

Jonathan Saunders Named Chief Creative Officer at DVF

By LISA LOCKWOOD and SAMANTHA CONTI

LONDON — Jonathan Saunders has been named chief creative officer of Diane von Furstenberg Studio, effective immediately, the company said Monday. Saunders, 38, will be responsible for the overall creative direction of the brand and he will report to chief executive officer Paolo Riva.

The first collection will be spring/summer 2017.

"Jonathan's extraordinary passion for colors and prints, his effortless designs and his desire to make women feel beautiful make him the perfect creative force to lead DVF into the future," said Diane von Furstenberg, founder and chairwoman of the company.

"I could not have found a cooler, more intelligent designer and I cannot wait to watch him shine as our chief creative officer."

Saunders returned the compliments. "The wonderful thing about Diane is she's very aware of designers in London. Diane came to one of my very early shows years ago when I was showing in London Fashion Week. She's always been a supporter of the aesthetic of the brand that resonated with her in terms of my love of prints," he said in a telephone interview. "I met her again at Downing Street in London, and I think we started a conversation and it went very fast."

They started talking about the position just a few weeks ago. He said he'll move to New York as soon as he can. "It's a decision we all made very quickly because it's so natural," said Saunders.

His appointment marks the first time that DVF has hired someone across all categories, in terms of complete brand image. "For me, it's about understanding the ethos for which Diane started this brand. For me, the approach that she had is thinking about what women want to wear and balancing functionality with desirability. It can never be a better moment for that ideology and that thought process in terms of designing. I love simplicity, and I love clothes that have a sense of ease. I think that print and color and optimism are all key values that are so important to the brand that I want to keep at the forefront," he said.

"What's also really exciting that made the decision quite easy, both Diane and Paolo [Riva, chief executive officer] are really, really intelligent thinkers. They think about things and they analyze things and they're not afraid to think about change. All of us are questioning how we can push forward the cycle to fashion and how we can give the consumer something that they want and the way that they want it. We're still going to have lots of conversations like that. That's what's so exciting to me. Although the brand has such an incredible history, the company is not afraid of change and doing things in an unusual and interesting way," he said.

He said what's interesting and exciting about the industry now is that everyone is talking about how they can push into the future, and how they can cross over to consumer-led decisions with creative decisions, and keep the conversation moving to come up with something new.



Jonathan Saunders

As for their mutual affection for prints, Saunders said, "I love prints because prints tell a story and symbolize change and newness, and prints symbolizes optimism and all things I hold dear. The most important thing is color. Color is such a wonderful thing to work with. Those key elements will always be an integral part of the collection."

The designer had his own business for 12-13 years, and now he's glad to be moving onto something else. "There will always be creative projects I can work on as an individual. I'm excited about change and newness and having a definite thing to work on. Change is good," he said. "I'm so excited about where fashion is headed. Fashion is always a reflection of what is going on in people's minds and it reflects society. That's so wonderful about fashion. We work in an industry where people want to challenge it and change it. People want things available to them at the moment. People want value and it's less about pushing people into brackets and price points. What's fascinating is that people are looking for value and respect what they're willing and what they have to spend on the product," he said.

"We all have to work together and find a new way of doing stuff," he continued. He said that e-commerce was a big part of his business, and from a strategic point of view, they're exploring it at DVF.

Asked if he has plans to take the collection in a new direction, he replied, "It's day one. I need to immerse myself in it. I think what's important is that we think about the values this brand has established from the beginning, and the reason why this brand started and why it began, and take it from there."

As for reporting to Riva, Saunders said, "It's a new chapter for the business. Diane is such an incredible force. She has her philanthropic work which is an inspiration for women. Both Paolo and my main mission is to think about that with everything we do. Not only is Paolo an extremely deep thinker and really understands product, but to have someone as a ceo who understands product like that is such an exciting partnership. When those shows were over, Akeroyd and Burton presided over a robust international retail rollout that stretched from Savile Row to China and saw the unveiling of a new shop concept under David Collins Studio.