

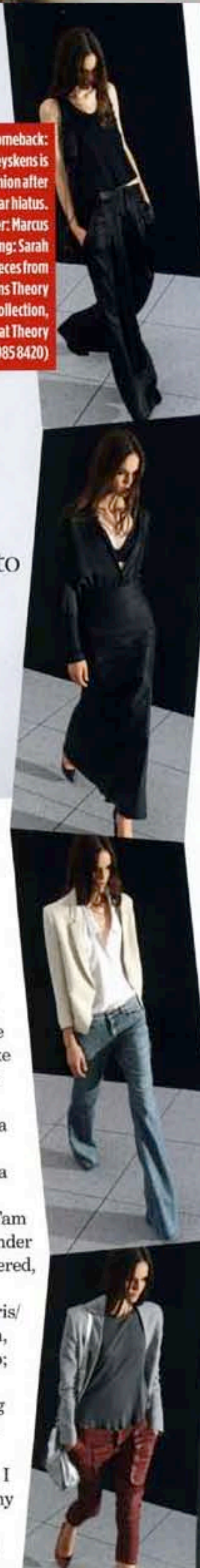
INVogue



## Smart move

Olivier Theyskens has moved from high-end luxe fashion to a mid-market label known for edgy, urban basics – and to Harriet Quick’s surprise, his new role suits him to a T

The comeback: Olivier Theyskens is back in fashion after a two-year hiatus. Photographer: Marcus Man. Grooming: Sarah Sibia. Right, pieces from the Theyskens Theory capsule collection, available at Theory stores (020 7985 8420)



Into a white-cube showroom on the rue du Mont-Thabor bounds a breathless Lou Doillon, flinging her arms around designer Olivier Theyskens. “I just have to see your new work!” she says, plunging into a rail of pewter slippery-satin, wide-leg trousers, neat blazers and watercolour-print slips, cooing as she goes.

Theyskens, the 34-year-old Belgian designer, who abruptly left Nina Ricci in spring 2009, is back in fashion, hired as artistic director of US label Theory. His new venture is not of the high-end-luxury, £3,000-feathered-dress variety, but in the global mid market. The brand, which is owned by Fast Retailing and has annual sales of men’s and womenswear worth \$500 million, is known for smart, trend-savvy, everyday fashion. Theyskens’s first venture is Theyskens Theory, a capsule collection infused with his trademark sultry chic and full of pieces that we, like Doillon, will want to wear day in, day out.

Take, for example, Theyskens’s trousers – there are all varieties of cuts, from his signature floor-skimming styles to jodhpur cuts and the softest denim high-waisters. There’s skin-thin leather, in tailored jackets with a slit at the nape of the neck to make the cut shrug forward, leg o’ mutton-sleeved silk blouses and slouchy-cut tees – the overall aesthetic says “special” but not

“precious”. The line has got buy-me-wear-me-now appeal written all over it. “If I was a girl, I think I would be happy to wear the tiered slip and leather jacket for the day or for dinner,” he muses.

Theyskens, with his nearly-there Vandyke beard and glossy long hair, is visibly happy and relaxed. The intense demeanour of the Nina Ricci years seems to have magically dispersed. “I started working on my book and I took a lot of time off to think,” says Theyskens of his “sabbatical”. “It’s wonderful, Paris, with its culture of luxury, and it’s been a great experience working here; but I am also someone who is quite independent – I’m Olivier from Belgium!”

Theyskens focused on where he wanted to be in his next venture, and the mid market satisfied his interest in creating accessible, quality designs. “I do not like what is cheap,” he says. Theory and its CEO Andrew Rosen came into the picture. The growing group is creating a niche in designer but accessibly priced fashion – it also has Helmut Lang and Rag & Bone in its stable. Theyskens found that essential “click” at Theory. “I walked into the store in the Meatpacking District and it just seemed right. Even the way I sign my name and the brand’s typography are similar,” he smiles.

Olivier based himself in the company’s

West 13th Street HQ, and the capsule collection evolved rapidly. He sourced technologically advanced fabrics from Japan – the softest, floppy denim, tight-weave cottons, washed leather – and honed the detail and cut that make the garments jump out as interesting and desirable. There’s also a capsule line of lingerie pieces, such as satin bra tops, made with sister brand Princesse Tam Tam – perfect for slipping under one of his slope-shouldered, tailed jackets.

Theyskens’s new Paris/New York life suits him, too. “New York is all go; it’s about constant interaction and making things happen. Bright-yellow shorts! Stripes! Why not? But in Paris, I get back to my focus, my vision.” One that we want to be a part of. ■