

Lindeberg is mining gold

By Anna Blom

“I believe a personal mode of expression is more important than ever.”

After a few turbulent years, the Swedish fashion entrepreneur and jeans maker Johan Lindeberg is finding new paths to success in New York.

When you do what you love, things often turn out well – but living your passion demands sacrifice. One man who has taken on the challenge is Swedish fashion designer Johan Lindeberg, best known as the founder of the Swedish fashion brand J. Lindeberg and for his solid experience in denim fashion in Sweden and abroad. He is now working with a fashion project called BLK DNM (pronounced black denim), which he started online in 2011. Alongside men’s and women’s collections built around a core of denim and tailored basics, notable elements include short videos, a blog, a magazine, a perfume, and two stores of his own in Stockholm and New York.

A divorce in 2010 was the impetus for the new venture. It inspired Lindeberg to set three life goals: start a new fashion brand, be an even better father, and settle in New York for good.

“I left the apartment and went to the far side of Montauk, where I walked and cried for three days,” Lindeberg tells me when I meet him in his combined store, design studio, and office spread over three levels at 273 Lafayette Street in Manhattan.

The designer has now realized his new visions. His clothes are sold in some of the most hyped fashion boutiques in the world. The collection was recently launched at the trendy Browns Focus in London. In February, Lindeberg was named one of the six best men’s fashion designers in the US by the prestigious men’s fashion magazine GG, and in May he topped Swedish King magazine’s list of the 100 most influential figures in Swedish men’s fashion in 2012.

The choice to start BLK DNM in 2011, a time of unrest and struggle for democracy, might not have been purely a coincidence. His own childhood in Lund, especially 1968, shaped Lindeberg’s character.

“Seeing this solidarity and energy was mind-blowing. This is something I feel very deeply where I am right now, on Lafayette. It feels like there are so many new ideas and values here.”

In addition to denim, the new collections are defined by clothes in a minimalist suit look, basics, and motorcycle jackets. The archetypical style is a leather biker jacket à la James Dean and a pair of Farrah Fawcett-style high-waist jeans – pieces that are eternal classics but also breathe the present and a rebellious attitude. Lindeberg says that much of the appeal of the clothes lies in the fact that customers can discern the intentions behind them.

“I believe a personal mode of expression is more important than ever. That you are yourself.”

That is something Johan Lindeberg can be in New York, after a past spent flitting between his hometown and the fashion metropolises of Milan and London.

“I am having a great time, I have to say. And I am doing exactly what I want to do and living exactly the life I want to live.”

Johan Lindeberg

Age: 54

Home: New York.

Family: Daughter Blue, 11

History: In the 1990s, Johan Lindeberg was international marketing director for Diesel Jeans, where he worked with the Paradiset ad agency to create successful advertising campaigns under the slogan “For successful living.” The first collection under his own brand, J. Lindeberg, came in 1997. He severed his relationship with the company in 2009 and currently has no connection to the brand that carries his name.

Stores: BLK DNM at 273 Lafayette Street in New York and BLK DNM at Mäster Samuelsgatan 1 in Stockholm. The Swedish store opened in the capital city in September 2011.

On the appeal of jeans: “When I grew up, jeans were always a symbol of freedom. Jeans have an attitude that frames the modern wardrobe,” says Johan Lindeberg.

Miscellaneous: As part of the prize awarded by GQ, Johan Lindeberg and BLK DNM will be launching a capsule collection this fall in cooperation with the American fashion chain GAP, which will be sold internationally.

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