Maison Kitsuné's Gildas Loaëc: “Our story isn’t like a standard business school case study”

By Anaïs Lerévérend | 4 May 2018

French-Japanese label Maison Kitsuné, originally Kitsuné, was created in 2002, and has come a long way since then. Its co-founders Gildas Loaëc and Masaya Kuroki, still in charge of the company, lead a label currently worth €40 million in revenue, operating 12 monobrand stores and distributed via over 300 retailers. After Japanese group Stripe International invested again in Maison Kitsuné, Gildas Loaëc spoke to FashionNetwork.com, giving more details about the label’s recipe for success and future ambitions.

FashionNetwork.com: How, as a highly international label, do you design for both Japanese and French consumers? How do you create a kind of universal style?

Gildas Loaëc: This is what’s so brilliant about it! Managing to produce a collection which appeals as much as possible to as many people as possible, people with widely different cultures and morphologies. It requires a special kind of thinking, and it certainly isn’t an exact science. To do it, we rely on our French-Japanese roots; it comes natural to us of course and, besides drawing on these influences, we try to create a fashion that is relevant for the greatest possible number of countries. We have the opportunity of travelling a lot, and also of having stores in France, New York and Japan, so we can monitor and anticipate what is likely to appeal to consumers from many different regions.

FNW: How would you describe the profile of the Maison Kitsuné community today?

GL: I’d say they are men and women aged between 20 and 35. They are a web-savvy, international community, and we will soon have new ways of connecting with them. We started working with 24Sèvres, and we also want to do more with Galeries Lafayette, with the department store's branches outside Paris for example, and with their international projects in China or the Middle East. The Galeries Lafayette’s clientèle is very similar to ours. We are interested in the group's customers, and vice versa.
Can you tell us more about the London opening you’re planning for 2019?

GL: We’re working on it ... But I won’t say anything else, as I won’t say anything more about Vancouver either. In terms of new stores, we opened in Kyoto last November, and a small boutique in Honolulu in December. There may be something on the cards in South Korea, and why not Indonesia afterwards? Besides these, we are also working on new openings in our second line of business, Café Kitsuné. We are planning a series of openings with this concept in Japan, and we also have ideas on how to integrate Café Kitsuné in department stores.

Does a Café Kitsuné have to be next door to a store, or will you develop them independently?

GL: There isn’t a rule. They can be linked to a store, or not. They are actually two separate businesses. Let me be clear: we want to sell coffee. Lots of coffee. It's not just a concept, it's another business we are keen to get to know. From plantations to roasting to end-consumers. It all stems from Masaya’s passion for coffee. Urban myth has it that he’s been drinking coffee since he was two. We both believe that our brand has an affinity with the niche, quality coffee segment, and can carve out a space within it.

Wearing many hats, being what you might call a lifestyle label, was what made you unique to begin with. How do you regard the fact that many brands want to do the same nowadays?

GL: It’s how we are, it isn’t a contrived marketing approach, we aren’t doing it just for show. Our first business was music, and we’re still very busy at it. Then came fashion, and we’re still very busy at it too. Now there’s also this food & drink business, as they call it. I prefer to use the French expression ‘art de vivre’, art of living. Each of these ventures could exist independent of the others. Our story isn’t like a standard business school case study. We want to do things thoroughly, with passion.