

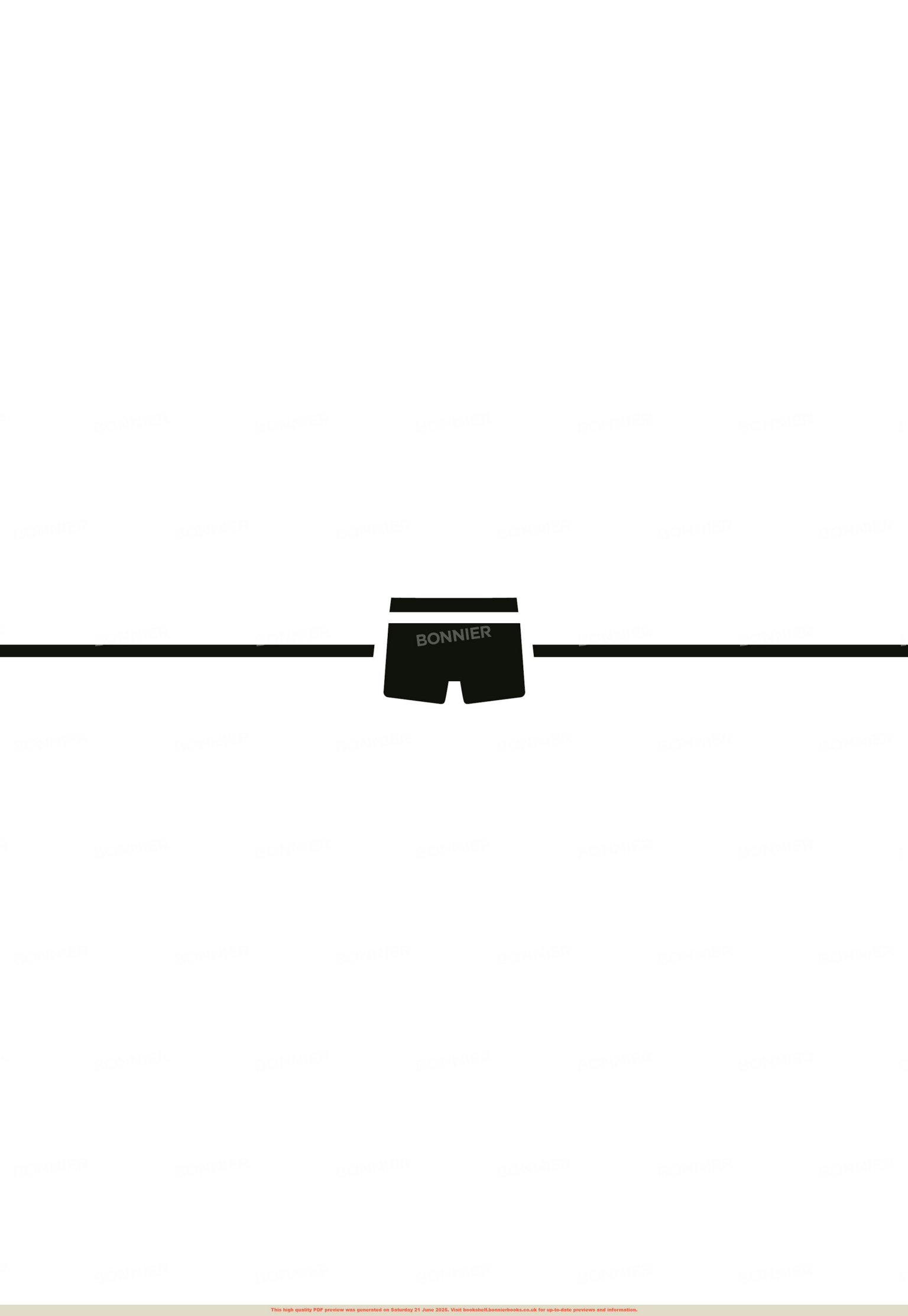
JESSICA BUMPUS

Calvin Klein

The Story Behind the Style



UNOFFICIAL AND UNAUTHORISED



First published in the UK in 2025 by Studio Press,
an imprint of Bonnier Books UK
5th Floor, HYLO, 105 Bunhill Row,
London, EC1Y 8LZ

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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ISBN 978-1-83587-328-1

FSC DUMMY

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A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

Printed and bound in China

The authorised representative in the EEA is Bonnier Books
UK (Ireland) Limited.

Registered office address: Floor 3, Block 3, Miesian Plaza,
Dublin 2, D02 Y754, Ireland
compliance@bonnierbooks.ie

www.bonnierbooks.co.uk

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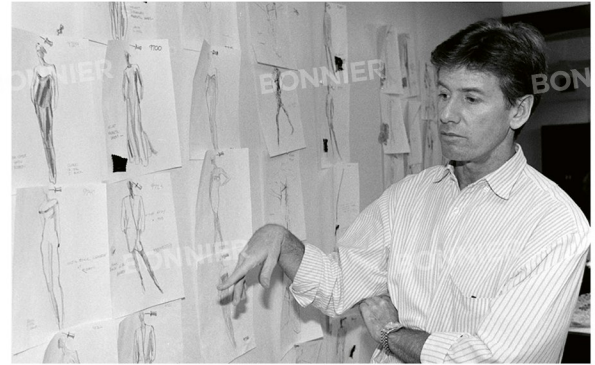
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An American Icon is Born

What comes to mind when you think of the name Calvin Klein? Is it the man himself, a charismatic fashion entrepreneur from the Bronx? Or perhaps it's the brand, bound up in its blend of cool minimalism and striking simplicity – a potent mix that would go on to coin the look of the 1980s and 1990s with such notable garments as the white shirt, the camel coat and the slip dress.



OPPOSITE: Calvin Klein with a model wearing a look from the autumn/winter 1980 collection, New York.

TOP: Calvin Klein discusses looks from his upcoming autumn/winter 1990 collection during a preview.

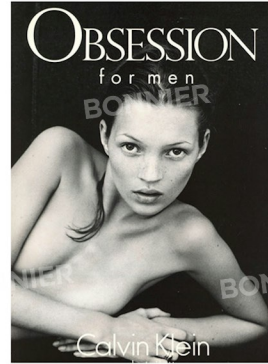
BOTTOM: Calvin Klein with models Janice Dickinson, Iman, and Beverly Johnson, preparing for his autumn/winter 1977 show at 205 West 39th Street in New York City.



Perhaps it's Kate Moss (in said slip dress) or Brooke Shields – the models (and supermodels) Calvin Klein made famous through provocative but landmark fashion campaigns that, to this day, are referenced on the moodboards of both established and up-and-coming designers. The man was a marketing genius.

Or is it the perfumes – Obsession, Eternity, CK One? The underwear, with that Calvin Klein wording peeking out over waistbands? The designer jeans, which were revolutionary at the time and worn in those landmark campaigns by Brooke Shields?

All of these things are defining features of the American brand which stands alongside the country's greats: Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, Tommy Hilfinger and Oscar de la Renta. Incidentally, Ralph Lauren came from the same neighbourhood as Klein.



OPPOSITE: In 1981 at Studio 54 in New York City, Calvin Klein and Brooke Shields.

TOP LEFT: Kate Moss in the famous Obsession perfume advert, 1995.

TOP RIGHT: Kate Moss walks at the Calvin Klein spring/summer 1999 show.



BOTTOM LEFT: Jeremy Allen White for Calvin Klein underwear on a billboard in Piccadilly Circus, London, 2024.

BOTTOM RIGHT: With the designer Donna Karan at the 2016 CFDA Fashion Awards, New York.



Maybe it's Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy that comes to mind? The late style icon worked for Klein as a publicist and, as a result, became an ambassador for the brand, coming to define the sleek and stylish aesthetic of the 1990s Klein era. Perhaps it is the more recent chapter of the story – post-Calvin Klein the man, Francisco Costa and Italo Zucchelli took the reins on womenswear and menswear respectively, but continued to champion Klein's sensual minimalism, dressing Elle Macpherson, Scarlett Johansson, Emma Stone and Jennifer Lawrence along the way. Or is it Raf Simons (now at Prada), who did a much anticipated stint at Calvin Klein from 2016 to 2018 and is known for adding a more subversive-pop element to the brand? The designer explored darkened American themes, adding edge to interesting effect.



After Simons, the brand went on a general hiatus from the catwalk, instead focusing on digital-first campaigns featuring megastars like Shawn Mendes and Kendall Jenner, while it worked out its business model.

This was followed by the appointment of creative director Veronica Leoni in 2024, whose highly anticipated debut took place at New York Fashion Week in February 2025. The question was: could she bring the Calvin Klein magic back?



OPPOSITE:
Kendall Jenner
at the Calvin
Klein Jeans
Music Festival
in Hong Kong,
China, June
2015.

LEFT: Veronica
Leoni at the
Magliano
fashion show,
Milan Menswear
autumn/winter
2025–26 Fashion
Week.

And that just about brings us up to date on nearly 60 years of Calvin Klein – though there have been many more twists and turns in the story along the way.

Calvin Klein is one of those names that sits among the lofty heights of global fashion brands that everyone, both in and outside of the fashion world, knows – such as Dior, Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani and Vivienne Westwood.

To hear the name is to immediately see the font, the aesthetic, the clothes – and, pertinently, the calm and neutral colour palette (though, as this book will explore, that was perhaps not the case during the Raf Simons era), which underpinned the brand's lifestyle approach to dressing.

Ahead of the New York Fashion Week show in February 2025, the influential fashion consultant Julie Gilhart referred to the return of Calvin Klein Collection – which means what gets shown on the catwalk – under Leoni as being a “BIG day” on social media.

Leoni, an Italian designer who has held positions at Jil Sander, The Row, Moncler and Phoebe Philo's Celine, was the first ever female creative director to take on one of America's biggest fashion brands, with the show taking place at the midtown offices of Calvin Klein. Among those in attendance at the show was the man himself, seen chatting away with Kate Moss and Christy Turlington. He was dressed in a sleek and chic suit, demure and understated just as the Calvin Klein brand had promoted under his own watch.

Notably, Klein hasn't been a part of the brand for over 20 years – since the early 2000s, when Phillips-Van Heusen Corp, or PVH, acquired the business in a deal reportedly worth over \$700m. Clearly, this is a story of several parts: the man, the myth and now, the legacy.

BELOW: Calvin Klein at the Calvin Klein Collection show during New York Fashion Week, February 2025.



In the Beginning

It all began in 1942. Klein was born on November 19, brought up in the Northern part of the Bronx in a Jewish immigrant family with an older brother and a younger sister.

Calvin Klein's father, Leo, was born in Budapest and owned a grocery store in Harlem. His mother, Flore, was a lover of fashion – which must surely have influenced the direction of Klein's career. She had extravagant taste and would wear fur-lined coats. Klein's father, on the other hand, would also teach him about running a business, the importance of customers, and working hard.

When speaking about his mother, Klein has noted that she particularly liked neutral colours – a trait that seems to have rubbed off on him (the Calvin Klein colour palette is one of its unique and defining factors). She was also known to be creative and would often redecorate the family apartment.



Meanwhile, his grandmother, Molly Stern, worked at a dress alteration shop and could apparently make anything, without needing a pattern. She had also worked for Hattie Carnegie, the American sportswear designer. A lynchpin of American fashion history, as we will see, sportswear plays a significant role in the world of Calvin Klein. A picture of early-life influences begins to fall into place.

Klein taught himself how to sketch and sew, and has said that he spent the early years of his life designing in a colour palette of beige, cream and brown – all the colours his mother loved. His grandmother taught him to use a sewing machine, and both women were important references for Klein when it came to the way women looked and dressed. According to *Obsession: The Lives and Times of Calvin Klein*, growing up, Klein himself became something of a trendsetter in his local neighbourhood and, as he got older, would carry a sketch pad around with him.



OPPOSITE: The Bronx by night circa 1946, Fordham Road.

ABOVE: The designer posed with models all wearing Calvin Klein for *Vogue*, photographed by Oliviero Toscani, 1977.

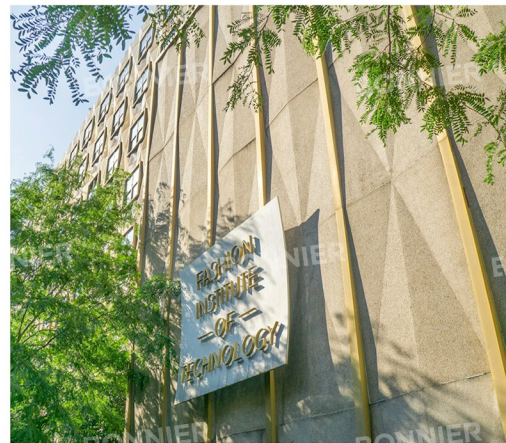
The other person of significance in his life was his friend Barry Schwartz, whom he met when he was just five years old. Early business ventures, according to Vogue On: Calvin Klein, included selling cups of water on a street corner – which they had actually got for free from Stern's shop. They also sold newspapers at marked-up prices. Later, Klein would become business partners with Schwartz, building something far mightier.



OPPOSITE: Circa 1951, Calvin Klein, left, with Barry Schwartz.

TOP RIGHT: The Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City, New York.

BOTTOM: At Marci Klein's 16th birthday, held at Studio 54 in New York City, 1982.



Klein began his fashion education, and therefore career, by attending New York's High School of Industrial Arts in Manhattan, specialising in illustration, and then the Fashion Institute of Technology, from which he graduated in 1963. Other famous alumni to have attended FIT include Michael Kors, Norma Kamali (both of whom are known for their sportswear-infused styles) and, more recently, Luke Meier, formerly of Jil Sander, and Schiaparelli's Daniel Roseberry. While there, he is said to have developed a taste for expensive fabrics, such as silk, and a dislike for bright colours.

In 1964, Klein married Jayne Centre. He had met her at Junior High and she had studied textile design. Both young at the time – though eager and ambitious – they were married at the Hampshire House Hotel on Central Park South. They had a daughter, Marci, in 1966.



First Steps

One of Klein's early jobs was working for the trade publication *Women's Wear Daily*, or *WWD* as it is known, as well as doing some dress-cutting. He worked for various middle- to down-market Seventh Avenue manufacturers, with whose products he was not impressed.

But his first real job – according to him – was designing coats and suits for Dan Millstein, a clothing manufacturer in the New York garment district. Located in Manhattan, and generally considered to be around Fifth and Ninth Avenue from 34th to 42nd Streets (though the exact location has changed over the years), historically the garment district is known for its role in the production of clothes and has been operating since the early 20th century.

According to *Vogue On: Calvin Klein*, one of the reasons he was hired was because he had a knack for remembering what he saw on the runways and was asked to sketch out designs – a skill that impressed Millstein. As a result, he was sent to Paris to cover the collections. Back then, shows were closed-off affairs and there wouldn't be the swath of coverage you see today. Sketchers like Klein, were apparently not allowed to put pencil to paper during a show. It was a totally different world.

During his time working for Millstein, Klein learned about all elements of the manufacturing process, from sketching to fabrics and fitting the garments. And was inspired by what he saw people wearing on the streets of Europe. But Millstein, it seems, wasn't the easiest of people to work for. Perhaps that was a blessing in disguise...



LEFT: The Midtown Manhattan skyline: looking west over the Garment District and Hudson Yards circa 1960.

It Started With Coats

We know that Klein was ambitious. And he has said that he knew he always wanted to go it alone – a move he thinks was, in part, inspired by the fact that his dad ran his own business. Eventually, he decided to make samples of his own designs, at night and on the weekends. However, it was also a move that would get him fired by his employers when they found out.

And that's when Klein's entrepreneurial spirit blossomed once more – he borrowed \$10k from his childhood friend, Barry Schwartz (with whom, you might recall, he used to sell water and newspapers) and took a room in Manhattan's York Hotel. Here, there were rooms that clothing manufacturers could use as showrooms. Klein could start a business.

His room was by the lift. Fortuitously, the general merchandise manager of department store Bonwit Teller, Donald O'Brien, happened to walk in one day and see the clothes, and said he would send along a buyer.

As a result, Klein would end up showing his clothes to the store's president Mildred Custin. At the time, Custin had the ability to make designers famous by placing just a single order – in the same way having the seal of approval from the right celebrity or influencer would guarantee success today.

RIGHT: Calvin Klein and Mildred Custin at an event at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, March 1987.





So the story goes, Klein was so worried about getting a messenger to transport the clothes in case they became crumpled, that he wheeled the collection over from Seventh Avenue to Fifth Avenue himself. As it happened, one of the wheels on the rack broke.

Once there, Custin told Klein she would like to place an order. She was careful to stress that she expected the pieces to be exactly the same as the samples. Often, elements of a design can change during production, be it the fabric, the colour, or the fastenings, usually because of costings or availability – there are lots of variables. It resulted in a \$50,000 order – the amount Klein was aiming to hit for the whole year! It was a dream come true and a very serious business proposition to fulfil. Klein and Schwartz now needed to expand – and seriously get to work.

They moved from the York Hotel to a space on 37th Street and Ninth and found themselves, like most designers and entrepreneurs starting out, doing every aspect of the job themselves – including selling and shipping. It wasn't glamorous to begin with and they slept on the floor of the studio, or on its sofa, worked seven days a week and sometimes until 3am. Their mothers would sew in the labels. Yet, interestingly, Schwartz has said that those early days, full of struggles though they were, were actually some of the best times.

LEFT: The Bonwit Teller department store.



Early Success

Things continued to improve. Klein's coats featured in the department store's Fifth Avenue windows as part of the New York autumn selling season, and Custin picked Klein to be in an advert for the store that featured in *The New York Times*. From an industry perspective, the move showed that Custin believed in Klein, and it also positioned Klein front and centre of the fashion industry. This is thought to have paved the way for his success in the 1970s – Klein and Schwartz were getting orders now and from all the right people.

Side note: it would be his own adverts that would get him noticed by everyone in the fashion industry – and beyond – sooner or later...

American Vogue featured two of Klein's designs in the January 1971 issue, as part of a story about knits. Klein has credited the magazine's senior fashion editor, Baron Nicolas de Gunzburg, a socialite known for his great sense of style, as being a mentor in those early years. He helped Klein to define and develop his style, which Gunzburg would often describe as "American". When Gunzburg died in 1981, aged 76, Klein told *The New York Times* that he was both an inspiration and a friend.



OPPOSITE: Calvin Klein spring/summer 1974.

ABOVE: Lauren Hutton wearing a Calvin Klein overcoat, *Vogue*, 1974, photographed by Francesco Scavullo.



In 1973, Klein unveiled a sportswear line which resulted in him winning a Coty Award – a prestigious accolade in fashion – as, of course, is scoring your first American *Vogue* cover, which happened for the designer the following year. The edition was photographed by Francesco Scavullo and saw the model and actress Lauren Hutton wearing a trench coat. Inside, there was a fashion story that featured further of his designs. Hutton has since walked for Calvin Klein shows as well as attending them.

Though Calvin Klein the business seemed to be taking off with all the right things starting to happen and fall into place, when it came to Klein's personal life, there were cracks in his marriage. He and Jayne divorced in 1974. Reportedly, Klein was generous in proceedings.



OPPOSITE:
Backstage at the
Calvin Klein spring/
summer 1976 show.



ABOVE LEFT: Calvin Klein
Collection autumn/winter
1975, presented inside
Klein's design headquarters
at 205 West 39th Street.

ABOVE RIGHT: Klein
being interviewed by
NBC correspondent
Robin Young.

Claire McCardell

Claire McCardell, an influential American fashion designer from the 1930s and 1940s who had championed a sportswear style of dress, has been a recurring source of inspiration for Klein. And it's easy to understand why.

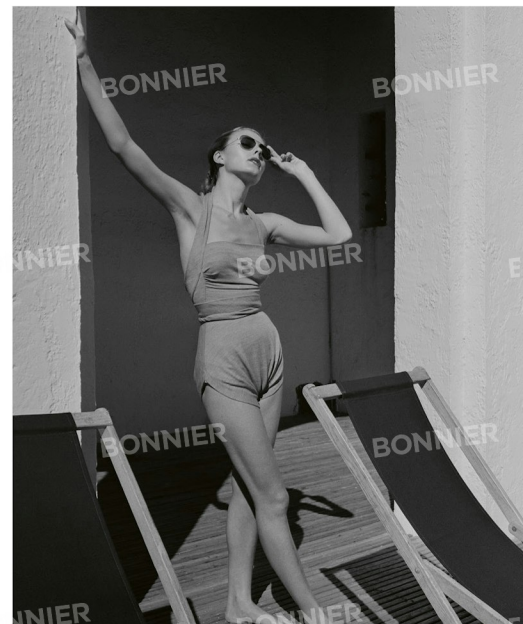
Born in 1905, McCardell was known for pioneering American sportswear (and is often credited with inventing it as a fashion) – a look that has become synonymous with the US just as couture has become with Paris, France. Sportswear garments were practical and functional, devoid of ornamentation, focusing instead on form. They were designed for women leading equally practical lives. But that didn't mean designs were boring or dowdy – far from it.

Simple fabrics, such as cotton, denim, gingham and jersey were used for her clothes which incorporated purposeful shapes with clean lines. Such was her impact that she is considered to be one of the most influential American designers. One can arguably trace all of the contemporary American fashion designers back to McCardell – Klein, Bill Blass, Donna Karan and even Anna Sui who, interestingly, is known for her highly decorative designs.



OPPOSITE: A model wearing a dress by Claire McCardell, *Vogue* 1947.

RIGHT: Swimwear by Claire McCardell.



When Klein was interviewed by *British Vogue* for the September 1980 issue, he was asked about his main source of inspiration and named McCardell. The magazine had noted that, similar to McCardell, there was an ease to Klein's work, which was comfortable and surprisingly simple – his designs were freeing for women and enabled them to work. Modern and simple, he considered McCardell's to be the only clothes from the 1940s and 1950s that still looked beautiful and were good enough to wear today – quite the compliment for any designer.



Klein's Fashion Language

Today, fashions change faster than ever, and even the most storied of fashion houses, whose signatures and design codes are well embedded, shed their proverbial skins each season and try on something new. This wasn't always the way – and certainly not at Calvin Klein, with its distinct voice which has helped it stand out.

Descriptors commonly used in relation to the Calvin Klein brand include: simple, all-American, modern, wearable, pure, classic, sporty, minimal, calm, luxe accessible, pared-down, androgynous, masculine, sensual, restrained luxury, good taste, old money. He would also use sex to sell.

The fashion historian James Laver noted that Klein designed women's clothes that followed masculine lines. And Klein himself has remarked that he liked the idea of a boyfriend's shirt being thrown on – it was very sexy.

From early on, the brand had a sportswear style that was clean and adopted by professional women, noted for neutral and earth tones and luxe fabric choices. This modernity and ease was chosen with the working woman in mind; Klein had told *WWD* that he didn't want women to be victims. He made a point of designing the clothes that they wanted, which meant cowl-neck pullovers, trouser-top skirts and unlined coats.

The fashion historian Christopher Breward points out that Klein had created an interchangeable wardrobe that catered to the needs of the

professional woman: the palette was classic – tones of grey, beige, navy and black – which was appropriate for almost all scenarios. It offered luxury, but in an accessible way. And, later, his style had a confidence that was associated with the New York Fashion Week scene.



ABOVE LEFT: Calvin Klein Collection autumn/winter 1997.



ABOVE RIGHT: Calvin Klein Collection autumn/winter 1999.

He is of course also known for the white shirt, the camel coat, the classic jeans, a perfect T-shirt, and cable-knit sweaters. Not to mention the famous CK motif on blue jeans, the underwear, and later the fragrance, all of which are a more informal proposition. The white shirt, slightly undone and sexy because of it; the slip dress; and easy tailoring, didn't feel stuffy, which was part of the appeal. There is a sort of androgyny, but there is also a sensuality.

His neutral colour palette was far from standard – *Vanity Fair* noted that he used coal instead of black, and dove instead of white. Through subtle design choices, Klein was able to elevate the basics.

Notably, Klein was concerned with quality and price, pointing out that with inflation women were unable to spend huge amounts on

clothes and so the pieces they did wear had to last and not go out of fashion quickly. This is why the brand has endured – it has a certain sort of timelessness-meets-modernity.

It's easy to spot the impact of Calvin Klein on contemporary fashion brands – he was the original in quiet luxury before *Succession* made it a trend. Brands that fit into the Calvin Klein aesthetic category include Jil Sander, Theory, Narciso Rodriguez, Celine under Phoebe Philo, and The Row (however, the latter is known for its luxury prices).

And what about descriptors used for Klein, the man? He was noted for his charisma, magnetism and for being very attractive. According to those that worked with him in his studio, he wore T-shirts with tweed suits and thick socks with heavy shoes.



ABOVE: A very Calvin colour palette. Models wait backstage, autumn/winter 1998.

OPPOSITE: With models Janice Dickinson, Iman and Beverly Johnson, for the autumn/winter 1977 show at 205 West 39th Street in New York City.





Minimalism

This is the term that most readily springs to mind when describing the Calvin Klein aesthetic. In a fashion dictionary, it will detail it as a trend for pared-down clothing that typically comes in neutral shades and employs sculptural shapes, first appearing in fashion during the 1980s and becoming more popular in the 1990s. Emphasis is on the quality of the fabrics and the refined design, with colours usually in blocks, under which you will then see the name Calvin Klein.

Some argue it is a brand more to do with purism than minimalism. The underlying sentiment is the same: the clothes are unobtrusive in the sense that they are not loud and do not include unnecessary adornments or frills. But a lot of hard work has gone into making

them look effortless, relaxed and aspirational. In the 1970s, Klein gave an interview in which he discussed his home, but anyone walking in partway through could have been forgiven for assuming he was discussing one of his collections – he spoke of wanting things to be clean, remarked that he was interested in shape and line, and liked things to look contemporary – another very Calvin Klein word.

BELOW LEFT: Carmen Kass and Gisele Bündchen, among others, walk the runway for the spring/summer 2001 finale.

BELOW TOP RIGHT: Backstage at the Calvin Klein spring/summer 1999 show.

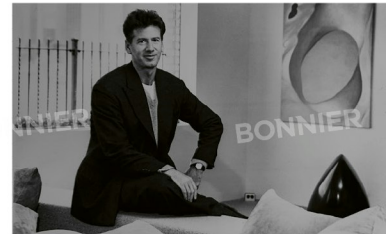
BELOW BOTTOM RIGHT: Calvin Klein, New York, New York, circa 1983.



ABOVE: Spring/summer 1999: footwear from the collection worn by models backstage.



RIGHT: Models walk the runway at the spring/summer 1998 show finale.





The 1970s

The decade continued to be a period of expansion for the designer and the brand. His pea coats were a hit. In the beginning, Klein had the most success with them, though it was not a style of his invention. But his classic reinterpretation of them was very stylish and very well made, which made it a staple among his collections for years to come with additions and tweaks along the way. According to *Obsession: The Lives and Times of Calvin Klein*, by 1974 Klein was selling 30,000 pea coats a year at \$65.75 wholesale.

In 1972, however, he made the choice to branch out from the coats and suits for which he had become so well known. In 1973, he created his signature look, beyond the fabrics and the colours, and it is recognised as a clean American look.

In 1976, Frances Stein, the *American Vogue* fashion director, joined the company. She is said to have made a significant impact on the brand even though the relationship – in which she has been described as something of a muse – only lasted a couple of years (the relationship is said to have ended abruptly).



Stein was the company's vice president and director of the design studio. She had previously worked for the famed fashion designer Halston, who made similar inroads as Klein in both the fashion scene and the nightlife scene at Studio 54, which during its short lifespan from 1977 to 1980, would fast gain an all-too-glamorous reputation and become known for its glittering celebrity guest lists and hedonistic excess.

Stein was in charge of licensing and accessories. She was known for her good taste, which was both modern and elegant. It's been noted that she helped "clarify" Klein as a designer, find his stylistic voice and discover the aesthetic elements for which he, and the brand, would become well-known – classic but sensual and with a certain sexuality.

He became the only designer to win three consecutive Coty Awards during the decade. Images from collections of the time show coats of dreams and put-together wardrobes that look smart but casual. By today's more street-style and streetwear standards of casual dressing, this seems especially elegant and sophisticated – and also fun.

The brand was becoming a household name.

OPPOSITE LEFT: The designer with his models ahead of the autumn/winter 1977 show.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Calvin Klein and Barry Schwartz, plus models and staff at the atelier, circa early 1970s.

BELOW TOP: Frances Patiky Stein, New York City, 1979.

BELOW BOTTOM: Backstage at the Calvin Klein spring/summer 1976 show.



Studio 54

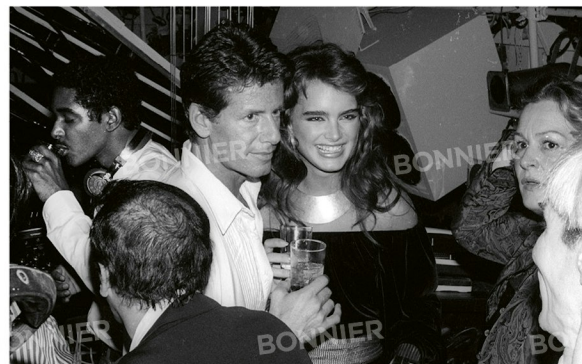
Klein was fast becoming the darling of the New York scene and was at the centre of 1970s disco. In April 1977, the infamous nightclub Studio 54, founded by Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager, had just opened and Klein would become a regular, alongside such famous names as Liza Minelli, Bianca Jagger, Diane von Furstenberg, Halston and Andy Warhol.

It was the place to be – a New York phenomenon and a fabulous hub for the rich and famous, as well as the young, creative and attractive. Bianca Jagger famously arrived on a white horse one evening.



OPPOSITE: Calvin Klein, Brooke Shields and nightclub owner Steve Rubell at Studio 54, 1981.

BELOW: Calvin Klein and Brooke Shields at Studio 54, 1981.



Klein wanted to be a part of this exciting new world; everything about it gave the designer inspiration. Klein had married young, become a father, and then started a business. Studio 54 was the antithesis of the responsibility that had defined his life. But spending time there meant that he was burning the candle at both ends.

While Klein's own designs were becoming known for their minimalist aesthetic, in his own life he seemed to have become something of a maximalist. This has been disputed by Bianca Jagger, who wondered if such rumours were true – how could he have worked so hard if he was partying so hard? And, according to *Vogue On: Calvin Klein*, she said he worked very, very hard.

But Studio 54 had provided Klein with an important business opportunity... and it would be a very lucrative one at that.

Designer Jeans

Klein has been declared an early pioneer of what was a new category in denim – designer jeans. According to *WWD*, he first advertised his skin-tight designs following a test shoot with the model Patti Hansen in 1978. Saks Fifth Avenue's house photographer, Charles Tracy, took the photograph that would end up appearing on the first billboard for Calvin Klein jeans.

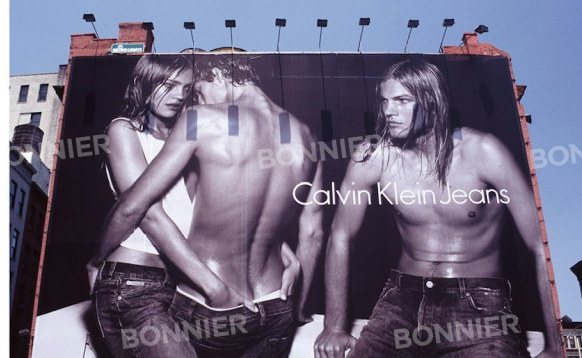
How did it get there to begin with? Picture the scene: Klein is dancing the early hours of the morning away at Studio 54 when a man comes up to him and asks him if he would put his name on jeans. At the time, designer jeans were an emerging category, unlike today, where they are a huge industry.

In 1976, the socialite Gloria Vanderbilt had debuted her own line of jeans; Jordache, an American clothing company, had brought them out around the same



ABOVE RIGHT: The back pocket of a pair of Calvin Klein jeans, 1979.

RIGHT: Patti Hansen poses for Calvin Klein Jeans.



ABOVE: Natalia Vodianova for Calvin Klein Jeans.

time, during the late 1970s; and there were already established brands such as Lee, Wrangler and Fiorucci who had a foot in the category. Klein was no fool, and he could see that jeans were a great idea. He called his business partner and childhood friend Barry Schwartz and told him about the idea. Klein thought it was fun and it could reach a lot of people: the women who couldn't afford to buy and wear his clothes could buy and wear his jeans.

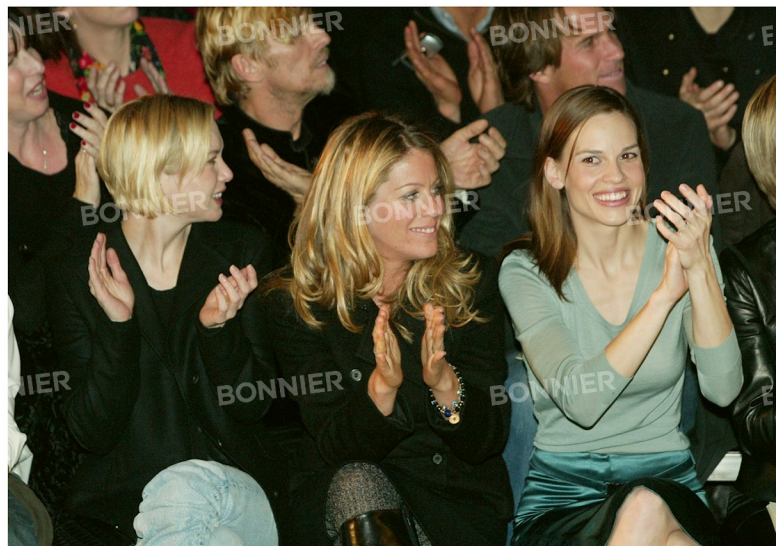
A deal was made with Carl Rosen (who had initially been in the dress business) and his manufacturing company, Puritan Fashions. It has been pinpointed as the first really important deal that Schwartz landed – he negotiated royalties of \$1 for every pair of jeans. Klein's designer jeans would become known for their sculpting shape, high waistline and his signature across the back pocket.

Debuting at the end of the 1970s, it wouldn't be long before Puritan ended up shipping 500,000 pairs of Calvin Klein jeans a week – a great success, and the beginning of something far bigger thanks to some iconic advertising and Brooke Shields.

Personal Tragedy

In 1978, Calvin Klein's 11-year-old daughter Marci was kidnapped on Manhattan's Upper East Side while on her way to school, and was held for ransom. It was reported that she had been tricked off the school bus by a former babysitter, and two others, who were arrested two days later.

Klein held a press conference with the FBI – who, later, almost arrested him when they mistook him for the kidnapper as he dropped off \$100,000 to rescue Marci. She was found alive and tied up in a New York tenement. An awful and harrowing experience for Klein as well as for Marci, there are those who have pointed out it might have added to his celebrity.



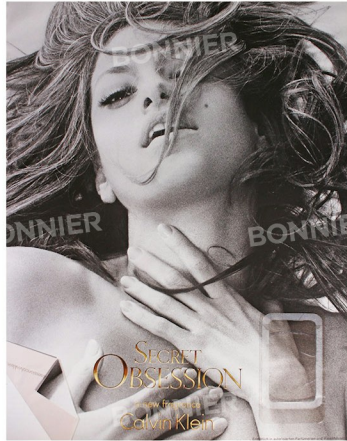
OPPOSITE: Calvin Klein and daughter Marci at Klein's autumn/winter 1973 show.

ABOVE: Actress Renée Zellweger, Marci Klein and actress Hilary Swank at the autumn/winter 2003 Calvin Klein show.



Advertising

When you think of Calvin Klein, no doubt one of the iconic adverts comes to mind. There have been so, so many! It's one of the only fashion brands which has managed to make itself immediately recognisable to the world and, on numerous occasions, has been controversial – though this is something that Klein claimed he never set out to do.



Klein has explained that the point of advertising was not so much to sell clothes but instead to create the right image. One could argue that the right image results in the selling of the clothes – it was all about conveying the message of the brand, a forward-thinking approach that certainly resonates today. His

ABOVE: Eva Mendes for Calvin Klein's Secret Obsession fragrance.

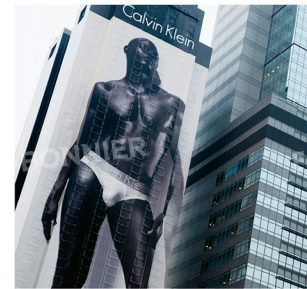
OPPOSITE LEFT: Christy Turlington with her husband Ed Burns in the Eternity fragrance campaign.

carefully crafted adverts have earned him the title of trailblazer. They were arresting and impactful; and they got people talking.

Indeed, Klein was deemed a master of marketing during the 1980s and this is so ingrained in the public's mind as one of the brand's unique selling points that it's a legacy the brand has to live up to today, even in his absence.

A recurring element of Klein's advertising has always been its risqué nature which, on more than one occasion, has elicited outcry, uproar and even been banned. This pointed to a brand with a dual nature: clean and classic, but also a little bit more complicated and sexy.

In 2025, the brand added Lily Collins, Eve Hewson, Cha Eun-woo, Mingyu and Bad Bunny to its campaign roster. But before them, there was Brooke Shields.



ABOVE: A Calvin Klein Underwear billboard advert in Hong Kong.



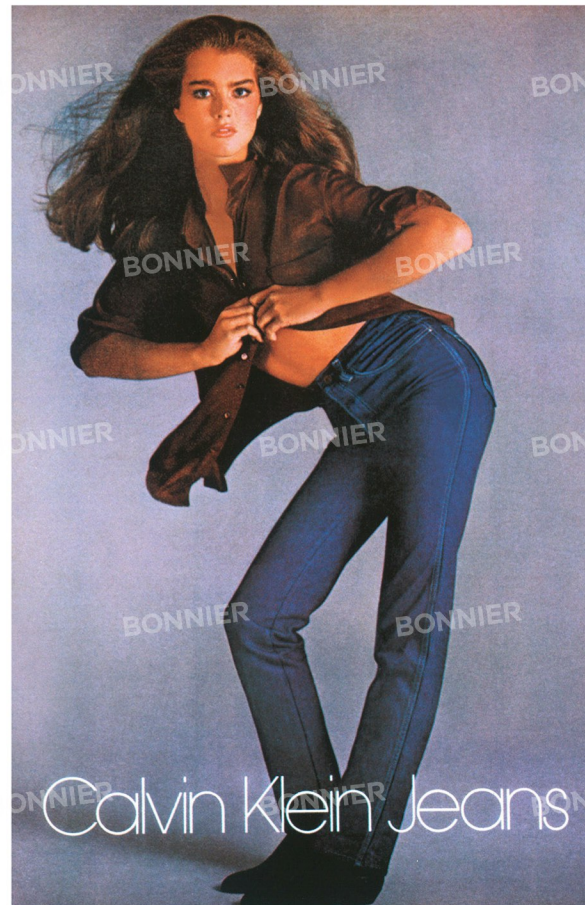
Brooke Shields

The year was 1980 and the model was a 15-year-old Brooke Shields. The campaign was a Calvin Klein Jeans television commercial – one of several, directed by the famous photographer Richard Avedon. Apparently, Klein had hesitated about producing television adverts but had decided to go ahead. Shields looks directly into the camera and declared that nothing comes between her and her Calvins.

Deemed at once groundbreaking, provocative, scandalous and impactful, Shields became synonymous with the brand. Some TV stations pulled the ads but though there was much uproar, the adverts were actually a great success – and the fact they are still talked about today is testament to that. *WWD* said that customers would go into stores and ask for “Brooke Shields jeans”. Later, she would be dropped from the brand – Klein apparently preferred that the item be associated with his name. This reportedly upset Shields and made her think she had failed, but we now know this couldn’t be further from the truth.

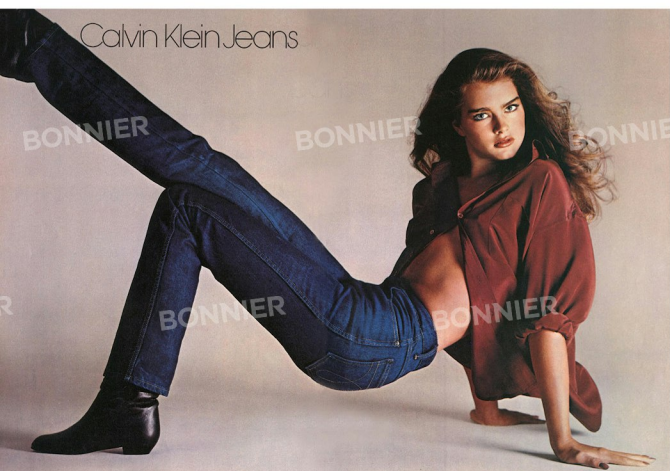
RIGHT: Brooke Shields at the Calvin Klein Inc. 40th Anniversary Celebration, 2008, in New York City.

OPPOSITE: Calvin Klein campaign star Brooke Shields, 1980.



Much of the outcry about the ad was around its sexualisation of the young actress, which prompted a flood of complaints. Shields has said she didn't regret starring in the campaign and that she hadn't thought about it as being sexual; she had found the response to be ridiculous. However, it did result in the sales of Calvin Klein jeans reaching two million pairs a month, earning them a reported one-fifth share of the market.

While Shields's contract might not have been renewed, she did appear with Klein on the cover of *People* magazine in 1982. By 1996, Klein



ABOVE: Calvin Klein campaign star Brooke Shields, 1980.

OPPOSITE: Brooke Shields in her closet with her Calvin Klein jeans from her 1980 ad campaign, which she put up for auction, 2024.

would be named one of the 25 most influential Americans by *Time* magazine.

His next advert would be even more explosive. For this latest endeavour he would team up with the photographer Bruce Weber and the Brazilian-born champion pole vaulter Tom Hintnaus.





Underwear

Klein's next commercial project was an expansion into underwear, perhaps even more practical and sexy than jeans. It can be argued that, beyond the slip, the coat, the jeans and the minimalism, underwear is the thing the brand is best known for. Calvin Klein wording peeking out from a waistband still carries kudos all these years later.

For context, during the 1970s, the fashion academic Elizabeth Wilson noted that glamorous underwear for women was very much back, particularly in the UK. This made Calvin's foray into the area, with its very anti-traditional-glamour, all the more impactful.



LEFT: Calvin Klein with models wearing underwear looks from Calvin Klein Underwear.

OPPOSITE: A magazine advert, circa 1980s, for Calvin Klein Underwear.

It began with the men's line, which debuted in 1982 and was soon followed by the women's. Tom Hintnaus, something of an Adonis-like, handsome and hunky figure, was picked to be the face (or perhaps that should be torso and bulge) of the brand, and was photographed by Bruce Weber.



On the Greek island of Santorini, Hintnaus is topless, his torso arched against a wall wearing Klein's Y-front pants. The image was provocative, steamy and sexy to say the least; and ended up being plastered across billboards and bus shelter posters across America, including New York's Times Square.

Boasting both shock appeal and a buy-me-to-become-me candour, the advert inferred fairly directly that Calvin Klein underwear could make you look like this, too. Underwear sales began to fly. A reported \$65,000 of Calvin Klein briefs sold in just two weeks; sales for the first year were projected at \$4 million. Similar success would be replicated when the brand branched into the women's category.

Much later, in 1994, Klein sold the men's and women's underwear business to Warnaco Group for \$64 million, according to *Obsession: The Lives and Times of Calvin Klein*.

Calvin Klein was now dominating three key areas of fashion: high fashion on the runway, designer jeans for everyday and magical underwear. The idea to move into women's underwear actually came from Kelly Rector, an assistant in his studio who would later become his second wife.

Klein has said that the idea behind his women's underwear line was to create the sense that a woman was wearing her husband's, or boyfriend's, or lover's underwear. He felt there was something very seductive about this, and indeed, it has become a well-known fashion reference.

The line included tanks, briefs and boxer shorts and Klein saw it as a new attitude to women's underwear – it was young and modern, with no frills and no lace. It wasn't tacky – it was as practical and functional and cool as his clothes. It was a new kind of sexy.

Around a quarter of a million dollars' worth of underwear was reportedly pre-ordered and there was a projection of \$18–\$20m in business. Clearly, this line was another hit. Kate Moss and Marky Mark would also play a role in its success – more on this later.

RIGHT: Tom Hintraus appearing on this 40x50 foot billboard in Times Square.

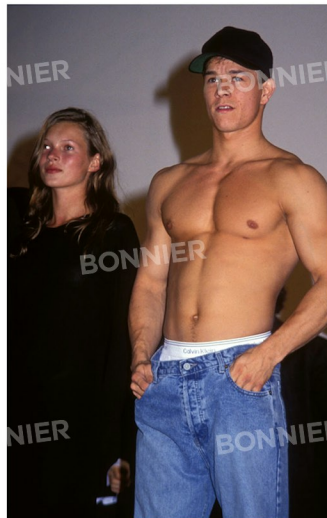


It's thought that one of the reasons for such success is that Klein linked underwear with sex but did so in a direct and non-judgemental kind of way. Compare it, for instance, with a brand like Victoria's Secret, which has been the subject of much criticism. In addition to the designer jeans category, Klein has been credited as the creator of the designer underwear category.

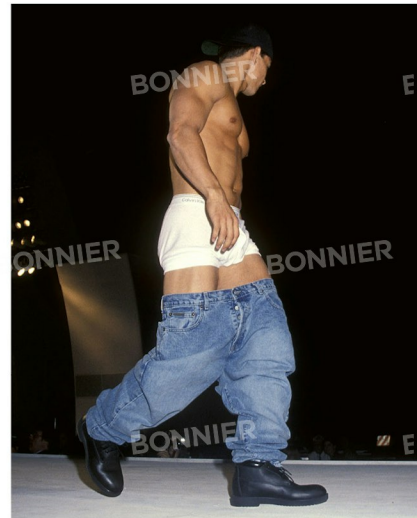
In 1992, Mark Wahlberg and supermodel Kate Moss starred together in Calvin Klein adverts. Moss was in her late teens at the time and appeared topless alongside Wahlberg – she has since expressed her anxiety about this, but it would not be the first time she would model for Klein.



Photographed by Herb Ritts, Mark Wahlberg had been suggested for the shoot by David Geffen, who became an investor in Calvin Klein after seeing him on the cover of *Rolling Stone* wearing the brand's underwear. Wahlberg was best-known as being the frontman of a hip hop group called Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch.



OPPOSITE: Model Christy Turlington and designer Calvin Klein autograph photos and underwear at Bloomingdale's to launch Klein's newest line of underwear.



ABOVE LEFT: Kate Moss and Mark Wahlberg, who is flashing that famous waistband.

ABOVE RIGHT: Mark Wahlberg at the Seventh Annual California Fashion Industry Friends of AIDS Project Los Angeles Benefit Dinner and Fashion Show to honour Calvin Klein on June 3, 1993.

Calvin Klein Jeans



The 1980s

James Laver, the renowned fashion historian, pointed out that in America during the 1980s, there was a shift towards a traditional look for men and women. He observed that Ralph Lauren, Perry Ellis and Klein celebrated fashion looks that had an air of 1920s aristocrats and American pioneers about them – a highly successful formula.

The Italian fashion designer Giorgio Armani could also be considered a contemporary of Klein's in the 1980s. At the time, Armani was

dressing career women in structured but fairly sober suiting. Dressing for success was the style of the day.

What Klein was doing was the antithesis of what the Paris-based Japanese designers were doing at the time. They were conceptual and avant garde – two words which were not a part of the Klein design language.

The decade was a continued time of expansion for the brand, with cosmetics licenses and the addition of fragrances. The jeans and underwear businesses continued to do well – Klein bought its jeans licensee, Puritan, for \$68 million. On the catwalk, life was glamorous and elegant and Calvin Klein courted the supermodels of the day.



OPPOSITE:
Calvin Klein
Jeans.

ABOVE LEFT: Cindy
Crawford models the
autumn/winter 1988
Calvin Klein collection.



ABOVE RIGHT: Calvin
Klein at New York Fashion
Week circa 1988.

In Klein's personal life, things were more difficult. There was speculation about his health. In 1983 he denied to *WWD* that he was dying of AIDS. He began to bulk up in a bid to prove his health. By the end of the decade, in 1988, he had checked himself into the Hazelden Foundation rehab centre for treatment, reportedly related to alcohol and prescription drug abuse. In interviews following, Klein has been open about the experience. That same year, Klein opened his first British shop at Harvey Nichols.



LEFT: Calvin Klein Collection autumn/winter 1988.

MIDDLE LEFT: Calvin Klein in his Manhattan office, July 1983.

MIDDLE RIGHT: A Calvin Klein advertisement, circa 1983.

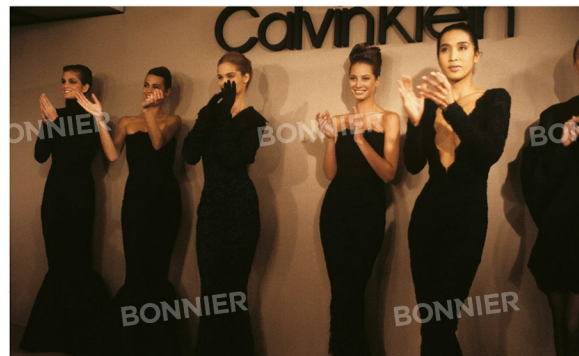
BOTTOM: Autumn/winter 1987 finale.



ABOVE LEFT: Calvin Klein with a look from his autumn/winter 1980 collection.



ABOVE RIGHT: Christy Turlington models spring/summer 1988 Calvin Klein.



Obsession

Calvin Klein debuted the fragrance Obsession in 1985. As with his other products, it came with striking visuals, initially photographed by Weber, and starring the model Josie Borain. Blurry and fuzzy, with limbs entwined, it wasn't entirely clear who or what you were looking at; but at the same time, it sort of was. Klein later went to Richard Avedon and writer Doon Arbus to create the television adverts, which were shot in black and white and were striking if not surreal vignettes, ambiguous in tone.

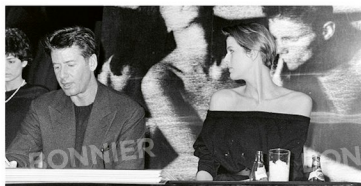
Klein has confessed that he was – appropriately – obsessed with Borain because she was not an obvious choice, and that the name of the fragrance had come about because Klein and his friends were obsessed with work and success. It was the 1980s, after all, the time of the “yuppie” and power dressing – it was all about work.

The advertising budget came in at a huge \$13 million (remember this was the 1980s) and was the largest amount the brand ever spent. Bloomingdale's reportedly sold \$7,000 worth of Obsession on the day of its launch.

Klein's fragrances have been deemed erotic, and one of the images for Obsession, photographed by Weber, was banned by *The New York Times* – but sales of the fragrance surpassed \$100m within four years.

In 1993, Kate Moss fronted the Obsession fragrance, which would reprise themes from earlier

campaign shoots. But the shock factor that was such a well-known brand signature would begin to be toned down a little. Klein's life would start to change and a new chapter for both the man and the brand would begin.

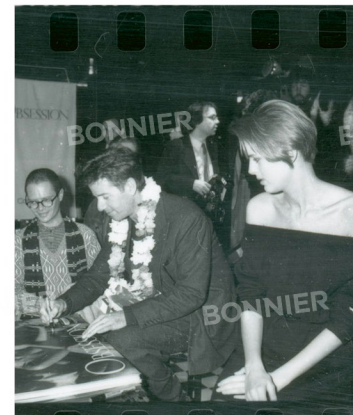


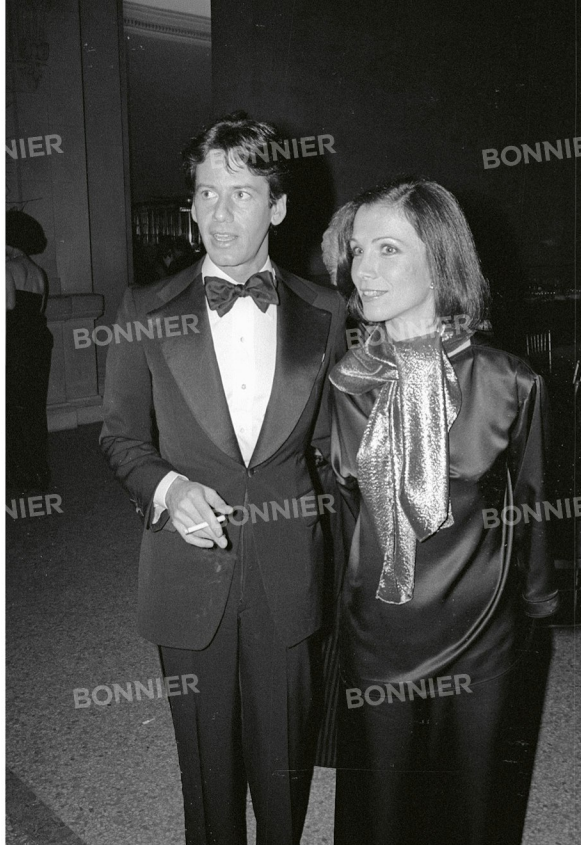
OPPOSITE
BOTTOM: At
Bloomingdale's,
Calvin Klein
and model
Josie Borain
autograph
posters.

ABOVE:
Promotional
event at
Bloomingdale's
New York for
The Fragrance
Obsession By
Calvin Klein.

OPPOSITE
BOTTOM: Calvin
Klein discusses
pre-release
promotions for the
new fragrance
“Obsession for
Men”, 1986.

RIGHT:
“Obsession”
by Calvin Klein
fragrance
launch at
Bloomingdales.





ABOVE: Calvin Klein and Kelly Rector at the Glory of Russian Costume Exhibition, held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute, New York, 1976.

OPPOSITE: For Vogue September 1988, Calvin Klein and his wife Kelly by Irving Penn.

Kelly Rector

Klein married his second wife, Kelly Rector, in 1986. She had been a studio assistant at the brand. The marriage was a surprise to some, who remembered Klein from his more hedonistic Studio 54 days (Klein had said he didn't think another relationship would be possible). The pair were the toast of New York and had married at the American Embassy in Rome with thanks, apparently, to his friend Nancy Reagan, who was the wife of the president, Ronald Reagan.

Rector would have a significant impact on Klein's life and the direction of the brand, which would take on more of a lifestyle feel and become a little more traditional, starting with the visuals for the Eternity fragrance.

Kelly was born in 1957 and was brought up in Westport, Connecticut. She had previously been a studio assistant at Ralph Lauren, arriving at Klein in 1981. It was a mutual friend who had suggested she be hired. Following a meeting, she was hired and began work not long after.

Rector's sense of style is noted to have rubbed off on Klein and she has been described as something of a muse. She was sporty and an all-American type – classic, wore faded jeans and appeared effortless. She was the ideal clothes horse for Klein.





OPPOSITE: Calvin and Kelly Klein 1993.

Where Klein was a perfectionist, Rector knew how to laugh through things; and showed him how to ease up on his schedule, which she could do because she had worked in the studio and had an understanding of how everything worked. She was a positive influence.

From the outside, it seemed that the pair had an idyllic lifestyle, though some thought it was a fake marriage. It was the aftermath of the HIV epidemic and AIDS had taken its toll on the creative industries – Klein had lost numerous friends, including Halston. And Klein himself was trying to prove his health credentials. Their marriage would last for a decade, from 1986 to 1996, when they separated.

BELOW: Calvin Klein with his new wife Kelly Rector after their wedding in Rome's City Hall, Sept. 26, 1986.



Eternity

Klein's second fragrance debuted in 1988 with Christy Turlington the face of the campaign – at Rector's suggestion. Where Obsession had been deemed erotic, Eternity wandered into more wholesome terrain.

The campaign was photographed by Bruce Weber in black and white and had a gentle and sophisticated feel. The images were said to reflect a shift in Klein's lifestyle, since he had checked into rehab and was feeling more relaxed about life. Indeed, as perhaps the original US agent provocateur, Klein said he didn't think being provocative was the way forward any more.

Turlington had noted there was a ladylike feel to the fragrance, which had been named Eternity after a piece of jewellery Klein had given his wife – the Duchess of Windsor ring. Others have noted it to smell clean, floral and romantic.

It was the success of Obsession that led to the debut of Eternity. The brand spent a reported \$18 million to launch the scent, which would ultimately surpass Obsession as the highest grossing fragrance. It made a whopping \$35 million within the first year of release.

Turlington was just 19 years old at the time and would return to front the campaign again in 2014, 2016 and 2020 with her husband, the actor Ed Burns. The setup was similar to the first time around: in black and white, the couple embraces on the beach.

OPPOSITE: Christy Turlington
in the Eternity by Calvin
Klein fragrance advert.

ETERNITY





The 1990s

Vogue's Julia Reed described the mid-90s as being Klein's time; the interesting thing is that, depending on who you speak to, they'll likely all have a different opinion on which decade was most successful for the brand. His big moves in advertising and the introduction of jeans, underwear and fragrance all came in the 1980s; he had laid the foundation for his empire during the 1970s and bolstered it a decade later.

In 1992 there was a bit of a blip – the designer jeans market crashed and Klein almost found himself in serious difficulty, but the designer's friend, David Geffen (who had suggested Mark Wahlberg for the adverts with Kate Moss), bailed out the company and bought its junk-bond debt, which reportedly had a \$62 million in face value. Citicorp then lent Klein the money to buy back Geffen's bonds. But such an experience made Klein stop and think – it was time to reassess his company. It wasn't long after this that he had an interesting conversation with his daughter Marci.



On the runway, the spring/summer 1994 collection was inspired by lingerie and came interspersed with tailoring. Klein, following his lifestyle shift, was now more interested in staying in than going out and thought fashion shouldn't be about flaunting any more.

OPPOSITE: Model
Lauren Hutton walks
for autumn/winter
1993.

BELOW: Calvin Klein
Collection autumn/
winter 1999.





The spring/summer 1995 collection focused on smart-but-not-boring dresses and suiting. The show opened with black before moving on to white and pale lilac, sleek silver and then back to black by way of a little lace.

Ladylike poise continued for autumn/winter 1995, which featured caramel shades, navy notes, grey and white for jackets, shirts, coats and more sharp dresses. Things became lighter for spring/summer 1996, with yellow and blue, a generally softer feel to shirts, loose dresses and tailoring.

The autumn/winter 1996 collection was all about recreating the 1970s for a new generation, while punches of cobalt blue brought something new to spring/summer 1997; origami folds and draping were striking for autumn/winter 1997; and a delicate take on sportswear dominated spring/summer 1998.

As the millennium approached, the master of minimalism explored daywear for spring/summer 1999, went polished for autumn/winter 1999 and showcased a pale rainbow of colour alongside technological fabrics for spring/summer 2000. Minimalism was the trend of the 1990s as it readied for the millennium and a fashion future that many assumed would be silver, slick, lilac, pale green, cream and clean. Klein was ideally primed for it.



OPPOSITE:
Cindy
Crawford
in Calvin
Klein
Collection
spring/
summer
1992.

LEFT: Linda
Evangelista
and Stella
Tennant
model
Calvin Klein
Collection
autumn/
winter
1995.

Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy

When Klein “discovered” Bessette-Kennedy, she was working as an employee in the Boston Calvin Klein boutique (later, in the mid 1990s, she would be the brand’s publicist in charge of the New York office’s celebrity clients). She would become a poster girl for the 1990s brand style.

Notably, when she married JFK Jr in 1996 in her own minimalist slip, it was Narciso Rodriguez who designed it, not Calvin Klein – though the pair did meet while both working for the brand. Narciso Rodriguez is also a fashion designer known for his clean and refined lines and sculptural designs.



LEFT: Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy backstage at the Calvin Klein Collection autumn/winter 1995 show.

OPPOSITE: Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy at a Calvin Klein fashion show, April 1994 in New York City.



CK Calvin Klein

It was on the advice of his daughter, Marci, that Klein entered into a lower price point category, or bridge line as it is known, with CK Calvin Klein women's apparel in around 1992–1993. Apparently, she had complained that his clothes were too expensive and not cutting edge enough for her generation. So, he introduced a youth-orientated



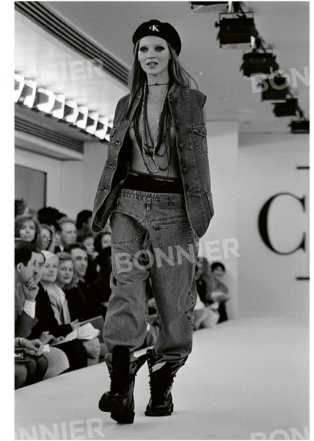
line which featured oversized men's jackets and sleek trousers, among other things. It was an instant hit. Aesthetically, it leaned into a street style sensibility that Klein had predicted would become the mainstay of the 1990s – a freer and more personal way of dressing, in contrast to the brashness of the 1980s.

In 2013, CK Calvin Klein received a rebrand.

The accessories and clothing label was renamed simply Calvin Klein. It was part of a wider strategy to unify all the Calvin Klein brands under one umbrella.

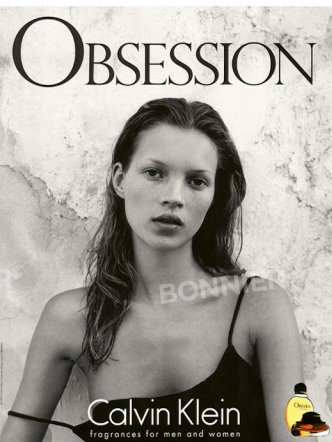
In 2012, PVH Corp – which bought Calvin Klein Inc. in 2003 – said it was acquiring Warnaco Group Inc., the worldwide licensee of Calvin Klein Jeans, as well as the owner of Calvin Klein trademarks for underwear, sleepwear and loungewear.

According to *WWD*, the CK Calvin Klein brand had generated about \$1 billion in global retail sales, which had been achieved in Europe and Asia primarily.



OPPOSITE: CK By Calvin Klein spring/summer 1993.

ABOVE: CK By Calvin Klein spring/summer 1993 modelled by Kate Moss.



Kate Moss

Klein is credited with having made Kate Moss a household name when, in 1992, he put her in a series of underwear adverts alongside Mark Wahlberg. While the supermodel has walked for practically every major fashion house and has been the face of numerous others over the years, in many ways she is synonymous with Calvin Klein because of those adverts. She has also walked for the brand many, many times.

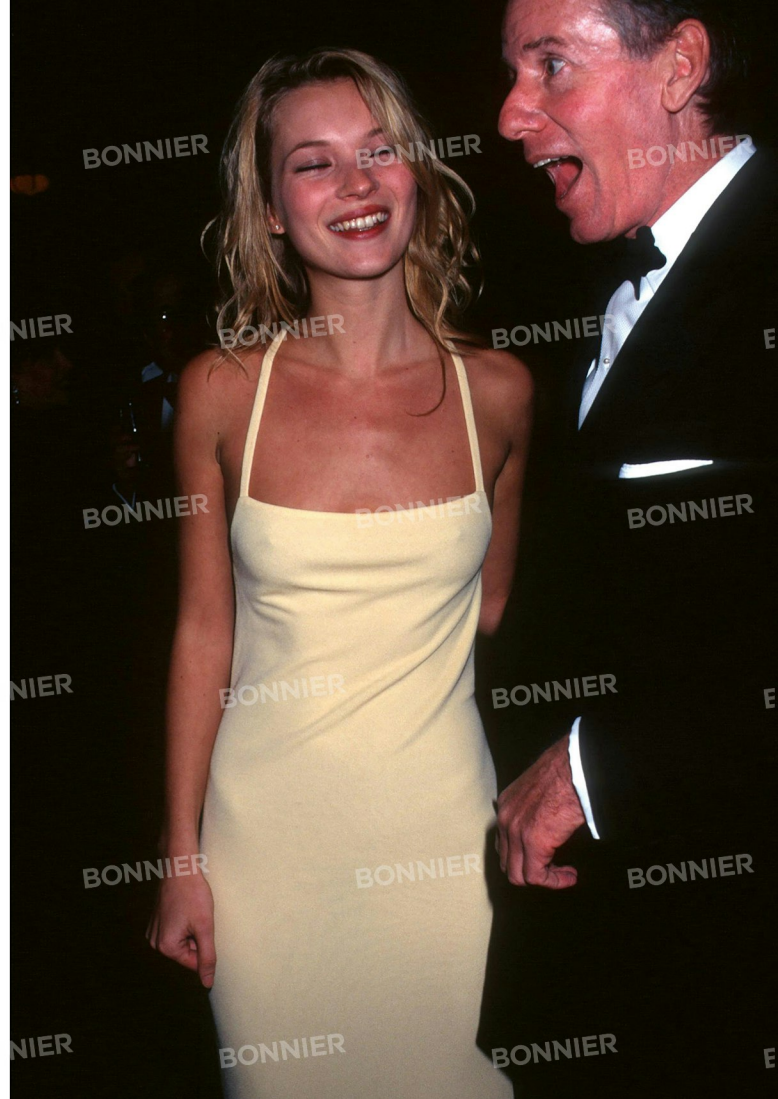
Perhaps there is a comparison to be made between the images taken for Klein and those taken by Corrine Day, who also plays a role in the Kate Moss story.

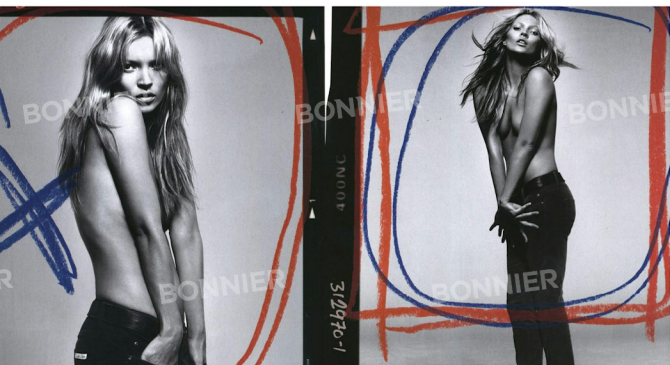
With her waif-like physique and youthful features, there is also perhaps a comparison to be made between Kate Moss and Brooke Shields.

Klein had seen private pictures of Moss, taken by the photographer Mario Sorrenti – Moss's boyfriend at the time – and decided he wanted to use her for the relaunch of Obsession for Men which, a decade on from its debut, needed to move with the times and feel relevant to the 1990s.

ABOVE: From the 1990s, a Calvin Klein Obsession magazine advert.

OPPOSITE: Kate Moss and Calvin Klein attend the Costume Institute exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995.





Klein could see from Sorrenti's work that he was rather obsessed with Moss, which was ideal. The resulting images for the campaign – in which she seemed to pose almost in the nude – caused controversy once again in the US where Moss was criticised for being too thin. But Klein loved the image and told *WWD* that it was the sexiest shot he'd ever done. The designer had been looking to create the opposite of the glamorous-glamorous look which had dominated until then.

Moss would have further impact on the house – the model, who is well-known for her penchant for vintage, is said to have provided the inspiration for Klein's autumn/winter 1994 collection, which featured the knee-length hems the model favoured in her everyday life. The designer found a renewed appeal in covering up the leg. Moss would later feature in Calvin Klein Jeans adverts alongside others, and would return as the face of them in 2006, appearing alongside the actor Jamie Dornan and photographed by Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott.

ABOVE: From the 2000s, Kate Moss stars in a Calvin Klein Jeans CK advert.



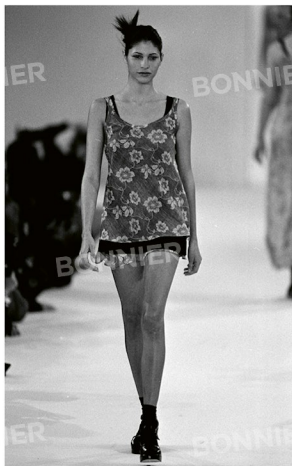
ABOVE: Kate Moss and Calvin Klein at Klein's China flagship CK store opening in Hong Kong, 1996.

The Slip Dress

The sensuality and simplicity of the slip dress makes it an ideal Calvin Klein piece. Kate Moss was famously photographed in a sheer slip dress by the designer Liza Bruce in 1993. The item became significant for the Calvin Klein spring/summer 1994 collection, which showed them in varying lengths and featuring different thicknesses of straps.

Along with the white shirt and the camel coat, the slip dress (which, appropriately for the brand, is also an item of underwear) became a mainstay of the Calvin Klein repertoire – in much the same way that Westwood springs to mind when one hears the word “corset”, or when one thinks of bejewelled shoes, they think of Manolo Blahnik.

Even after the departure of Klein, Francisco Costa, who would take over from the founder, would feature the slip dress in his collections.



Particularly memorable is his spring/summer 2016 collection. In its review of the collection, *American Vogue* cited the defining spring/summer 1994 collection of the house and the impact it had, both in fashion and in becoming an iconic emblem for the house. It also claimed that the only other item more recognisable for the house was its briefs! Delicate wispy slips were teamed with satin-y slip-on trainers to take it out of 90s nostalgia and into 21st century style (that style of trainer would become all the rage).



OPPOSITE TOP: Calvin Klein Collection spring/summer 1994.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The slip dress made an appearance as part of the eveningwear of the autumn/winter 1977 collection at Le Club restaurant in New York City.

TOP RIGHT: Kate Moss models Calvin Klein Collection autumn/winter 1998.

RIGHT: Calvin Klein Collection spring/summer 2016.



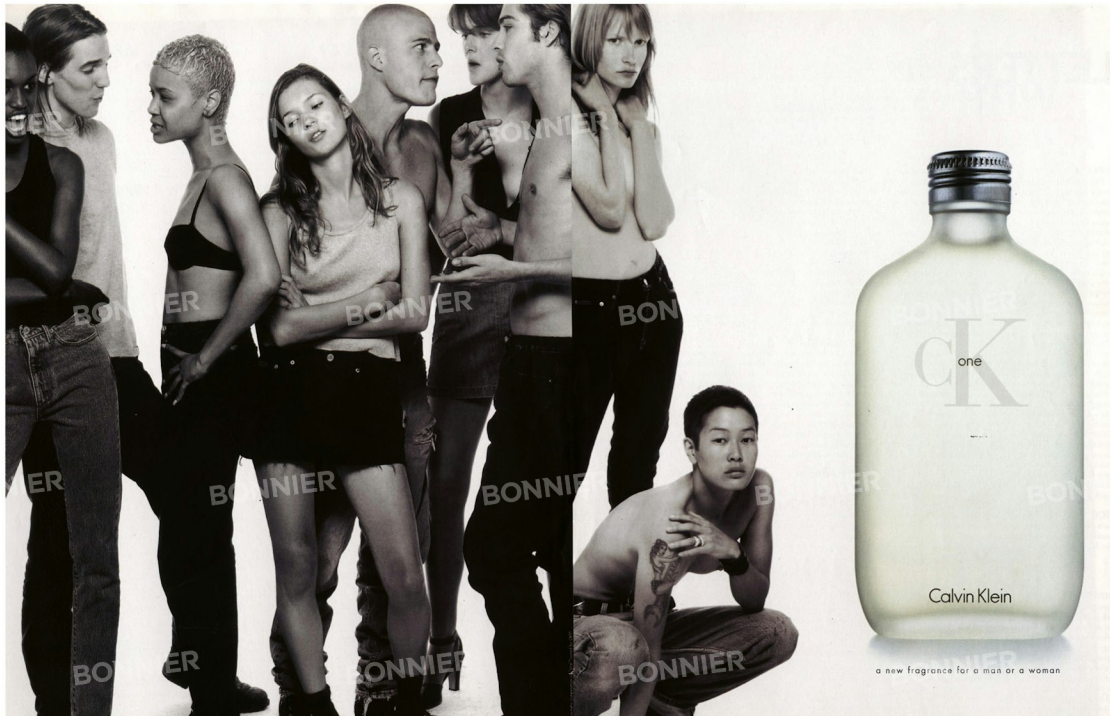


CK One

Following the success of Obsession and Eternity, Klein debuted a unisex scent in 1994 – CK One. It was hailed as an unprecedented move in marketing and Klein was credited with inventing unisex fragrance, though gender neutral fragrances are not uncommon today.

The accompanying campaign for CK One was quite raw visually – a bit grunge, with a loose Andy Warhol/The Factory feel to it.

Photographed in black and white by Steven Meisel, it again included Kate Moss and felt cool and edgy. I recall being excited to own and wear this fragrance as a teen.



OPPOSITE: The CK One advert featured on a bus.

LEFT: Steven Meisel's ad campaign for CK One.

Madison Avenue

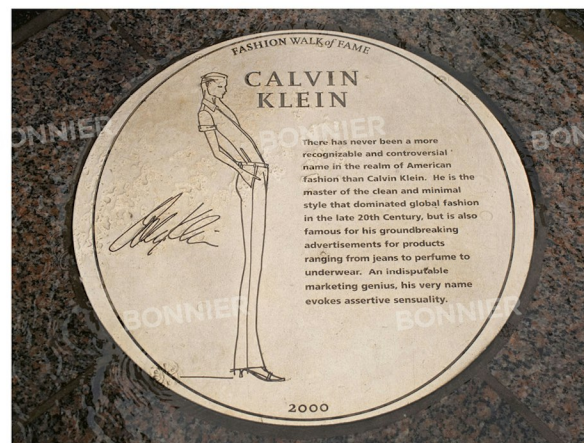
In 1995, when Calvin Klein opened its first freestanding shop on New York's prestigious Madison Avenue, it was groundbreaking. Located at 654 Madison Avenue, it was a homage to the minimalist empire Klein had built, and the interior was designed by the British architect John Pawson. The famous fashion journalist Suzy Menkes described it for the *International Herald Tribune* as light-filled and vast, church-like and a modernist and minimalist temple.

The store would continue this kind of aesthetic even after Klein's departure, under the tenure of future creative director Francisco Costa. Notably, what Costa was good at was continuing the Calvin Klein legacy as we shall later find out. It would be under Raf Simons – who joined the house in 2016 – that the design would shift, rather like the clothes themselves. *Vogue.com* described it as being very different. The same year the store opened its doors, the brand also debuted its home category with bed, bath and tabletop pieces. The empire continued to grow.



Fashionable Accolades

Having scooped three consecutive Coty Awards in the early 1970s (1973, 1974 and 1975), in 2000, some 30-plus years since Klein had started the business, the designer was presented with a plaque on 7th Avenue's Fashion Walk of Fame. This was the equivalent of a Hollywood star for fashion designers, and was located on the east side of Seventh Avenue from 35th to 41st Street. A total of 26 plaques were to be installed as part of the project; Klein was initially joined by Bill Blass, Geoffrey Beene and Ralph Lauren.



OPPOSITE LEFT: The Calvin Klein flagship store on Madison Avenue, New York 1995.

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Calvin Klein in the men's department of his new flagship store on 654 Madison Avenue, 1995.

ABOVE: Calvin Klein's Walk of Fame plaque.

Red Carpet Moments Under Calvin Klein Himself

Given that Klein helped introduced Kate Moss to the world, it makes sense that the supermodel would also wear his designs. In 1995, she wore a long white bias-cut slip dress-style gown at the CFDA Awards in a look that has been applauded for its simplicity.

Meanwhile, Gwyneth Paltrow appears to be a lifelong fan of Calvin Klein, and has been pictured in the brand from the 1990s right up to today. In 1995, she wore a Calvin Klein coat for the premiere of *Living in Oblivion* and ended up matching then-boyfriend Brad Pitt in the process. In 1996, in complementary contrast to Pitt's tux, she wore an elegant floor-length Calvin Klein slip for the Oscars. She also wore a Calvin Klein monochrome dress to the Golden Globes in 1996.

In 1999, Paltrow scooped the award for *Shakespeare in Love* at the Oscars (and, memorably wore



a pink Ralph Lauren gown). Wanting to keep it simple for 2000, she picked a Calvin Klein slip, which she said she chose because she didn't want to draw too much attention to herself that year. The dress was auctioned in 2020 to fundraise for those impacted by Covid-19.

It was an almost-but-not-quite Calvin Klein Oscars win in 2005 when Hilary Swank won Best Actress for *Million Dollar Baby*. According to *Vogue Australia*, she had been planning to wear a Calvin Klein dress for the occasion but at the last minute changed her mind and ended up wearing the now-famous Guy Laroche dress with its plunging backline. The brand was, apparently, very understanding — after all, these things happen, especially in fashion and especially in show business.



OPPOSITE TOP:
Kate Moss at
the Council
of Fashion
Designers
of America
Awards, 1995.

OPPOSITE
BOTTOM:
Gwyneth
Paltrow at
the Oscars,
1996.

ABOVE:
Gwyneth
Paltrow at
the Oscars,
2000.

The 2000s



In the early 2000s – some report it as 2002, and others 2003 – Klein and Barry Schwartz sold Calvin Klein Inc (CKI) to Phillips-Van Heusen Corp in a business deal thought to be worth \$700m. *WWD* reported \$430 million was in cash with additional payouts in the years that followed. Klein and Schwartz were said to have made \$215 million in cash and stock each from the deal, with Klein also becoming a consulting creative director.

Calvin Klein without Calvin Klein resulted in three designers coming in to oversee the Collections business: they were Francisco Costa on womenswear, Italo Zucchelli on menswear and Ulrich Grimm on accessories. Kevin Carrigan became creative director of womenswear and menswear on the Calvin Klein white label and CK Calvin Klein.

The new designers presented their first collections for the spring/summer 2004 season. Natalia Vodianova opened the show looking breezy in a white top and a brown shorts and jacket ensemble. She closed it in a sheer, fluttery black dress with cutaway details. She had begun working with the brand in 2002.



OPPOSITE: Natalia Vodianova walks for Calvin Klein Collection, spring/summer 2004.

ABOVE: Gisele Bündchen walks at Calvin Klein Collection spring/summer 2001.

RIGHT: Calvin Klein Collection spring/summer 2004.



Francisco Costa

Francisco Costa became the womenswear director at Calvin Klein in 2003. The 39-year-old designer had already been at the brand for a year, according to *British Vogue*. During his time leading the brand, he has been credited with giving it something of a revamp – the secret to his success, he has said, is just working. He has borrowed a little from the Calvin Klein archives but also taken the brand forward with his own vision.

Costa was born in Guarani, a small town near Rio, Brazil on May 10, 1964 and, before opting for a career in fashion, wondered whether he might pursue architecture or painting. His mother and father owned a successful apparel business and his sister was also interested in fashion design.

Arriving in New York in the early 1990s, he had aspirations to design for a large fashion house. While studying English, he enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology where he received an Idea Como/Young Designers of America award, which enabled him to study in Italy. After graduation, he worked briefly at Susan Bennett Studio, before being recruited by the HE-RO Group as a designer for Bill Blass dresses and knitwear.



RIGHT:
Calvin Klein
Collection,
autumn/
winter 2009.

OPPOSITE: Natalia
Vodianova features
in a Calvin Klein
advert circa 2007.



Calvin Klein
collection



Next, he headed to Oscar de la Renta where he spent five years working across the signature collection as well as working on the launch of Oscar de la Renta Pink Label. Whilst there, he said he received his true design education. He was recruited by Tom Ford in 1998 to join the designer's Gucci design studio, where he worked as a senior designer with a focus on eveningwear, as well as custom designs for VIPs. He joined Calvin Klein in 2002.

His first collection for the house was feminine and light, ethereal yet restrained. A shot of bright pink stood out among shimmery, biscuit-y tones. In the past the Calvin Klein brand has been described as clothing designed with masculine elements, but this was all much softer.

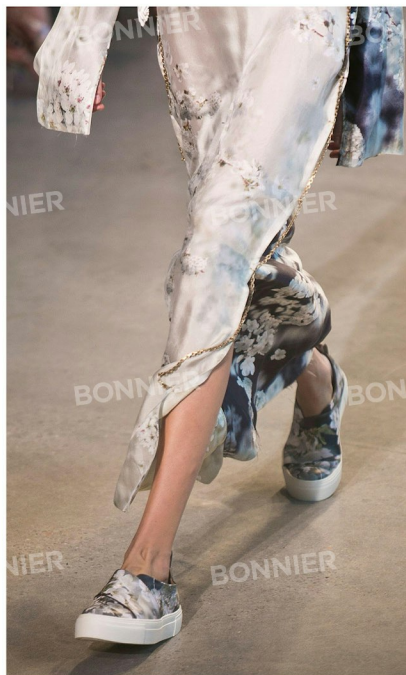
Sheer and pretty but with a simplicity running through, Costa's designs maintained the Calvin Klein DNA while adding softer moments and exploring surface texture. Among his most standout collections was that of spring/summer 2014, which paid homage to the slip dress that had made the house so famous. Teaming them with trainers, Costa made the dresses – which are typically thought of as underwear pieces and therefore have a delicate sort of association – functional and practical. But they were also very pretty with trailing details.



OPPOSITE: Francisco Costa and Katie Holmes – wearing Calvin Klein – at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Met Gala back in 2013.

ABOVE: Calvin Klein Collection, autumn/winter 2009.

While at Calvin Klein, Costa won many awards, including the CFDA's womenswear designer of the year award in 2006 and 2008. Also in 2008, he was awarded the Mortimer C. Ritter Award, presented by the FIT Alumni Association to an alumnus who graduated from the school and has excelled in art and design.



LEFT: Calvin Klein Collection spring/summer 2016.

ABOVE: Francisco Costa backstage at the Calvin Klein Collection autumn/winter 2005 show.



In April 2009, Costa was also honored by Parsons The New School for Design at the prestigious school's 61st Annual Fashion Benefit. That same year, the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum announced that it would award Costa with the 2009 Fashion Design Award – presented to those who have demonstrated excellence and innovation in design.

Since leaving the house in 2016, Costa has worked with research initiatives and charities to raise funds and awareness about AIDS/HIV.

Italo Zucchelli

Italo Zucchelli worked as the men's creative director of Calvin Klein Collection until April 2016. During his 15 years at the brand, Zucchelli, like Costa, won numerous awards for his work. Named the CFDA Menswear Designer of the Year in 2009, in 2010 Zucchelli was also awarded the Mortimer C. Ritter Award by the Fashion Institute of Technology Alumni Association for excellence in art and design. Meanwhile, at the 2012 Accessories Council Excellence Awards Gala, Zucchelli accepted the Designer of the Year Award on behalf of Calvin Klein Collection.

Zucchelli began his career at Jil Sander, before landing at Calvin Klein. He became known for his use of techno-tailoring and exploring bright colours, all the while staying in the realms of sportswear and formalwear.



ABOVE: Menswear,
spring/summer
2007, Milan.

OPPOSITE: Menswear,
autumn/winter 2011.



Ulrich Grimm

Calvin Klein isn't really a brand that courts attention when it comes to accessories. It doesn't have an It-bag or a noted shoe like other luxury houses do. But then, does it need to? The whole brand is about a certain simplicity, an overarching lifestyle, which means that ultimately any accessories need to complement the rest of the collection. This became a job for Ulrich Grimm.

After stints at Bogner and JOOP! in Germany, Grimm moved to the US, freelancing in New York for Fendi and Sonia Rykiel before he became a studio designer for Anne Klein and Anne Klein II accessory collections. He was then hired by Reed Krakoff, who was at Coach, where he was responsible for updating, and making more fashionable, the handbag and shoe offerings.

At Calvin Klein, which he had actually joined in 1998 while Mr Klein

himself was there, he oversaw the design of handbags, wallets, belts, watches, jewellery and eyewear, as well as categories relating to Calvin Klein Home across all brand tiers.

BELOW: Ulrich Grimm, Julianne Moore, Italo Zucchelli, Francisco Costa at 16th Annual ACE Awards, 2012.



Kevin Carrigan

British Carrigan joined Calvin Klein Inc in 1998 as design director for CK women's and in 2002 was promoted to design director of both men's and women's. He was creative director for CK Calvin Klein and Calvin Klein from 2003 to 2009; his most recent title was global creative director of CK Calvin Klein, Calvin Klein Jeans, and Calvin Klein, covering global men's and women's CK Calvin Klein apparel, global men's and women's Calvin Klein Jeans apparel, North American Calvin Klein lines including men's and women's sportswear, suits, outerwear, golf, swim, men's tuxedos, tailored and dress shirts, ties, sportswear, women's dresses, suits, and performance, and boys' tailored clothing, boys' and girls' jeans and newborn.

Carrigan studied at Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication as well as The Royal College of Art, and worked as a designer at Max Mara and Nicole Farhi before his career at Calvin Klein. Following the appointment of Raf Simons, Carrigan resigned from Calvin Klein, reported *WWD*.



ABOVE: Kevin Carrigan, 2012.



A New Chapter

In 2006, Klein's consulting agreement was not renewed by Calvin Klein Inc (CKI) and the designer hasn't had a formal relationship with the brand since then. That same year, Francisco Costa won his first CFDA award for Designer of the Year and a new show space was unveiled at 205 West 39th Street in New York. And in 2007, Italo Zucchelli was nominated for his first CFDA Menswear Designer of the Year award.

Klein and Kelly Rector divorced in 2006, having been separated since 1996.

Calvin Klein branched into e-commerce in 2008, introducing its website calvinklein.com and celebrating with a 40th anniversary party inside a John Pawson-designed structure. He had also designed the interior of the Madison Avenue store.

RIGHT: Lara Stone walks the Calvin Klein spring/summer 2011 catwalk.

OPPOSITE: Lily Donaldson models Calvin Klein Collection spring/summer 2007.





and corresponding wholesale and retail businesses for Calvin Klein entities such as Calvin Klein Jeans. Takeovers and licenses of the various facets that made up the empire would continue, and there was also expansion into more fragrances.

In 2007, CK IN2U, a men's and women's fragrance, was unveiled, while Secret Obsession debuted in 2008 with Eva Mendes as its face. Steven Meisel photographed the actress in the nude for the print and television adverts, the latter of which, in true Calvin Klein fashion, were banned from American television before even airing.

The Calvin Klein spring 2009 jeans advert, featuring Natasha Poly, Edita Vilkevičiūtė and Anna Selezneva, also never made it to television – this, too, was shot by Meisel and was similar to Mendes's ad, with little clothing making an appearance. It did end up running on the website, though.

OPPOSITE: Eva Mendes at the launch of Secret Obsession, 2008.

BELOW: Eva Mendes launches Calvin Klein's Secret Obsession perfume in Rome, 2008.



Further Fragrance

Following PVH's acquisition of the brand, various internal business changes took place: CKI signed a deal with Kellwood Co. and G.A.V. to launch Calvin Klein sportswear in the US and relaunch the CK Calvin Klein bridge women's sportswear. Production of Calvin Klein Collection was taken over by Vestimenta in Italy under license. Later, in 2005, Kellwood Co. took over the CK Calvin Klein women's bridge license from G.A.V.; while Warnaco had bought licenses

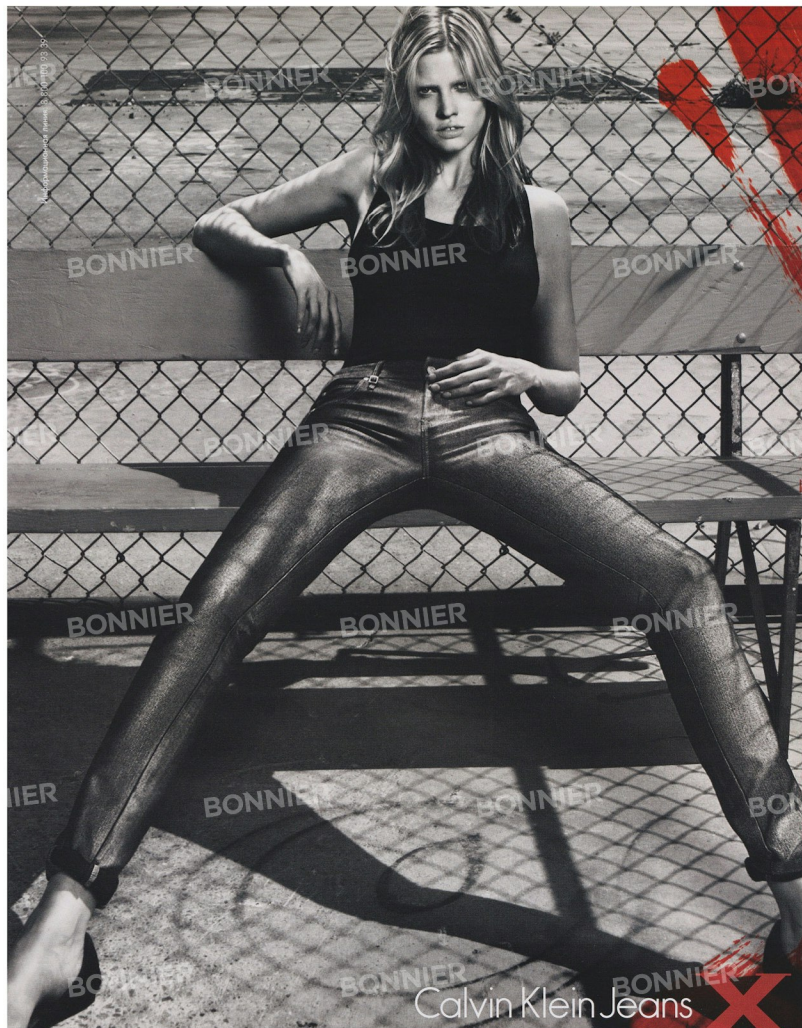
CK One Lifestyle

In 2010 CK One was relaunched as a contemporary global brand, which also included jeans and underwear. Steven Meisel once again photographed the campaign, updating his 1994 original with slightly grainy imagery that seemed to replicate surveillance footage with the models Lara Stone and Abbey Lee Kershaw. Also in 2010, Lara Stone signed a deal with Calvin Klein to become the face of Calvin Klein Collection, CK Calvin Klein and Calvin Klein Jeans.

BELOW: Lara Stone at the World of Calvin Klein Party, 2010 in Berlin, Germany.



RIGHT: Lara Stone in a Calvin Klein Jeans advert circa 2010s.



#MyCalvins

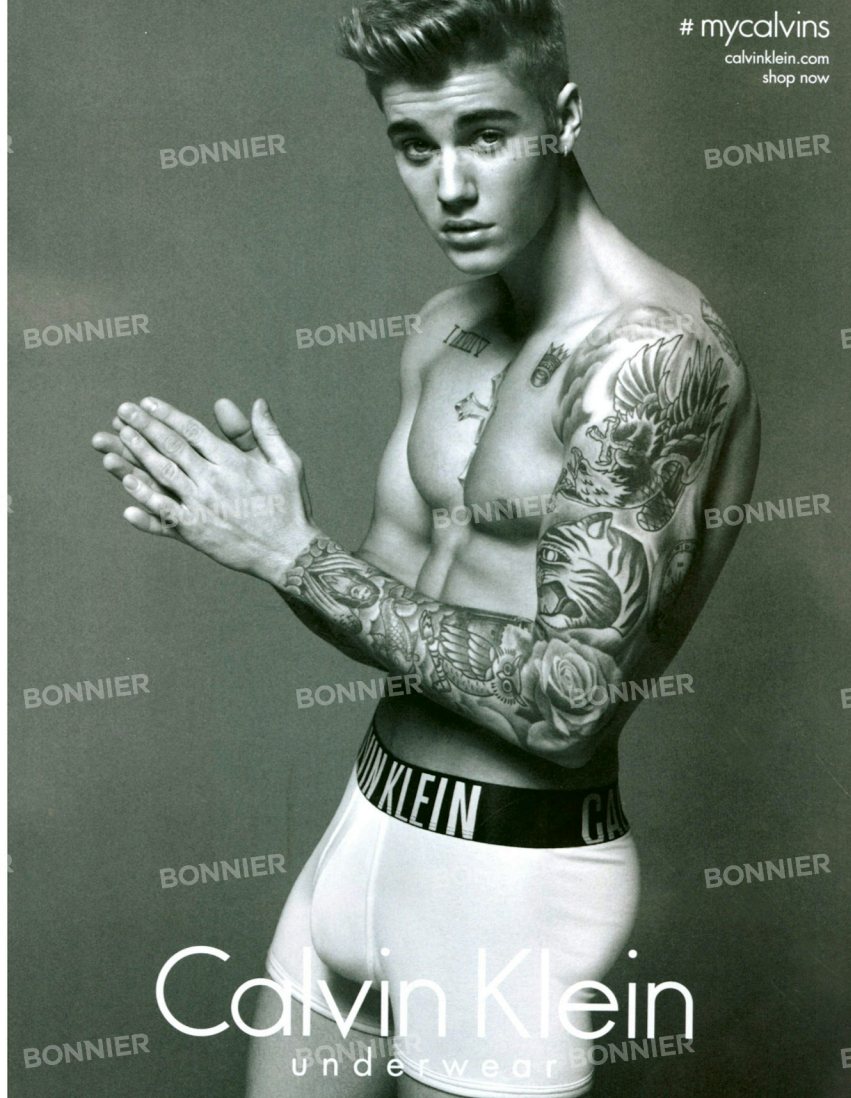
In 2013, Calvin Klein Inc decided to rebrand the women's and men's bridge apparel to Calvin Klein, rather than CK Calvin Klein, in a move designed to strengthen the brand's product categories overall.

The #MyCalvins campaign started in 2014, rolled out on Instagram, and is one of the most well-known social media moments of the time. A shrewd move, it was about promoting the brand's comfortable underwear, as well as community – and invited everyone to take part, resulting in thousands of posts under the hashtag. Influencers and celebrities would also become a big part of it – Shawn Mendes, Justin Bieber and Kendall Jenner among them.

Bieber became a spokesperson for the brand and, alongside Lara Stone, featured in an advert photographed by Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott that directly referenced the famous Mark Wahlberg and Kate Moss campaign from 1992.

Jenner secured a contract with the brand in 2015 and her first photos were part of the #MyCalvins campaign. Apparently, Klein himself wasn't especially pleased about this and said it wasn't something he would have done. But, unfortunately, Klein no longer had a say in what went on with the brand.

OPPOSITE: Justin Bieber becomes the face of #MyCalvins.





The whole Kardashian family, as well as other models, were photographed by Willy Vanderperre in 2018 for the Calvin Klein spring campaign (to note: by this point there had been a change in creative directors at Calvin Klein). One wonders what Klein might have thought about that?

And that same year, the brand announced it would no longer produce

print adverts and would instead go digital-first. The #MyCalvins campaign, this time digital, was back for spring 2019. Calvin Klein joined the social media platform TikTok.

ABOVE: Kendall Jenner on a Calvin Klein billboard, New York, 2015.

Red carpet – Francisco Costa

During his tenure at Calvin Klein, Costa was known for bringing a delicate sense of colour to the brand, which was shown off by Scarlett Johansson in 2004 when she attended The Met Gala, also known as The Costume Institute Benefit, in a soft yellow column gown with a gentle architectural twist at its front.

The Harry Potter star Emma Watson wore a black sporty and minimalist Calvin Klein dress for the premiere of 2010's *Deathly Hallows Part 1* in New York. It was an unexpected departure for the actress who has typically worn the likes of Burberry, Chanel and Temperley and been a little more ornamented with her style.

Diane Kruger at Cannes in 2011 perhaps epitomises the Calvin Klein elegance and simplicity under Costa. It was a less masculine and more feminine approach, one could argue, and Kruger managed to look both Old Hollywood and modern in a sequined backless gown. Emma Stone was nominated for



Best Actress for *Easy A* at the Golden Globes in 2011, to which she wore a peachy-pink Calvin Klein Collection dress. It was a sleek and elegant choice for an emerging star.



OPPOSITE TOP:
Actress Scarlett
Johansson at
the Metropolitan
Museum of Art's
Met Gala, 2004.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM:
Emma Watson at the
premiere of
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1, 2010 in
New York City.

ABOVE
LEFT: Emma
Stone
arrive at
the Oscars,
2011.

ABOVE RIGHT:
Diane Kruger
arrives at the
64th Annual
Cannes Film
Festival, 2011.



ABOVE: Lupita Nyong'o at the Oscars, 2015 – in that dress!

Deemed one of Jennifer Lawrence's best red carpet looks by *British Vogue* is her lithe red Calvin Klein dress, worn to the Oscars in 2011. The dress was a modern and punchy look for the red carpet – and thereafter she would typically wear more ornate gowns or those that had a sense of glamour and grandeur from a different era.

In the kind of storyline from a whodunnit detective spoof, something very strange happened in 2015. The dress that the actress Lupita Nyong'o had (thankfully already) worn to the Oscars (she often wore Calvin Klein on the red carpet) was stolen from her hotel room. Stranger still, it reportedly turned up a few days later. The custom dress had been decorated with 6,000 pearls, but, according to *The Guardian*, when the thief discovered they weren't real (the official line at the time had been that they were), they returned the dress. Real or not, with that much ornamentation, one presumes it wouldn't have been an easy steal.

The following year, Saoirse Ronan wore a green sequined Calvin Klein dress when she was nominated for Best Actress for *Brooklyn*. Though

BELOW LEFT: Jennifer Lawrence at the 83rd Annual Academy Awards, 2011.



BELOW RIGHT: Saoirse Ronan at the 88th Annual Academy Awards, 2016.



she didn't win, Costa told *Vogue.com* ahead of the event that he thought the actress was a great talent and he was excited for her.

The idea behind the dress had been to make something that was both young and sexy but that would also make Ronan feel confident. The emerald green shade, he said, was a nod to her Irish heritage. While she might not have won the award, she was well praised for her fashion choice that night.

Departures

It was announced in April 2016 that Costa and Zucchelli would be leaving the company – the brand was apparently now on the search for a creative director who could unify the various facets and voices of the Calvin Klein empire under one vision.

Rumour had it that the person to come in and solve this problem would be the much-lauded Belgian designer Raf Simons, who had experience in both menswear and womenswear, as well as sportswear and couture. Such rumours would resurface again in June, before his appointment to the house was finally confirmed in August.



LEFT:
Francisco
Costa takes
a bow at the
Calvin Klein
Collection
autumn/
winter 2016
show.

OPPOSITE:
Calvin Klein
Collection,
autumn/
winter 2016.

The autumn/winter 2016 season, which took place in February 2016, was Costa's last for the house and was met with a favourable review from *American Vogue*, which noted he had managed to push forward his Calvin Klein aesthetic and build upon a strong collection from the previous season – which, interestingly and surprisingly for the Calvin Klein brand, had featured jewellery in the form of delicate chains laced over dresses. The collection itself featured plenty of black (not necessarily something to read too much into!), with bursts of plaid and check; mineral-esque prints featured on dresses and tailoring with a few boudoir notes in there also.



Raf Simons

News broke of the designer's appointment in August 2016. Simons had previously been the creative director at Christian Dior (he had exited a year earlier) and Jil Sander (which he left to then go to Dior), as well as running his eponymous menswear label.

At Sander, he was a triumph and much loved by the fashion press for his new take on the fashion house's signature minimalism, which was at once feminine and precise, joyful and bright, and elegant. At Dior, he created some memorable collections – particularly his couture debut that riffed slightly on a favoured skirt-and-bandeau silhouette also seen at Sander.

One can see the train of thought in appointing Simons at Calvin Klein, though more for his Jil Sander stint than his days at Dior. Across all fashion capitals, there are brands that you can loosely categorise together, be it for their maximalist tendencies or in this case the reverse.

Simons would last two years at Klein, making his debut for the house in February 2017 for the menswear autumn/winter 2017 season. He brought with him Pieter Mulier, his right-hand man, who would go on to become the successor at Alaïa, the renowned Paris fashion house in 2021.

OPPOSITE: Kaia Gerber walks for Calvin Klein, 2018.





Simons at Klein was an eagerly anticipated debut. Simons is something of a cult fashion character, while Klein, the brand, is something of a commercial one. It was sure to be an interesting mix.

Brooke Shields, something of a Calvin Klein Mascot by now, was front row – so was Millie Bobby Brown of *Stranger Things*, who had recently become a new face for the house, as well as Gwyneth Paltrow, Julianne Moore, Sarah Jessica Parker and A\$AP Rocky.

Held at Calvin Klein's 39th Street headquarters in New York, the collection featured both menswear and womenswear and played around with ideas of America and its Americanisms: band uniforms and varsity jackets, cowboy boots and quilting, boilersuits in denim, leather and tailoring, with both clothes and ideas spliced together. On closer inspection, Brooke Shields's silhouette featured on the leather label on the back of the waistband of jeans. It was a nice little nod.

The collection received a mixed review from *American Vogue* but was deemed a hit by Bergdorf Goodman's senior vice president Linda Fargo, who felt it did tap into the brand's DNA. Looking back, it was a great collection – but perhaps it was just not quite right for Calvin Klein at that time. Among it were key pieces that stand alone as both looks of the time and the collection. Colours were primary-bright, a jolt away from the typical sensual palette shades of Klein.

LEFT: Kaia Gerber walks at the Calvin Klein 205W39NYC spring/summer 2019 runway show during New York Fashion Week.



ABOVE: Raf's Calvin Klein at New York Fashion Week, February 2018.

During his tenure, Simons introduced Calvin Klein By Appointment, a made-to-measure service that created handcrafted designs out of the New York atelier. And, what had formerly been known as Calvin Klein Collection was renamed to Calvin Klein 205W39NYC.

For his spring/summer 2018 collection, he revisited the Americana tropes he had played with before but made them shiny – and sinister. There was an installation from the artist Sterling Ruby, with whom Simons has previously collaborated. Colours clashed, there were more shirts with statement pockets and the model Kaia Gerber – the daughter of the supermodel Cindy Crawford who also walked for Calvin Klein back in the day – took to the runway.

OPPOSITE: The new-look Calvin Klein, New York Fashion Week, 2017.

Statement dresses and utility jackets walked alongside cheerleader pom poms – that sometimes made for dresses – and Andy Warhol-style prints appeared on dresses and vests which were teamed with splaying skirts in a recurring Simons silhouette.

For autumn/winter 2018, Simons's third season for the house, he was praised for it being his most realised. Long gloves, boxy outerwear over long gowns and jaunty knitwear, including balaclava-esque designs featured – alongside what was fast becoming a Raf-at-Klein signature, those pocket Western shirts.

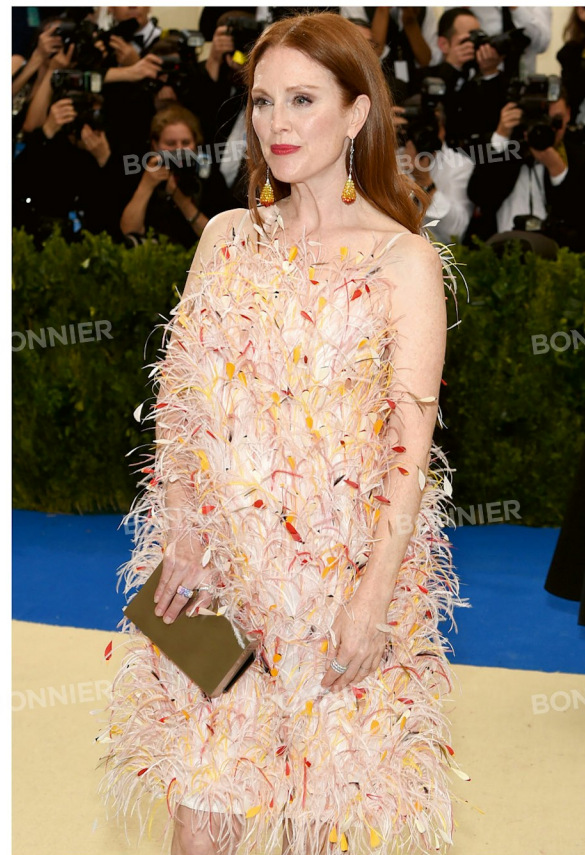
The designer cited the movies *Jaws* and *The Graduate* as inspiration for his spring/summer 2019 collection – which would be his last – with scuba hemlines and oversized blazers, motifs of the shark-infested film coupled with the CK logo. There were also nods to the 1950s in the form of colourful, prom-style jackets and pleated skirts. While there were moments that felt Calvin Klein, it felt more *Twin Peaks* overall.





OPPOSITE: Actor Naomie Harris at the Oscars, 2017.

BELOW: Julianne Moore at The Met Gala, 2017.



Red carpet by Raf Simons

For Raf Simons's first red carpet Calvin Klein look, he dressed Naomie Harris at the 2017 Oscars. The designer had only recently presented his debut collection as the brand's new creative director during New York Fashion Week that February.

Harris wore a white sequin column that riffed a little on designs seen in that first autumn/winter 2017 collection, which flashed flesh beneath the bust. It was a clever way to do sequins for a brand which is not known for its sequins.

At the Met Gala in 2017, the actress Julianne Moore wore a short and sheer dress sprouting colourful feathers from Simons's autumn/winter 2017 collection, which made for a playful and vibrant look.



Nicole Kidman, meanwhile, styled by Julia von Boehm, wore a Calvin Klein By Appointment Raf Simons design at the 2017 Emmy's. Made from grenadine silk gazar, the red gown had a pleated bodice and splaying skirt, with shoes from the Calvin Klein 205W39NYC. It had an overt red-carpet feel and was not the first time she had worn Calvin Klein by Raf Simons.

The *Star Wars* actress Daisy Ridley wore a gown from the designer's spring/summer 2018 collection, which had been inspired by horror film heroines, to the London premiere of *The Last Jedi* in 2017. The gown featured an asymmetric neckline and choker detail, as well as a nipped-in waist, and felt very appropriate for the sci-fi debut – a mix of utilitarian and elegant.



Simons departed the brand in December 2018 but did design a custom gown for Lady Gaga, which she wore to the Critics' Choice Awards the following January in 2019: a very light pink – almost white – loose and flowing gown. It was a very Klein note to end on.



OPPOSITE TOP LEFT:
Nicole Kidman
onstage during the
69th Annual Primetime
Emmy Awards, 2017.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT:
Daisy Ridley at the
European Premiere
of *Star Wars: The Last
Jedi*, 2017, in London.

ABOVE: Lady Gaga at
the 24th annual Critics'
Choice Awards, 2019.

Another Exit

In December 2018, it was announced that Simons was out. 205W39NYC was not deemed commercial enough despite praise from the fashion industry – in the world of retail, his designs had failed to perform. Later on, the press would begin to acknowledge this also.

Emanuel Chirico, the then-chairman and CEO of PVH had said that both price and fashion had been pushed too far and, as a result, more focus was to be put into its CK Jeans offering. According to *WWD*, PVH was said to have invested between \$60 million and \$70 million in the 205W39NYC collection over a three-year period and had not seen a return on its investment. Announcing Simons's



exit, Calvin Klein Inc declared that the brand had decided on a new direction that was different to the vision Simons had.

In 2019, following the closure of the high-end designer collection by Simons, the brand said it would not continue a traditional collection business and also shut down its Madison Avenue flagship store, which had originally opened in 1995. Under Simons, it had undergone a Sterling Ruby makeover with bright yellow walls and scaffolding.



OPPOSITE: Raf Simons at the Calvin Klein finale, New York Fashion Week, 2018.

ABOVE: The refurbished Calvin Klein Store with a floor-to-ceiling installation by Sterling Ruby, 2017.



Next Moves

Calvin Klein would be absent from the catwalk for the next few years, but it wouldn't be absent from the fashion sphere. In spring 2019, it brought back the #MyCalvins campaign, which focussed on showcasing confidence, and the musician Chika Oranika, who has been described as being plus-sized, featured in the campaign. There were internal moves happening up in management, too.



OPPOSITE: Michael B. Jordan backstage at Calvin Klein autumn/winter 2018.

ABOVE: Kendall Jenner spotted on a shoot for Calvin Klein in New York City, 2023.

Cheryl Abel-Hodges was named CEO of Calvin Klein in 2019. Jessica Lomax was named global head of design, tasked with leading Calvin Klein's global design strategy and creative direction across all areas of the business in 2020. And in 2022, Eva Serrano was named global brand president of Calvin Klein.

Meanwhile, the BTS K-pop star Jungkook became a global ambassador for Calvin Klein Jeans and Underwear in 2023 and a spring/summer 2023 campaign, called Calvins or Nothing, photographed by Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott featured Jennie Kim from Blackpink, Kendall Jenner, FKA Twigs, Michael B. Jordan and Aaron Taylor-Johnson. It continued later in the year, this time with a spotlight on athletes.

Jeremy Allen White

Jeremy Allen White burst on to our screens in the high-tension show *The Bear* in 2022. On screen, his character Carmen (Carmy), was noted for his style: his white T-shirts and cable-knits in particular, which are all very much a part of the Calvin Klein design language.

In 2024, White sent shockwaves across the internet when he became the face – or body – of Calvin Klein underwear.

The actor was photographed across Manhattan rooftops in black pants and white tights, and a chiselled torso.

Speaking to *GQ* in 2024, he said it wasn't a gig he necessarily thought he'd ever end up doing. But it was one that had come at the right time – White had built up his fitness, the story explained, as a result of working on the film *The Iron Claw* with Zac Efron and Harris Dickinson. Playing a wrestler in said film meant he was also now fairly used to being in his underwear in front of people, which also helped...

But that didn't mean he didn't get nervous before the shoot and confessed to having imposter syndrome about appearing on those famous billboards on which the adverts sit – both icons of the city and of the brand.

Comparisons can certainly be drawn to Mark Wahlberg's turn for Calvin Klein. White's certainly became a distraction.



ABOVE: Jeremy Allen White for Calvin Klein Underwear, spotted in Paris.

OPPOSITE: Jeremy Allen White for Calvin Klein Underwear, spotted in New York.



Nensi Dojaka x Calvin Klein

Nensi Dojaka started her own label in 2019 following her graduation from Central Saint Martins, and quickly became known for her delicate and delightful lingerie looks that boasted technical skill, blending ready-to-wear and tailoring with body contouring designs.



OPPOSITE LEFT:
Nensi Dojaka,
autumn/winter
2023–24.

OPPOSITE RIGHT:
Nensi Dojaka,
autumn/winter
2023–24.

BELOW: Rebecca
Ferguson at the
2024 Met Gala.



In 2024, it was announced that the designer had collaborated with Calvin Klein to create a capsule collection for spring/summer 2025. One could see why it made sense given the underwear link. There are not many designers who are as savvy about underwear as Dojaka, who has used it as a pillar of her work. The actress Rebecca Ferguson featured in images of the final collection, which had been taken in New York by Harley Weir. According to *British Vogue*, the designer had, during her short career to date, often had images from Calvin Klein during the 1990s taped to her reference boards.

Calvin Klein, Currently...

Since the man himself left the brand, there have been a string of changes to the legendary Calvin Klein – some good, some bad, some in between. It is now on its third creative director, Veronica Leoni, announced in 2024, and had a new global president in Eve Serrano, announced in 2022 and appointed in 2023. David Savman was announced as next taking on the role in 2025.

Leoni was a 2023 LVMH Prize finalist (the prestigious fashion competition run by the luxury French conglomerate), and has worked for Jil Sander, Celine, Moncler and The Row, which on the face of things makes her aptly prepared for taking on Calvin Klein, these all being aesthetically archetypal adjacents to the brand.



Growing up in Rome, Italy, it was her grandmother who taught her how to sew. But rather than study fashion, she studied literature and interned for a family-run fashion brand in Italy. After she graduated, she managed to land a job at Jil Sander.

OPPOSITE: Veronica Leoni front row at Milan menswear, autumn/winter 2025–26.

BELOW: At the Quira presentation, Paris Fashion Week, 2023.



She worked at Celine under Phoebe Philo, at the same time as similarly impressive contemporaries Matthieu Blazy and Daniel Lee (of Chanel and Burberry respectively).

Her appointment at Calvin Klein, where she is in charge only of the Collections, likely came as a surprise. She was not especially well known and had not run a large fashion house before (though she had her own brand, Quira). The idea was that her overall vision would eventually work its way down to the other divisions of the brand. Time will tell.

Speaking to *The New York Times* ahead of her debut, she discussed the idea of sexitude, by which she meant ideas about sex, sexuality and our attitudes towards it. She felt it was something that had been absent from the New York Fashion Week scene. What that meant exactly and whether it would work in reality was about to be revealed...

OPPOSITE: Veronica Leoni at Milan menswear fashion week, autumn/winter 2025–26.



Veronica Leoni's First Collection

On February 7, 2025, following a six-year gap, Calvin Klein was back on the New York Fashion Week runway for the autumn/winter 2025 season. It was a hugely anticipated show, both across the season and at New York. At the time, there was a lot of movement in the fashion industry, with what is known as designer musical chairs as various big names were rumoured to be leaving their roles, particularly in Europe. That New York and Calvin Klein could command this much excitement really said something about the impact the brand had made.

What was the verdict? For starters, Calvin Klein himself was there, which must have offered equal amounts of pressure and reassurance.

Backstage, according to Fashion Network, the designer loved it, noting it was very Calvin – praise indeed! Kendall Jenner – a recent face of Calvin Klein, walked in it; there were oversized coats and blouses with shape and cut as their decoration; layered dresses and draped gowns. It was office with a fashion edge, and moments of going out – accessorised with CK One bottles as evening bags, which was a nice little nostalgic touch.

Alexander Skarsgård also sat front row along with Kate Moss and Christy Turlington. In 2024, the Swedish actor starred in a new Calvin Klein campaign promoting its Studio line, a series of basics that were smart and elevated with imagery of Skarsgård to match – elegant and timeless.

Interestingly, that was not the first time Skarsgård had worked with the brand, having appeared some ten years or more earlier in its campaigns, too – a steamy and seductive film by Fabien Baron.

Speaking to *Esquire* in 2024, the *Succession* actor acknowledged the similarities between Calvin Klein and Scandinavian style: there is the monochrome, the minimalism and a sense of understatement.

Overall, while the new Calvin Klein collection made an impression and elicited the right sorts of noises from the fashion press in terms of it being respectful to the heritage of the brand, it wasn't deemed an all-out success. And judgement was to be reserved for forthcoming sales. That said, there was a sense that the brand was back.

OPPOSITE: Calvin Klein attends the debut of Veronica Leoni's Calvin Klein show at New York Fashion Week, February 2025.

TOP RIGHT: Details from Leoni's debut.

TOP LEFT: Kendall Jenner models the new collection.

BOTTOM: Alexander Skarsgård.





ABOVE TOP: Christy Turlington, Calvin Klein and Kate Moss at the Calvin Klein Collection fashion show during New York Fashion Week, February 2025.

The return also came at a time when old-school Calvin Klein was in the air – nostalgia for 1990s and 2000s fashion being at an all-time high. A case in point: on the opposite end of the minimalism-all-American pricing scale is Gap, which, similarly, has been restored to its heyday.

Calvin's new-look-original-ethos-with-a-new-attitude was quickly clocked on the red carpet within weeks of its unveiling at New York Fashion Week. On February 22, the actress Mikey Madison wore runway look 52, a black wool panelled dress with a cream cotton underlayer and open back detailing for the 40th Film Independent Spirit Award. She had been nominated for Best Lead Performance for her role in *Anora*. The dress looked like traditional Calvin Klein in its sleek style but boasted a twist with its structural design up top.

Later, for the 18th Annual Women in Film Oscars Nominees celebration, Monica

Barbaro – who had been nominated for Best Supporting Actress for her role in the Bob Dylan biopic, *A Complete Unknown*, wore a pearl bias-cut floor-length slip dress with micro crossover strap. It was a very Calvin Klein look: striking but simple, not fussy, not ornate, just elegant and arguably minimalist in its approach (though it should be noted, technically, bias cut is not simple).



OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Looks from Leoni's debut collection.

ABOVE LEFT: Mikey Madison at the 2025 Film Independent Spirit Awards, 2025.

LEFT: Eve Hewson at the Calvin Klein show, New York Fashion Week, February, 2025.

ABOVE RIGHT: Monica Barbaro at the Women in Film's 18th Annual Oscar Nominees Celebration, 2025.

And in March 2025, Lily Collins – of *Emily in Paris* fame – became the face of the brand, starring in a three-part campaign which saw her try on various Calvin Klein staples, such as the loose-fitting shirt, the slip dress, designer denim, and a typical going-to-work look, as she seemed to decide what to wear. Next, she was seen walking down the street in an oversized blazer when she's stopped in her tracks by a yellow viscose ribbed maxi dress in a window. An Instagram caption by the brand points out the cut and simplicity of the piece, which suddenly is no longer in the window...

Instead, it's on Lily Collins for the third instalment. She walks into a hotel lobby with shopping bags and is suddenly dancing with the staff, leaping on the reception desk and dinging the bell with her strappy sandal. And then she is jolted out of the moment – the idea being to embrace the fantasy.

Which is exactly what the Calvin Klein brand had been about all along. Be it selling sex, a luxe lifestyle, a confident and in control working wardrobe, Calvin Klein has always had a fantastical element to it – it just hasn't been in the obvious way, via the couture side of fashion, or the lavish decoration and ornamentation we so typically associate with out-of-this-world fashion magic and the idea that fashion is art. For Klein, fashion was more to do with great clothes that could be worn every day.



ABOVE: Calvin Klein ambassador Lily Collins at the premiere for season 4 of *Emily in Paris* at the Egyptian Theatre.



LEFT: Julia Louis-Dreyfus as Martha during the 'Calvin Klein Cream Pies' skit, 1983, on *Saturday Night Live*.

OPPOSITE
BOTTOM: Michael J. Fox as Marty McFly waking up in 1955.

In Pop Culture

That said, like any global and impactful brand, Calvin Klein has gone beyond the realm of just clothes and broken through into the consciousness of popular culture. In 1984, Run DMC, the American hip-hop group from Queens, made reference to Calvin Klein in their lyrics – noting that they weren't friends with the brand and as such didn't want its name on their derriere. Ouch!

In 1992, the American comedy TV show *Seinfeld* parodied Calvin Klein for an episode called *The Pick*. In the episode, the character Kramer learns the brand has created a new fragrance based on his idea for a perfume that smells like the beach. When he visits the Calvin Klein offices, he ends up being hired to model the brand's underwear.

Meanwhile, another star of *Seinfeld*, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, had already beaten him to it. In 1983, in a couple of skits for *SNL*, the American comedy television show, Dreyfus features in Calvin Klein Cream Pies, dressed in denim as an ode to the brand's style and imagery. Talking about how she likes to win, be the best, and look pretty, she ends up with a cream pie in her face. It's an odd one, and meant to

be a parody on the seemingly perfect Calvin Klein adverts of the day, but the audience seems to laugh and the brand was at the centre of prime-time television.

The brand also became the centre of some name confusion in the 1985 film *Back to The Future*. Marty McFly, played by Michael J. Fox, wakes up in 1955 instead of 1985 and meets a teenage version of his mother, named Lorraine Baines. Startled to discover where he is, he is told to relax by Baines who keeps referring to him as Calvin. Puzzled as to why she does so, he asks her – to which she replies it's because the name is written in his purple underwear. Ha!

Interestingly, the name Calvin Klein didn't feature in the French dubbed version of the film and was instead replaced by Pierre Cardin. It is a piece of trivia that started to come to light again at the passing of the famous French fashion designer, who is known (appropriately for a time-travel film) for his space-age and futuristic designs, in 2020.



In the 1995 comedy *Clueless*, Alicia Silverstone as Cher is about to leave her house for a date when her father stops her to ask what she is wearing. He clearly does not approve of the petite white strappy dress, which she attributes to being Calvin Klein. Duh, as her character would say.

Anne Hathaway, as Andy Sachs in the 2006 fashion comedy *The Devil Wears Prada*, memorably runs all over New York city to find the new Harry Potter manuscript wearing a khaki green belted dress by Calvin Klein. As the film's outfits go, it was a practical choice for the task. In an earlier scene, Miranda Priestly also requires 10-15 skirts from Calvin Klein but fails to provide any further detail, leaving Hathaway's Sachs very confused.

More recently, in 2013, Calvin Klein made an appearance at the Super Bowl, in one of its highly-coveted advertising slots. It released the first advert for its Calvin Klein Concept underwear line in which the model Matthew Terry sports the seamless design to powerful effect.

And, in 2016, the brand teamed up with Emma Watson and Eco Age to create a sustainable trouser-grown hybrid for that year's Met Gala. It featured yarns that had been woven from plastic bottles.

Asked once if he wanted to do films, Klein said that making them was something he had been thinking about but didn't have the time. Alas, that could have been a very interesting career pivot...

OPPOSITE: Anne Hathaway in *The Devil Wears Prada*, 2006.



Underwear 2.0

The brand that started the original designer underwear revolution introduced Calvin Klein Shapewear in February 2025 with a campaign fronted by the actress Eve Hewson. Described by the brand as being a first of its kind offering, it included a mix of foundation and fashion pieces with innovation and sensuality as key reference points. Featuring no-show thongs, briefs, mid-thigh shorts, leggings and slips (and, arguably, therefore ticking off all the hits), the range has been designed at four compression points: second-skin smoothing stay-put mesh, stay-put stretch and secure sculpt.

RIGHT: Eve Hewson, campaign star for Calvin Klein shapewear.

OPPOSITE: The designer put his penthouse office studio up for sale.



Property Portfolio

For those that want to get a taste of the Calvin Klein world, an opportunity arose in 2025: the designer's penthouse office studio, based in Chelsea New York, went on the market for \$3.495 million. Klein had originally bought the commercial space, located at 545 West 25th Street, in 2006. Boasting floor to ceiling glass walls up on the 18th floor (complete with views of the Hudson River and, now, the striking Hudson Yards development), it was designed by the architect Richard Gluckman. *WWD* reported that the property had also been put on the market in 2019 for \$6.5 million. Besides building a fashion and lifestyle empire, Klein was well-known for having amassed a considerable property selection, including homes in the Hamptons, Miami Beach and Los Angeles as well as New York.

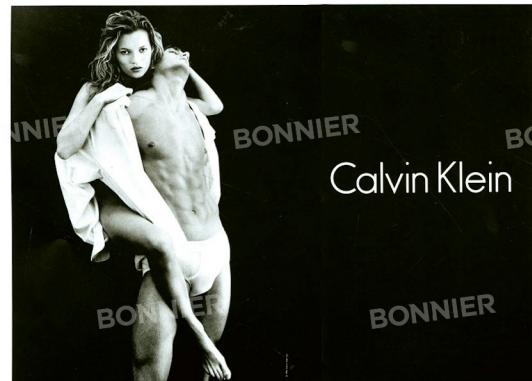
Bad Bunny For Calvin Klein

More recently, in 2025, Calvin Klein has once again made a pop-cultural impact for its underwear adverts, this time starring Bad Bunny, otherwise known as Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio. The music star was reported to have generated \$8.4 million in media impact value, or MIV, in less than 48 hours, according to a new report by Launchmetrics, as reported by *WWD*. Released in March, the campaign was photographed by Mario Sorrenti (who photographed Moss all those years ago for the Obsession fragrance campaign), and saw the Puerto Rican singer wearing the brand's new Icon Stretch underwear. Across the social media platforms TikTok and Instagram, the campaign achieved more than 3.7 million likes and its videos received more than 56 million views. Quite the feat! Bad Bunny said in a statement that he was thankful for the opportunity and the fact that the campaign was also shot in Puerto Rico made it all the more important.

Of course, this is just the latest in a long list of impactful celebrity partnerships that has taken the brand stratospheric – and in this one, again, comparisons can be made to the iconic Mark Wahlberg underwear campaign. Calvin Klein had also gone viral in 2023 with a Calvin Klein Jeans campaign starring Jungkook, which saw \$13.4 million in MIV in 48 hours. Jeremy Allen White generated 12.7 million. In many ways, it makes sense that the brand would take the social media waves by storm – with its longstanding legacy of audience engagement through impactful and iconic adverts throughout the decades, it was once again ideally primed to capitalise on it for a new generation.

OPPOSITE: Bad Bunny at the Calvin Klein show, February 2025.





Calvin Klein Underwear, 1994

Calvin Klein: The Man, The Myth, The Legacy

Calvin Klein did it all and did it first. His actions foretold the future of fashion, from designer jeans and underwear to impactful advertising and athleticwear – the kinds of clothes we find ourselves living in today.

He was a multi-hyphenate and put America on the fashion map. He was arguably the first designer to take a brand so international that even the corners of the world knew who and what Calvin Klein was. And he did this while managing to maintain a high fashion presence on the catwalk, where a completely different look was being showcased – yet it was one that was still entirely Calvin.

It's this clever back catalogue that continues the legacy today, despite the fact that Klein is no longer involved with the brand. But in some ways, he can't ever not be.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT:
The designer at
Calvin Klein Collection
autumn/winter 1999.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT: CK By
Calvin Klein
spring/summer
1994.

OPPOSITE
MIDDLE RIGHT:
Calvin Klein
Collection
spring/
summer 1992.

ABOVE: Always
making an impact
with adverts, Calvin
Klein featuring Kate
Moss, circa 1990s.

RIGHT: Taking a bow at Calvin Klein
Collection spring/summer 1994.



Veronica Leoni's
new take on
Calvin Klein, 2025.



Image Credits

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