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Milla Jovovich & Carmen Hawk

Words Lee Carter

When it comes to their LA-based women's line, Jovovich-Hawk are a little bit country and a little bit rock'n'roll.

Plus a little bit disco, flapper, folkie, Victorian and Valley Girl... That's because, for the longtime friends, the line is a true melting pot of ideas and inspirations, stirred in with a generous amount of girlish bravado. After two years of climbing a very steep learning curve, the models-actors-musicians now find themselves on the brink of a new kind of stardom: as designers. Here, the duo discusses everything from finding inspiration on YouTube to life in the fashion fast lane.

It's been a month since your fall collection in New York and we're still blown away at how you were inspired by [gay avant-garde film director] Kenneth Anger.

Carmen Hawk: We've been looking a lot at YouTube...

Is that where you found his work? Did you watch his *Puce Moment* there?

CH: Totally. A lot of things are subliminally in our minds, it only takes a short film or something for them all to connect. There's also a little *Blue Velvet* going on.

I love how YouTube is the new muse. YouMuse!

Milla Jovovich: But I heard it's going to get shut down. A lot of film and television companies aren't very happy. It sucks!

I think it'll survive now that Google bought it. In Google we trust...

MJ: Oh, yay! >

At your show, you told me how your friends have radically different takes on the collection. Some described it as 1930s Shanghai, others as gypsy.

MJ: We love to hear what people's interpretations are. We already know what our inspirations are, but we like to know how it inspires other people.

How did the line start? You met as models, right?

CH: Yeah, like 13 years ago in Paris. Milla was also doing music at the time and working on some fashion things with big houses. I was in and out of modelling and decided to start a little shirt company, basically to teach myself sewing. Each shirt was titled after a song.

MJ: You were doing music, too. Carmen has always done amazing music. You should go on MySpace.

CH: So we hooked up and said let's do something. We got our ideas together and tried making things, and a friend of ours took our first eight pieces to Fred Segal and they bought all of it. They liked the vintage fabrics we used, like '50s French fabrics, which were really expensive...

MJ: ...like, \$150 a yard. We couldn't sell it for as much as it cost to make.

Can you clear something up? I think a lot of people assume you rework vintage dresses, but the pieces are all new, right?

CH: Oh yeah, they're all brand new, just with a vintage feel. Vintage is a huge inspiration for us. Like we'll see a piece of lace on a Victorian dress and build a whole story out of it.

MJ: We develop our own fabrics, but try to capture the feeling we have for the old fabric. We never show an old dress.

CH: Once we had these really beautiful polyester prints, but the fashion world doesn't exactly jump for polyester. So we replaced the flowers. Basically we added fine art to the funny 60s polyester prints to create a whole new fabric.

MJ: And for last spring we took the little country flowers out of some old Little House on the Prairie gunnysack type of dress and put it on this silk striped chiffon. That was our Country Disco collection. We really focus on fabrics.

Wow, you're like the Prada of LA

MJ: Yeah, it's very thought out. Every piece is so special, so much its own concept. The amount of energy that goes into each piece is unbelievable.

CH: We were producing everything ourselves for a while. Everything you saw in a store was sewn in one of our houses. Now they're made in a lot of different places, depending on the piece. For fall/winter that we just showed, we used some great places in India for the beading. They're the best. It's so cost-effective that we don't have to sell it for so much. All that beading would retail for, like, \$10,000 in the US. That wouldn't sell.

MJ: Or not to the girls we want to sell to.

Who's the Jovovich-Hawk girl?

MJ: Girls who are very independent and expressive. A lot of artists. We don't want to cater to rich girls, but our clothes can be very expensive because they're so unique. It's definitely not about trends. Forget about what everyone else is wearing.

CH: Or what fantasy you can get away with. (Laughs.)

MJ: But obviously we don't make costumes. We don't want people to laugh at us as we're walking down the street. I think people smile at us, though. We're all about how you feel today, what makes you feel special.

Speaking of feelings, I noticed your website says "Feel Good, Look Good, Feel Bad, Look Good..."

CH: Yeah, like you're not feeling good one day, but you put something on and you think, well, at least I'll look good. We're interested in moods, like how a bad hair day means so much more than having bad hair. (Laughs.)

MJ: We're into emotional states. Between a smile and a frown, we're going to go out of our way to make you smile. No one feels the same everyday. Today I might feel romantic, tomorrow I might feel tough. We make this floor-length black skirt, so maybe I'll feel like ripping the bottom off of it before I walk out the door.



"They're all brand new, just with a vintage feel. Vintage is a huge inspiration for us."



A little like playing dress up?

MJ: Definitely.

Tell us about the Mango collaboration...

MJ: I was doing some modelling for them and wore one of their dresses to work. Carmen asked me if I was wearing something vintage and I said, no, it's Mango. And we were like, oh my God, it's so cool. Then they approached us to do something for them. It's been great for us because we're learning how to make quality clothes while keep prices down. We're becoming smarter all the time. Our prices are going down every season. They have these huge teams that make huge fabric orders.

But there's a certain charm in being small, too.

CH: Yeah, it's more approachable. People can relate to it.

What do you make of the onslaught of celebrity lines?

CH: Are there so many? We don't look at magazines. We don't want so much random information in our heads that we start thinking so-and-so did this, we should, too.

MJ: Everyone can make a box dress, but it gets interesting when they're all a little bit different.

CH: I like the fast-fashion thing because it takes away the elitism factor in fashion. Now you can go to Target or H&M and people who aren't wealthy can buy beautiful sheets for their bed. I shop at those places all the time and I get super excited about what they're rolling out next.

What are you rolling out next?

CH: Well, in addition to our new holiday and resort lines, we just signed with a Japanese company that we're really excited about.

MJ: And we've started doing accessories, belts and bags. We also have jeans that people can see on our website. We'd love to have boutique sometime.

Are you guys self-financed or do you have a backer?

CH: We're so self-financed. We like being experimental, but we have to know what people like from us. We have to know what people are coming to us for, what that feeling is that they want.

MJ: We also have a lot of fun doing it. I mean, you understand starting your own business. It's enough to make you go bonkers. So if it wasn't fun, we would probably shoot ourselves.

What other projects are you working on?

MJ: Carmen's definitely written some really rad songs in the last couple of months. I did a couple of shows in Europe. Bulgari asked me to do a couple of songs. And at the Mango launch party, too. They heard about the Bulgari show and asked me to play. I've only done one film, the third instalment of Resident Evil.

That comes out later this year?

MJ: In September. And this summer I'm going to work with Paul Verhoeven on a period piece called *The Winter Queen*. With my lifestyle, it's so easy to disappear into different things, so mostly I'm trying to stay focused and making sure Jovovich-Hawk is the main priority. We've done a great job in the last couple of years getting our foot in the door. We want to get it lodged there. ●