Zegna unveils Mahershala Ali’s new #whatmakesaman ad campaign

By Godfrey Deeny - 7 September 2019

Zegna unveiled its latest ad campaign Thursday night in New York, with the Italian brand nabbing double Oscar winner Mahershala Ali as its style ambassador.

Irina Shayk, Benjamin Millepied, Alexi Lubomirski, Fabien Baron, Cameron Dallas, Patrick Finnegan, Tina Leung, John Dempsey and Michael Avedon joined a score of New York and visiting editors on the roof terrace of the mansion of Keith and Inga Rubenstein, the hard-charging property developer, for the soirée.

Located on Manhattan’s gold coast, on 62nd street between Madison and Central park, the tony townhouse boasted huge Damien Hirst paintings and Ron Arad chairs – ideal setting for the spicy Italian dinner by chef Mario Carbone.

In a novel move, Zegna's artistic director Alessandro Sartori introduced the campaign with a debate with the actor on what it means to be a man. Ali has won Oscars for both Moonlight and Green Book, the only Muslim actor to win an Academy Award.

Shot in the streets of Los Angeles by Josh Olins, the mini videos manage to be gritty yet elegiac. Capturing Ali and songwriter and actor Nicholas Tse in a playful spirit – dressed in a wide-ranging Zegna wardrobe – graceful cashmere coats; tuxes; deconstructed jackets and fabulous intarsia architectural silk jerkins.

“One of my earliest memories sincerely was learning how to match. My mother and father both had a real appreciation for clothing and being conscious how you felt walking out of your home. So I remember being three years old and knowing how to put an outfit together. And in 1993, something happened that informed how I feel about Zegna. My dad said I was not allowed to wear school clothes this year, but fine; you think. And he said me see...
about Zegna. My dad said I am not getting you any school clothes this year, but just one thing. And he said we are
going to this store called Barneys!” said the baritone-voiced, 25-year-old Ali, who comes from working class
Oakland in the Bay Area of San Francisco.

“And I looked at the price tags, and I am going, 'My God this is crazy!' But dad got me a beautiful sweater, which I
have to this day. It was an initial disappointment, but a lesson that you have to value quality over quantity. That's
what I learnt from my dad that day, and why I love Zegna,” said Ali, dressed in an aubergine mohair suit finished
with Sartori’s signature ski pant ankles.

Founded in 1910 in Trivero, west of Milan, Zegna is one of Italy’s classiest labels, which under Sartori has added
an element of sartorial panache and subtle edge. Its previous campaign starred another Oscar winner, Robert De
Niro.

“Once I made a capsule collection for today made exclusively for friends. And when we showed it in our LA store I
was surprisingly shocked to see you [Ali], a very elegant man coming to see my work… To discuss modern
masculinity, it’s about the aura around a person, who can be fragile and love and express their feelings, which is a
sign of strength,” said Alessandro Sartori, who goes by the diminutive Ale.

A #whatmakesaman T-Shirt is to be sold in Zegna stores, proceeds of which will go to a global charity supporting
education.

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