Fausto Puglisi on reviving Cavalli; partisan chic and working with Mike Tyson

By Godfrey Deeny - 20 July 2021

Fausto Puglisi has unveiled his debut collection for the house of Roberto Cavalli, and the designer has come out swinging.

A Sicilian-born designer who has dressed the likes of Beyonce, Lady Gaga and Jennifer Lopez, Puglisi presented a techno-Tuscan-rock-star collection that felt like an instant hit.

Born in Messina, an ancient city founded by the Greeks 2,800 years ago that boasts Norman and gothic influences, Puglisi is a composite designer himself, blending Italian exuberance with Californian cool.

He showed his first women's ideas for Cavalli in February, and followed that up last night with his debut menswear show for the Florentine marque.

So we caught up with this maximalist from Messina to hear about how he plans to revive Cavalli and hear about his colorful vision for the brand.

**FashionNetwork.com: Why have you decided to branch into menswear?**

**Fausto Puglisi:** I am trying to put Cavalli back on track. I want to celebrate the Cavalli DNA but also recognize we are living in a different world in terms of the perception of women, and men. Like, for instance, the idea of a Cavalli playboy. You cannot speak about a Cavalli playboy now. To me, the young generation is very fluid and I think we need to think of Cavalli without any boundaries - fluid and interactive between men and women.

And I was very excited by the reaction from buyers so far, like Selfridges and Neiman Marcus, who both loved the first women's collection I showed in February. So, I call this collection Season Zero, a bridge between the past and what's next.

**FNW: What is your focus in your first Cavalli men's ideas?**

**FP:** The new Cavalli a wardrobe is all about separates. I want to respect the flamboyance of the brand. I am an in-your-face Italian and I cannot be a northern European intellectual. I am trying to translate Cavalli today for China and USA, London and Paris. This young generation likes to be strong but they don't want to look like clowns. It's like when you are in New York and go to Magnolia bakery at 2am - before Covid, of course - and just order a little cake and you are part of that world. And you are wearing a vintage shirt – and shorts bought in Nike Town.

Guys today go on the online store to get Cavalli jeans, a Cavalli shirt and mix that with Zara pants, his grandfather's shirts or sweatshirts. I also want to seriously develop the denim and knitwear, showing lots of jacquard – since we have the best in Italy.
FNW: Roberto Cavalli was one of the greatest printmakers in fashion history; combining the Renaissance with rock and roll. How do you want to use that legacy?
FP: I have a real memory of prints my grandfather loved. He was part of the partisans who freed Italy from Fascism. And he used to love the American military and navy who came from their ships in vintage Hawaiian shirts. He used to wear them too just like his American pals, so that was an early obsession of mine.

To me, Cavalli is like a Ferrari but translated in a very human way. Not a distant playboy, but one who enjoys wine, friends and desires and loves beautiful denim. I see the Cavalli guy skating to a Brooklyn garage in new oily-looking jeans with a sense of car culture. Very very urban and more democratic.

FNW: Why did you work with Mike Tyson?
FP: I visited a wax museum in New York before Covid when I was designing Madonna costumes and I saw The Trinity: Michael Jackson, Michael Jordan and Mike Tyson, playing monopoly. And I thought of the power of icons and I thought of Warhol’s Mao and the power of icons to become legends. Today, I hate all these judgments of social media. It is important to have a second chance in life and learning from the past and making a new life, which Mike has done.

And, if you ask a 16-year-old or an 80-year-old who Mike Tyson is, they all know him. No one has a bigger demographic. When we were filming the video here in Milan, one of the models of 19 who practices boxing in London even had the lighter of Mike Tyson! He is like the Statue of Liberty, Marilyn Monroe and Coca Cola. He is an icon forever, who paid his price.

FNW: You were born in southern Italy, right? How do you adjust to designing a Tuscan brand?
FP: I am Sicilian. But Sicily was dominated by foreigners - Arab, Roman, Spanish, Norman and British. So, it is where different cultures live together like in Palermo. It is an island where we always had empathy and accepted idea of living together. Plus, I am proud to say it is in the roots of Liza Minnelli, Al Pacino and Lady Gaga. You know, I moved to New York when I was 18 and I met my cousin, and you know where he was working? Robert De Niro’s restaurant.

FNW: With your own brand you have dressed Jennifer Lopez, Madonna, Beyonce. Who do you want to wear Cavalli men?
FP: Obama and, oh my God! Mike Tyson as well. De Niro, Pacino and Scorsese. I am in love with him! And Travis Scott and Kanye.

FNW: What is the DNA of Cavalli?
FP: I am approaching this job with respect for Roberto as I have to live in his fashion house and touch the brand. Roberto was larger than life and loved animals, people and paintings. We have been working deep in the archives – for very Cavalli results – and are starting to put the lights on Instagram. I still live in Milano – as our headquarters are here on Via Bagutta and we moved the archives to Milan as well.

FNW: What have you most enjoyed discovering in the Cavalli archives?
FP: The genius of Roberto, especially in the '70s when he was not known and not famous. Before he dressed Oscars stars and Sharon Stone and Cannes. Finding out how he was very sincere and human and allowed himself to dream, and worked very hard to make something new. Discovering jeans, which he literally used to paint himself, and how he was both mature and naive.