

When two's a company

Best friends and business partners? It works for Mia Oeser and Kirstine Petersen, whose fashion-forward collections boast designer credentials at (almost) high-street prices

By Cordelia Madden

ON NOVEMBER 10, a capsule range designed by Stella McCartney for Swedish clothing giant H&M hit the British high street. Comprising a slick selection of trademark McCartney tailored separates, skinny-fit trousers, lingerie-look tops, shirtdresses, casual parkas and unstructured trenchcoats, and priced at up to 80 pounds sterling (approximately 120 euros), this one-off collection had trendy twenty- and thirty-somethings queueing around the clock outside the 400 branches at which it was on sale.

Their Athenian equivalents may have been unable to partake of this fashion bonanza without crossing borders (H&M has yet to open a Greek branch), but that doesn't mean they must miss out on affordably priced, fashion-forward designer clothing. Mia Oeser's collections exhibit a similarly London street-chic inspiration as McCartney's and, without compromising on quality, workmanship or style, they are priced to perfectly bridge the gap between high-street and designer.

It says it all that Heather Mills McCartney, no less - who, after all, has not only the option of buying the H&M line but also the financial wherewithal to purchase her daughter-in-law's more costly own-label collection - is a huge Mia Oeser fan. In fact, while I was interviewing English-Australian Mia Oeser and Danish-born Kirstine Petersen, the pair behind the label, Mills McCartney rang to place a comprehensive order for the autumn/winter collection.

The girls are thrilled to be able to count ex-model Mills McCartney as one of their devotees, but they emphasise the fact that a woman doesn't need to be well off or spaghetti-slim to wear their clothes. While noting that they try to keep their prices as low as possible, Oeser says, "We sell to all types/shapes of women, but we are particularly well-known for our cleavage-revealing tops."

"We take into consideration the Mediterranean figure," adds Petersen, "and try to show off what women want to show while hiding their love handles." Basically, she sums up, the clothes are for "the woman who wants to look fabulous without spending too much money". So, that's all of us then.

Finishing each others' sentences, exchanging quips, joking and laughing, Oeser and Petersen describe their partnership as "a match made in heaven". They have been working together for the last two years, having been friends for several years before that. "It's very hard to do business with friends," explains Kirstine, who has some experience in this field, having set up a clothing label in Paris with a friend. "I think why this works is because we both do different things - we generate the collection ideas together, then Mia does the production and I do the PR/sales. Mia is very technical, she tells me what can and cannot be done. We totally complement each other," she continues. "Mia's really not a salesperson and I can't bear to sit next to the pattern-cutter during production."

"For years I needed to find someone who could do the selling for me," says Oeser. "I never liked working alone." She set up her label, Mia Oeser, in 1998, following a Degree Hons in Fashion Design at the University of Westminster, Harrow, and, after moving to Athens in 1994, a three-year spell designing for Greek high-street label Acrobat.

The Athens News profiled her affordable, very feminine line of clothes in 1999. But, "The label's completely changed around since Kirstine and



Mia Oeser (L) and Kirstine Petersen

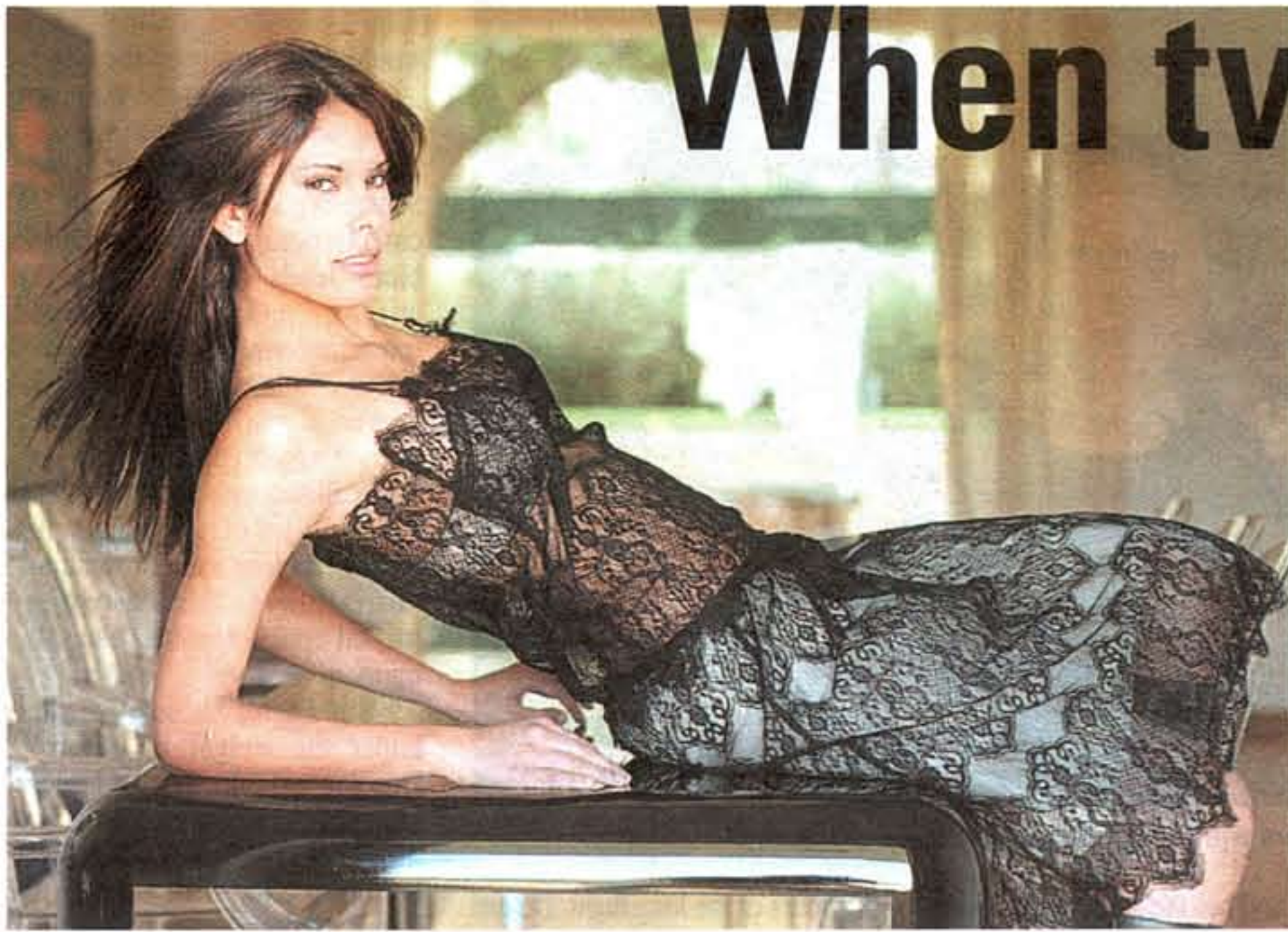
I became partners," says Oeser. Petersen continues, "It's more experimental, more edgy, more fashion. We're not so much focusing on keeping Mia's style but rather on taking influences from the London and Copenhagen streets and on producing what people are asking for," she says.

Born and brought up in the town of Gevninge in Denmark, Petersen moved to London aged only 16 and began an eight-year career as a model. In 2000 she upped sticks to Athens and set up a shop in Psychico, then two years later she headed to fashion capital Paris to start designing her own clothing range called Oggitersen. But the year 2003 saw her moving back to Athens again, in answer to a cry for help from her friend Mia. And the rest, as they say, is history.

The current Mia Oeser collection - entitled 'Afternoon cocktails', a name that emphasises its retro-tinged, romantic yet slightly decadent flavour - is a fluid, feminine, fashion-conscious compilation that features predominantly draped jersey and lace creations in a soft palette of caramel, cream, rose, pewter and black. Highlights of the collection include the "balloon" dress, a loosely gathered, drawstring-waisted, deep v-necked affair designed to be worn over skinny jeans or leggings; the delicate "lady lace" top, a simple slip of georgette gathered over the bust with a band of lace; the ruched Lycra-jersey leggings; the drape-fronted, lace-backed jersey top that can be worn over a bandeau bra, a simple white vest or by itself "if you dare" (as Petersen says); and the matador-esque cape-sleeved v-necked dress which, Petersen points out, is ideal for the older woman whose upper arms are no longer as taut as they might have been.

The duo didn't take part in the recent Diners Athens Collections InStyle fashion week, as they have yet to join the Hellenic Fashion Designers' Association (HFD) which was behind the event. While Oeser admits to being sceptical as to whether they would, as a couple of non-Greeks, be eligible for membership, Petersen says they haven't made any attempt to join yet as they have been concentrating their energies elsewhere - particularly on setting up their website. However, the latter opines that "it would be very good publicity to climax [at Athens fashion week] next season, and it would be a great way to reach many more buyers and clients". Watch this space!

✓ Mia Oeser clothes are priced at between 70 and 110 euros for separates and around 240 euros for dresses. Available at Elina Lebessi in Kolonaki, Camorra in Glyfada, Soho Soho in Kifissia, Afternoon at the St George Lycabettus Hotel, Simple Caractere in Halandri, Fena Fresh in Thessaloniki, and also at shops in Volos, Piraeus and on Mykonos. For more details see the site www.miaoeser.com



Studio A Karras

Photos courtesy of Mia Oeser