Kenzo poised to appoint Charaf Tajer of Casablanca as new designer, sources say

By Godfrey Deeny - 28 April 2021

The house of Kenzo is poised to appoint Charaf Tajer of Casablanca to be its new designer, according to sources in Paris.

Tajer would succeed Felipe Oliveira Baptista, who left the Paris-based house this Monday.

Kenzo, which is part of the giant French luxury conglomerate LVMH, said at Baptista’s departure that the house had decided not to renew his contract. Technically, Baptista will step down as artistic director after just two years on June 30, 2021.

A Kenzo spokesman initially declined to comment on the choice of Charaf, but then texted FashionNetwork.com saying it was not true.
A publicist who handles Casablanca said: “That is not something I can comment on.”

One other name being bandied about for the position at Kenzo is the indie French designer Marine Serre. However, according to well-informed sources, LVMH likes the idea of the high-energy Charaf leading the house, which was founded in 1976 by the late Kenzo Takada.

Charaf launched his own fashion brand Casablanca with a Spring/Summer 2019 collection in June 2018. His opening showroom was his mother’s living room in Belleville, the bustling neighborhood in northern Paris. Now, barely five seasons later, Casablanca retails in over 200 doors, including top-line destination retailers like Browns, United Arrows, Maxfield, Smets and Isetan. The likes of Gigi Hadid, Kendall Jenner and Hailey Bieber have all been seen wearing Casablanca.

Last year, Charaf’s rapidly growing party-hearty brand staged its first show on the official calendar of the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, French fashion’s governing body. A significant recognition of its explosive growth and propulsive style.

Keeping up the momentum, this January, during the Paris menswear season, Charaf staged a show video shot inside the Traveller’s Club, a 19th-century mansion built by a courtesan on the Champs-Élysées. The collection featured a cast of fictive Grand Prix pilots, lovers and glamazons. For women: capes in red checkered flags, saucy black and white checkered cocktails, silk blouses with stocks, or snazzy ’70s pantsuits. Casablanca guys – a diverse cast reflecting contemporary France – donned male versions of the Chanel suit or preppy yellow and pink Ralph Lauren pants and trompe-l’oeil tuxedos. Charaf’s interlocking double-’C’ logo was everywhere.

Charaf is also a first-rate print specialist – mingling Art Deco gothic, race-car illustrations and retro card designs. No shrinking violet, he even made an appearance in his own video, playing piano while dressed in a red and white harlequin coat.

Casablanca also has a collab sneaker collection with New Balance. Though based in Paris, half of Charaf’s creative team and management live in London. Charaf is expected to maintain his own independent house while at Kenzo.

His aesthetic would also appear to be closer to founder Kenzo Takada, famed for his jungle- and big-cat prints. Indeed, under Baptista’s predecessor, the Opening Ceremony duo of Humberto Leon and Carol Lim, the house’s best-selling items were bold tiger-print sweatshirts. Humberto Leon and Carol Lim, who left Kenzo in 2019, also maintained their own label Opening Ceremony throughout their stint at Kenzo.

The choice of Charaf also underlines the general strategy of LVMH to choose designers who generate plenty of social and traditional media heat. The Casablanca brand has 257,000 followers on Instagram.
“Casablanca is very happening right now. So LVMH has gone for buzz. Just like at Vuitton and at Dior. It’s part of the same pattern. Anyway, they probably only really wanted tiger T-shirts from Felipe," commented one well-informed source.

By Godfrey Deeny.

Copyright © 2021 FashionNetwork.com All rights reserved.