Bayreuth

1994

Receives the "Chevalier de L 'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres"

Nomination from the French Minister of Culture

Receives the 12th Mainichi Fashion Award, Tokyo

Designs costumes for the Kanagawa Art Festival Opera [Susano]

Designs costumes for Ryuichi Sakamoto's Opera [LIFE]

1999

Designs costumes for Takeshi Kitano's film [BROTHER] (YAMAMOTO 2018)

Yohji has collaborated with other companies in 2003 his biggest collaboration still to this day is his partnership with Adidas where he steps away from the luxury garments to being focused on athleisure wear. Yohji's brand separated from Adidas stands at a different price point for example his website sells a number 54 Hollowed out Pocket Jacket Wool tropical costs \$1,188 USD but with his collaboration with Adidas a Y-3 CL Shell Track Jacket costs \$280 USD. What is good about Yohji collaborating with Adidas is that it gives he gets to sell to the lower,middle and upper class, sometimes we can't afford a Chanel or Gucci item because its too expensive but when you collaborate with certain brand and have a lower price point then the customers will feel happy knowing they bought something that they were able to afford made by their favorite designer.

Over the years Yohji continued to make collections but also wrote books such as "Talking to Myself" in 2002 and "An Exhibition Triptych" in 2006 and in 2016 he realeased his documentary titled "Dressmaker" where the film focuses on his upcoming as a fashion designer and his complex background. Looking at Yohji Yamamoto's career he has learned to be hardworking, not follow the trends that society wanted him to believe and to stick to what you like doing and he's still doing amazing till this day.

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