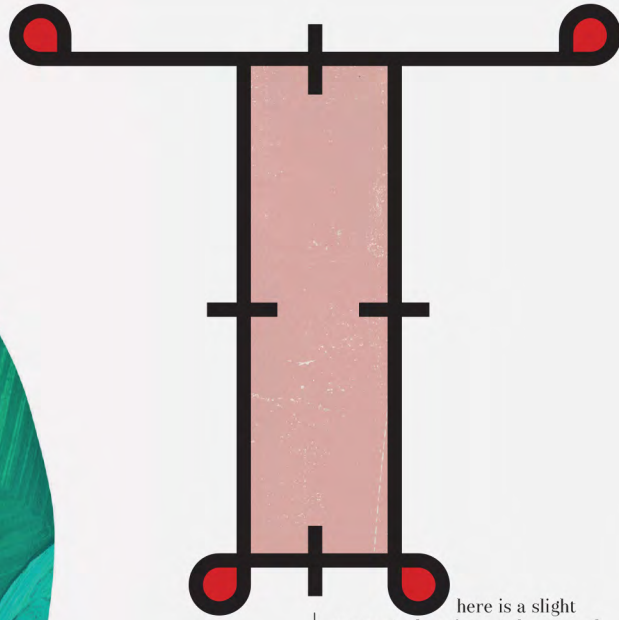




# STAR

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At the top of the fashion world, Stella McCartney is famed not just for her laid-back-but-sexy designs but also for her ethical stance within the industry. As her new store in Baku opens, she reflects on business, family and the perfect breakfast.

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here is a slight moment of anxiety at the genteel Clarke's cafe in Notting Hill when Stella McCartney decides to order scrambled eggs with coffee and grapefruit juice. The eggs are not the issue, nor is the grapefruit juice, which McCartney commends for its alkalinizing properties; no, the issue is the lack of wheat-free bread. The amiable maître d' pops across the road to purchase a small loaf and the problem is solved. "These are the best eggs and the toast is delicious - I really think you should add this to your repertoire," declares McCartney after the triumphant breakfast.

With her pretty freckled face and strawberry blonde hair all working in a soothing tonal harmony with her chunky cable-knit camel sweater, jeans and flat, tan ankle boots, McCartney looks content and satisfied. She is happily married to brand consultant Alasdhair Willis (they have four children under the age of eight) and is now on top of a world-class fashion house that delivers glamour and style to women everywhere. Her eponymous business, which is backed by François-Henri Pinault's Kering group, the owner of Gucci, Puma and Saint Laurent Paris among many other luxury brands, is now an impressive 13 years old.

"It's a long time - where did that go?" she says. "It's mad. The time has gone quickly but then no one really looks back on life - you are just getting on with it and proceeding forward. When I do stop for a moment,



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the thing that hits me is that I am chuffed that I am still around. For me, it feels like we are just starting. I want the house to have longevity. I always remember my grandpa (on my mother's side) saying it is so important in any business to have staying power."

The Stella McCartney brand certainly seems to have staying power. It also has an excitement and attraction, all of which is a potent cocktail but one that can be difficult to sustain in the febrile world of fashion.

culminated in 2012 when she was appointed Team GB's creative director by Adidas, making her the first ever fashion designer to dress an Olympic Team in full, and when she received both a British Fashion Council Designer of the Year Award and an OBE.

The launch of lines such as Kids, Adidas by Stella McCartney, and ranges of lingerie, accessories, fragrance and sunglasses has created a brand with many touchpoints relevant to a variety of lifestyles. Being a woman making clothes for women, McCartney's emphasis in her designs is on

"It really feels like there is so much more to do. It's about refining on every level. As you grow as a business the communication has to be much tighter. At the start, you assume people know what you mean but now I have found you can't say at a fitting that a dress should have a 'red blossoming hemline'. You have to say exactly what that tone of red is, whether it's more of a claret red or a deep warmer tone. You need to be precise so that the next time you come to the dress it's in the right red." She pauses over her coffee. "It's the same with the stores - I need to know exactly how a changing-room door opens and whether there is a belt on hand to help with styling. Making the ship gleam - polishing all the brass work and making it watertight - that's what it is about."

The gleaming yacht is an apt analogy for a business that traverses the globe encountering women of all kinds of cultural backgrounds and expectations. In 2014 Stella McCartney will be opening a shop in Baku, the latest in a line up of 26 stores and 600 selling points worldwide. "We try to take into account different cultures and



*Models on the runway at the Stella McCartney spring/summer 2014 show in Paris (above, top centre and far right); McCartney at the Chloé show in 1999 and in 1997 with Kate Moss; McCartney designs on the red carpet as worn by Cameron Diaz (left) and Kristen Stewart, in 2013.*

started up her own label as a 50/50 venture with Kering. She wooed critics with her deft mix of masculine, Savile Row-influenced tailoring and delicate feminine pieces and that juxtaposition has become part of the brand's DNA. Over the years, the design ante has been upped with elegant new organic silhouettes, artisan fabrics and details, and a winning way with day to evening pieces. This

ease of wear rather than fantasy, and that pragmatism has won her thousands of loyal customers - she counts Kate Hudson, Liv Tyler, Kate Winslet and Gwyneth Paltrow among her friends and fans. Alongside Phoebe Philo at Céline (her former right-hand at Chloé), Isabel Marant, and Sarah Burton at Alexander McQueen, McCartney has made this the era of the female designer and one in which the issue of ethical fashion has come to the fore.

With tenacity, ingenuity and a great deal of passion, the McCartney team continues to surprise and delight. "I'm a perfectionist and I do have high standards about how I like to work and to live and I always believe you can do something better," she says.

needs and create a reflection of our world in that. It's not about treating everywhere as the same, shoving a shop here and there - what we are doing is joining the dots, mapping out little conversations with women. The stores have a thread that is similar and the work is housed in a certain way but they have different expressions," explains McCartney of the brand's site-specific agenda. "The world of Stella touches different types of women, different parts of their lives - from daywear to cocktail to sport to kidswear - and in Baku hopefully women will respond to those elements."

McCartney, like her mother, Linda, is a staunch vegetarian and champions ethical





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and environmental awareness in all areas of her business. Her environmentally sensitive, holistic view permeates every part of the company. It is one of very few fashion businesses that does not use leather, skins or furs in any of its products, and that is some feat given the historic reliance on these in the luxury fashion market. Developing an attractive line of non-leather, non-PVC accessories has been a huge challenge. Yet such hits as the chain-trimmed Falabella line of bags, print-canvas platforms and a sleek line of sunglasses are paying off as commercially viable, proving it can be done. This approach extends to the use of wind power to generate electricity, printing on both sides of the paper, and the ban on plastic bottles in the office.

To instil sustainable principles in a business that depends upon newness and disposability requires something of an intellectual headstand. But if anyone can do it, McCartney can. "For me, there are many different levels," she says. "Number one is about designing timeless, investment pieces that do not really go out of style – disposable fashion is environmentally



McCartney's particular style signature is rather like herself – personal, nonchalant, tomboyish yet deeply feminine. She has delivered numerous variations on the tuxedo suit, transformed the all-in-one into a viable evening option and is a master of the cocktail dress with a difference, whether through a beautiful print, delicate lace, strategic cut outs or clever contouring panels and seams. From the boardroom to the red carpet, women look very comfortable and sensual in her designs rather than upright and over-polished. For spring/summer 2014 you will find sporty soft tailoring in the shape of zipped jacket trackstyle suits; gently voluminous mid-calf-length skirts in daisy silk jacquard; and romantic lace dresses that shift from matt to sheer, showing off areas of the body. "I really feel for fluidity, softness, femininity – the collection was less strict and more romantic," says McCartney, her speech replete with the designer's lexicon of adjectives and comparisons.

Where McCartney might not be able to deploy the sheen and shine of sequins and exotic skins, she does employ the arresting, thought-provoking power of art. In the past, she has collaborated with artists Gary Hume, Jake and Dinos

thing, but there's a side to me that is allergic to absolute perfection," she ponders. "I'm intentionally a little bit rough around the edges. When everything is all too slick it does not feel right."

The same is true of her home life. Having grown up in the countryside, McCartney remains very outdoorsy and grounded. She and Alasdhair do the school run, they encourage their kids to be very active and spend the weekends at their country house in Worcestershire riding horses and going on adventures. "Even if there is a snowstorm, I make sure we wrap up and get outside!"

Over the years, McCartney has learnt to manage her own presence and the halo effect of her legendary family name with good grace. When on 'tour' or at public events she is friendly and generous to the shutter-clicking crowds and autograph



Far left: Stella McCartney as a child in 1976 with parents Paul and Linda, and sister Mary. Centre, left and above left: McCartney in New York in 2013 with Madonna, her husband Alasdhair Willis, and Liv Tyler. Above: McCartney with her OBE at Buckingham Palace, London, 2013.



unfriendly." She is well-versed in green ideology and employs professional advisers to help on strategic decisions in this area of her work. "The biggest impact is no fur – over 15 million animals are killed for fashion every year. Even if you remove the issue of what people do to the animals, the water and grain that it takes to keep 50 million animals is crazy. The food that is needed could feed many, many more people and the use of land mass is inefficient, too. And we must be one of the very few fashion companies not to use PVC. It's very hard to find sequins!" says McCartney throwing her hands up at this small but important quest. After all, sequins are global shorthand for glamour from São Paulo to Shanghai.

Chapman, Jeff Koons, Rob Pruitt, Ryan McGinley and satirist Robert Crumb on specific pieces as well as on prints. "I've always loved and collected art and I have a lot of friends in that field but I only do something for the brand if it feels right – you have to let the artists' work speak," she explains. She finds that collaborating with artists tends to result in an interesting frisson, but what repels McCartney is anything that feels too forced, contrived or too perfect. "Maybe it's a British

hunters, happily positioning herself as one of the girls. It was not always so. "When I first started going to art school and was leaving home physically and mentally I was so defensive about the fame thing and who my parents are." But for McCartney, it's never been about the fame. "What I do for a living is not about me, or at least I try to make it that way," she explains. "I provide a service for women. Psychologically, I want to make women feel the best they can – that's my job and that's what makes me feel rewarded inside. Women have an emotional response to my work and that's what it is about." McCartney sips the last of the grapefruit juice. "I just want everyone to be in my gang!" ■