

Telegraph magazine

23 July 2005

Going the extra 100 miles

The man for whom
marathons are
a walk in the park

All the tea in Cornwall

The West Country estate
with a Darjeeling feeling

Molto sexy

Twenty years of Dolce & Gabbana



Back in the early 1980s, I was young and looking for a job in fashion,' Stefano Gabbana relates. 'One night I met Domenico [Dolce] in a club in Milan and found out that he was working for a well-known designer's fashion studio.'

So, 20 years ago, began the fashion fairytale of the Italian success story that is Dolce & Gabbana. Born at opposite ends of the country (Dolce in a small town near Palermo in 1958 and Gabbana in Milan in 1962), the pair strongly believe that they were destined to meet. As luck would have it, they did – in Milan, where it wasn't long before they were working together at a design studio and plotting to start their own label.

'When I first met Domenico I remember he was dressed like a priest, all black and grey, quite shy, but I was sure he would be a good workmate,' Gabbana says of the sensitive Dolce.

'We started from zero – we had nothing, only the love for our work, our passion, our dreams,' he adds. 'I remember we worked all day and all night long, seven days a week with no holiday for years. It was really stressful, but we were feeling really positive, full of energy, we believed in what we did and that made us feel alive.' It has also made them millionaires. Now a household name, Dolce & Gabbana say their business is worth £688 million.

Since teaming up in 1985, the duo have viewed fashion through Italian-tinted glasses. From Sophia Loren to pasta alfresco, season after season the patriotic pair make reference to 'la dolce vita'. It comes across on just about everything from underwear to home furnishings in their signature lines.

With leopard prints and corsetry they revive 1940s cinema divas, while the devilish knits and jewel-encrusted crosses are a tongue-in-cheek nod to Catholicism. Sicilian widows even get a look in, as the inspiration for many a sexy little black 'Dolce' dress. And not forgetting the 'Godfather', that inevitable Italian cliché. The pinstripe suits and crisp white shirts à la Vito Corleone came to light in the designers' first menswear collection, and gave rise to the term 'gangster chic'.

Twenty years on, the powerhouse is alive and kicking. The long list of loyal celebrity clients includes Madonna (and her daughter Lourdes), Kylie, Isabella Rossellini and the Beckhams.

Firm partners in business, but no longer in life (their 19-year relationship ended in February), it could be quite some time before they hang up their scissors for good. Luckily for us, the brand

name alone bonds the designers together for ever just as it does Viktor & Rolf, Gilbert & George, Ben & Jerry.

For now, it's business as usual and full steam ahead. 'Unfortunately, we do not have a crystal ball, so we can't see the future but we really hope to go on this way. We still want to grow consistently and keep pushing into new markets,' Dolce says.

When you are this successful, the world really is your oyster. Looking ahead, the duo plan to increase the brand's presence in the US and Asia. The strategy has a particular drive towards Japan and China. In March this year, a Dolce & Gabbana boutique opened in Hangzhou, one of China's most important tourist destinations, while stores are set for Beijing and Shanghai in 2006.

As far as their existing collections are concerned, the ever-important accessories line, with its footwear, eyewear, fragrances and underwear, is expected to perform better. In the meantime, the men's collection is also expected to get a boost with the opening of new stores in Milan, Beverly Hills and, just this spring, Paris.

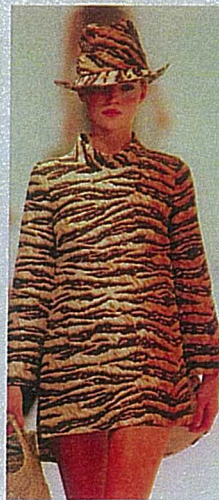
Given the chance, what would Dolce & Gabbana have done differently? 'We have no regrets about the past 20 years, because we've always followed our hearts and have always done what we felt,' Gabbana says. 'We took difficult decisions and each single one brought us to this point: we're happy and satisfied, but not completely. In the end we're still the same young boys with a big dream.'



2 Isabella Rossellini This was the first Dolce & Gabbana campaign to be shot by Steven Meisel, for a/w 1989/1990. Rossellini posed for the camera as if she were an actress from the neo-realistic cinema era of the 1940s – her father Roberto Rossellini was the founder of this sensual cinematic art form. Thanks to Meisel, the D&G message gained the duo instant international attention.



1 New talents In 1985 the organising body of Milan fashion week, Milano Collezioni, invited the young Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana to take part in its fashion fringe show to launch Italy's new talents. The next year, the designers presented their first independent women's ready-to-wear show. Gabbana says, 'The first collection we presented; the emotions we felt at that time, were something absolutely amazing: fear, joy, hope.'



3 Animal magic Over the years, Dolce & Gabbana's eclectic animal prints have been splashed on everything from women's and men's shirts to dinner plates. Even in their private quarters in Milan, the living-room is covered in leopard print and the dining-room in tiger. The furry look takes reference from early Italian cinema. The passion was further highlighted in their 1997 book, *Dolce & Gabbana Wildness*, a collection of magazine images of the animal motif.

20-20 VISION

For the past two decades, Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana's high-octane glamour has made their label a global triumph – and created a billion-dollar empire along the way. To mark the anniversary, **Lucie Muir** talks to the wonder boys about their enduring appeal and gives 20 reasons to salute their fashion firsts

Opposite the dream team: Stefano Gabbana (left) and Domenico Dolce



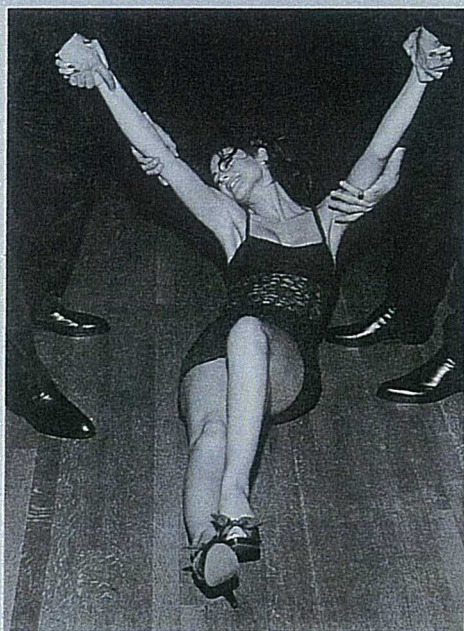
4 Marpessa Marpessa was one of the first iconic women to influence the designers' work. She appeared in the La Sicilia ad campaign in 1987, shot in Palermo by Ferdinando Scianna. The city's Vucciria flea market and barber shops provided the perfect backdrop. As did Scianna's ability to capture Sicilian life, which has since become the cornerstone of Dolce & Gabbana's look. The following season, Marpessa and Scianna hooked up again for a campaign based on Luchino Visconti's cult film, *The Leopard*. For this, she was snapped at the Villa Gangi, in the same spot where the movie was originally shot.



5 Underwear as outerwear Make no bones about it, Dolce & Gabbana like to tout their finely tuned tailoring. And that doesn't necessarily mean the suited and booted variety. In the early 1990s, when they cut suits with integral corsetry and added lace panels to jackets and skirts, underwear as outerwear took the fashion world by storm. Today, their trademark fashion statement lives on. Now if your bra should happen to be on show, don't worry.



6 Men The first men's collection – which was to make even vests sexy – was launched for winter 1990/91. The sharply tailored suits and signature shirts are typical of Sicilian men's clothing: comfortable jackets, black trousers and the Coppola hat. Aside from David Beckham, it's the label of choice for Johnny Depp, Javier Bardem and Benicio Del Toro.

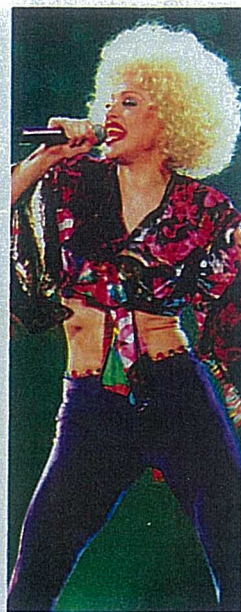


7 La Dolce Vita Both the summer 1992 collection and subsequent ad campaigns were heavily influenced by *La Dolce Vita*, Federico Fellini's cult movie. Steven Meisel shot the campaign in an authentic 1950s club in New York with Isabella Rossellini and Monica Bellucci. Along with the Italian starlets, teams of extras were cast in the roles of clubbers and dancers to party just as the original cast did in Fellini's film. It was a massive production that succeeded in evoking the glamorous mood of the time.

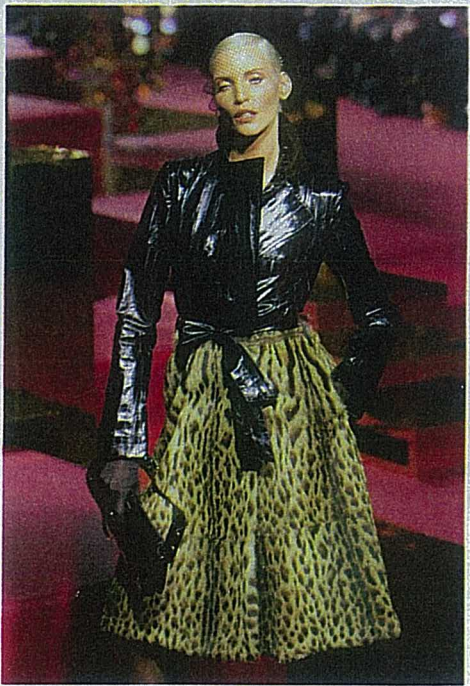


8 Beyoncé 'Since the days of Destiny's Child, we have been charmed by Beyoncé's beauty,' Gabbana says. 'We have dressed her for so many important occasions throughout her amazing music career. These include the Brit awards, the MTV awards and the Grammys.' Their most dazzling creations were for her Ladies First tour in 2003.

9 Madonna 'The first time Madonna wore a piece of ours – can you imagine?' Gabbana says. 'Your idol who fits perfectly into your creations.' Some 1,500 costumes were designed for the singer's Girlie Show world tour in 1993. Meanwhile, in November 2000, the duo celebrated the material girl's latest album, *Music*. As well as designing all the outfits, D&G created the stage set, transforming New York's Roseland Ballroom and Brixton Academy into a cyber ranch. Their rhinestone T-shirts from the event have become collector's items.



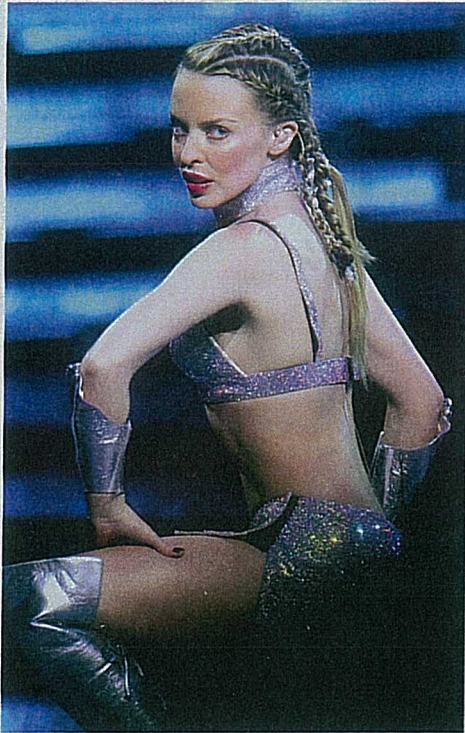
10 Helmut Newton For a/w 2004/5, the designers paid tribute to the late Helmut Newton and the elegant women he captured in those unforgettable images for Yves Saint Laurent in the 1970s. Newton's kinky masculine/feminine interplay was captured on the runway by Nadja Auermann (below), Eva Herzigova, Stella Tennant and Riley Keough (Elvis Presley's granddaughter).



11 D&G The D&G diffusion line was one of fashion's first collections specifically for a young audience. The first D&G diffusion collection – for men – was launched in January 1994 for the following autumn. Two months later, the hip, young and affordable spirit of the line was echoed in its first D&G womenswear collection, unveiled in time for the same season.



12 Gisele Dolce & Gabbana first set eyes on the girl from Ipanema during a casting and were bowled over by what they described as her 'curvy and sensual body'. She is their perfect woman. 'Gisele is sublime, she has a breathtaking body and a warm smile, she has got the Brazilian vibe.' This tight-laced dress looks as though it was made with her in mind.

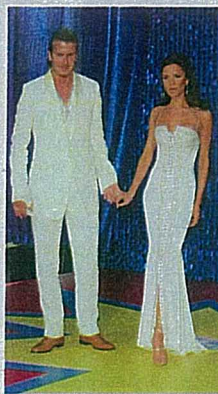


13 Kylie It's April 2002 and Kylie is clad in silver Swarovski-encrusted bra, miniskirt and silver boots. This ensemble, as well as a whole wardrobe of sparkly pieces to cover an epic nine costume changes, was designed by Dolce & Gabbana for her European Fever tour. The concert erupted with an extraordinary volcano dress for the pop princess's finale. 'Our long and beautiful relationship started when we took Kylie to the Madonna Brixton Academy concert. We emblazoned her name on Madonna's T-shirt for the occasion.'



14 Chloe Sevigny The *Boys Don't Cry* star and Dolce & Gabbana muse opened the runway show for a/w 2005, looking every bit the movie goddess. The pair picked Sevigny for her offbeat beauty and quirky sense of style. 'She's young but she knows how to make her way: she can mix different looks while maintaining her own identity, that's why she's perfect to represent our latest collection,' Dolce says.

15 Hippie deluxe Dolce & Gabbana's own summer of love was celebrated in the 1993 collection. The bohemian-inspired looks were modelled by Carla Bruni. While Talitha Getty and David Hamilton, Bénédicte Loyer, Nadja Auermann and Shalom Harlow were among the famous faces to appear in the ad campaign. 'Everything was very hippie and gypsy-oriented, though remaining very rich and stylish,' Gabbana says.



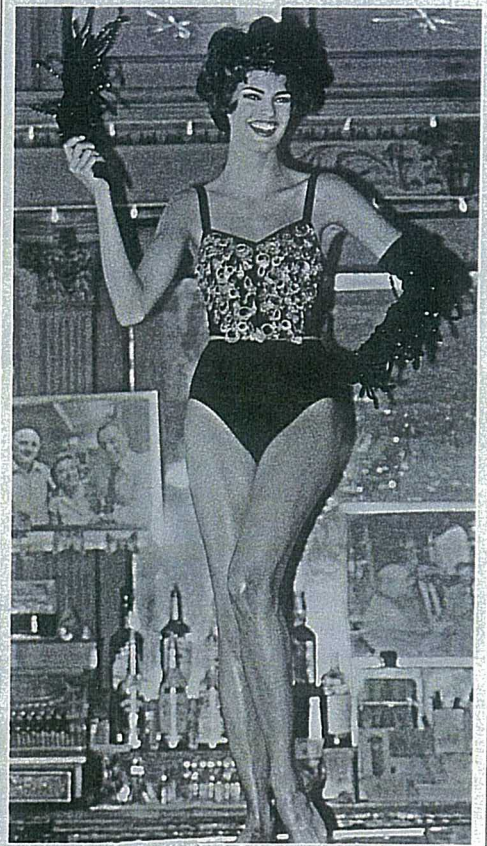
16 David and Victoria As well as bespoke Dolce & Gabbana pieces, Posh and Becks have a penchant for underwear (David once bought 200 pairs of undies for the couple). Victoria is said to wear so many creations that a mannequin of her body is now a permanent fixture at the designers' Italian factory. In 2003 the duo chose David Beckham as their muse.



17 Sherilyn Fenn It's no secret that the duo share a love of the curvaceous female form, and the glamour of 1950s Hollywood was a major source of inspiration for their winter 1991 collection. The crystal-covered corsets and leopard-spot coats all stem from that feminine era. The actress Sherilyn Fenn, of *Twin Peaks* fame, became the body and face of the winter ad campaign.



18 Ripped jeans When jeans were first slashed in the a/w 1986 womenswear collection, another pioneering Dolce look made headlines. The designers look for reference in clubs and on the streets. Camden and Portobello markets were favourites in the 1980s and 1990s, where they found inspiration in London's street style. Their ripped jeans were a classic example of a trend going from sidewalk to catwalk – and it's still going strong for the designers.



19 Little Italy The Little Italy campaign for a/w 1990-91, shot by Steven Meisel, brought together Linda Evangelista (above) and Christy Turlington for the first time in a Dolce & Gabbana campaign. The location was a club in New York's Little Italy. The story of showgirls falling in love with Italian boys set the mood.



20 The designers take a bow Stepping out after their show in January, the designers make their familiar walk up the runway. They breathe a sigh of relief at the end of each show. 'These days, we still work like crazy and we have less time than before,' Gabbana says. 'But we love it, it's our life.'