

*Luxury*  
PRODUCT & SERVICE  
**BRIEFING**

APRIL 2002

REQUIRED READING  
FOR THE LUXURY INDUSTRY

**A**S New York continues to recalibrate under its new status as federal disaster area, it is interesting to note the changes around town, six months later. The **art world** seems especially vibrant, with a number of exhibitions offering commentary on the extended period of mindless consumerism before September 11. The Whitney Biennial is also packing them in and for the first time in recent memory, reaction to the show ranges from generally positive to full-on rave. Museum attendance in general (unlike retail traffic) is back to the extraordinary levels of the twentieth century. And Broadway **theatres** are again full to capacity as several new American plays offer audiences acerbic tales of American over-indulgence and self-absorption. **Restaurants**, once empty, are bustling again though not all of them understand the **revised protocol** of New York dining. Frenzied hype and reconfirming reservations are out. Civilized greetings, lower noise and lowered dessert prices are in. The few spring restaurant openings have been remarkable in their restraint: neighborhood coziness, simple food, invisible decor. The requisite design statements of recent years – from mod-pod to Lieigre-luxe – now look dated, or worse yet, suburban.

Which brings us to **New York Fashion Week 2002**, New York's most recent disaster. This was the big chance to inject life into an industry that looks increasingly, well, dated and suburban, and against the backdrop of Manhattan's stark and even pure new reality, touristy. The various victims and irrelevant looks on display seem



only to have served the cable-viewing outlanders, much like some new animated feature from Pixar. This from an obviously stunned community of creative, even radical thinkers who until fairly recently affected the course of society and reflected the cultural fringe.

Is it that New York has marginalized its young people to Williamsburg and Hoboken so that they no longer inform the Manhattan streetscape? Is it that the conglomerates have made fashion not only self-important and self-referential but self-obsessed? Just please spare us any more in-store parties (LVMH, spare us any more stores!). PRs would do better to messenger editors a ticket to the Whitney, which might even snap them out of their trophy-bag trances, because quite frankly, **more bags mean more baggage**.

Big Fashion does not seem to be grasping the sweeping changes around us... that war is a horrifying possibility, that a new impetus for spending is emerging to transform all product, that 70% of Americans under-18 are non-white and do not aspire to the Marc Jacobs Lolita prototype or the Michael Kors ski bunny. And that *fashionistas* are not fashion, but corporate mascots and, increasingly, they are unfashionable.

**1. What is your favourite shop?**

Balducci's on 6th Avenue in New York – because it's all the kind of food I grew up with.

**2. Your favourite restaurant and why?**

J Sheekey's – service, food, decor – absolutely flawless.

**3. And your favourite hotel?**

The Belvedere on Mykonos. Nicholas and staff are the best; it's like going home. Plus a fantastic pool, wonderful views and great cocktails.

**4. Where have you received the best customer service?**

Joseph, Sloane Avenue and the Virgin Clubhouse at Heathrow.

**5. What do you dislike?**

Queues! Telephone recorded messages and five-minute wonders – trendy, faddy things – that are empty without quality.

**6. Who or what has been your biggest influence?**

My parents. They taught me I could be whatever I wanted when others were telling their children to become accountants. Grandma for teaching me to sew and Debbie, my business partner, for believing in me.

**7. Is beauty or function more important?**

Both are equally important – in my business if it's beautiful but doesn't work, it won't sell; and if it works but doesn't make you sigh, it won't sell either.

**8. What do you do to relax?**

Dinner on a tray, Gap pyjamas, TV remote in hand and Paramount Comedy channel.

**9. Where would your ideal holiday be?**

With my partner on an island with white sand, turquoise water, hot sun, crisp cotton sheets and Balducci grocery within walking distance.

**10. What is your favourite item of clothing?**

An equal contest between my old Wrangler denim jacket, my soft-as-butter Joseph leather jacket and all my Richard James shirts.

**11. What is your favourite fragrance?**

Gucci Envy. It suits all moods.

**12. What is your ideal watch?**

My stainless steel red and blue Rolax GMT Master Diving watch from the 70s.

**13. And your ideal car?**

A dark navy Aston Martin.

**14. Which luxury company currently has the best ads?**

Versace campaign this season – love all the bare bums.

**15. Do you collect anything, or would you like to?**

1950s ceramics.

**16. What is your most treasured possession?**

Two wooden boxes from my grandfather with his initials on them (which happen to be the same as mine).

**17. What was your most recent luxury purchase?**

A black tuscan lamb jacket I had made for me. It's perfect with a white T-shirt and jeans.

**18. What are you currently dreaming of buying?**

A beach house somewhere hot, or a flat overlooking the sea.

**19. Who do you tip to watch over the next 10 years?**

Scientists.

**20. What do you predict will be the biggest trend this century?**

Anything to do with health, spare time, leisure and feeling younger.

*Ben de Lisi, fashion designer*

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