

STYLE & FASHION

20 ODD QUESTIONS

TOMMY HILFIGER

The all-American designer on the one piece of clothing every man should own, his dreams of a Hilfiger Hotel and the lifetime achievement award he's accepting next week

WITH HIS BOYISH HAIRCUT and mischievous grin, it's hard to believe that Tommy Hilfiger is about to receive the Geoffrey Beene lifetime achievement award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America. But the man whose Nantucket-meets-hip-hop designs helped define late '90s cool is now 61—with four of his children grown, his business long since sold to private investors and a quieter, comfortable life with second wife Dee Ocleppo and their 2½ year-old son, Sebastian.

Yet with his recent gig as an image adviser for "American Idol" and his investment last year in luxury British biker brand Belstaff, quiet certainly doesn't spell boring for Mr. Hilfiger. While his main men's line is now overseen by British designer Simon Spurr—and his women's by Peter Som—Mr. Hilfiger still has the final word on more than a dozen annual collections as principal designer of the Tommy Hilfiger Group, the company he founded in 1985. As for Belstaff, Mr. Hilfiger will serve as a board member and adviser for the 88-year-old label, which plans to open a New York boutique this fall, followed by a five-story London flagship in 2013.

The growing international presence makes sense for Mr. Hilfiger, whose name has become a global brand, not just an American one. "Our style of American heritage has this 'cool factor' that appeals to cultures world-wide," said Mr. Hilfiger last week. "From cowboys and Indians to the Las Vegas Strip, I've lived my life steeped in Americana and pop culture," he added. "I'd like to think I've had a part in spreading it across the globe."

I was more a quasi-hippie than a true hippie during the '70s. Real hippies lived in communes and didn't believe in commercialism or capitalism—but I loved the idea of being in business and I didn't want to sleep in a tent.

My [older] son lives in Los Angeles so we spend a lot of time out there. Usually we stay at the Peninsula Beverly Hills, which has outstanding service, an incredible location and the food is above average. The rooftop cabanas let you feel like you're on vacation.

My favorite beaches are on the island of Mustique, where we have a home. The sand is white, the water temperature is perfect and the weather is amazing. The place has this primitive feeling of elegance.

There's no longer an American consumer or Italian consumer or English consumer—only global consumers. Fashion today offers so many choices that customers now are as comfortable with Topshop as they are with Balenciaga. I'm happy we found our niche within this marketplace.

I'm not regularly attacked by the paparazzi but we do have our occasional run-ins with them. It's intense; I wouldn't want to be Brad Pitt.

Vintage shopping in Los Angeles is much more interesting than in New York—particularly boutiques like Decades, American Rag, What Goes Around Comes Around and Lily et Cie. Their owners are like curators and are more daring than in Manhattan.

I'm not a "spa" kind of guy, but I love outdoor sports—beach volleyball, biking, tennis and skiing with my family. I just wish I had more time for them.

Andy Warhol was a major inspiration for me. He had this great talent for mixing together the four elements of FAME:

fashion, art, music and entertainment. He really knew how to bring these worlds together.

I recently fell in love with the Leela Palace Hotel in Bangalore, India. The hotel's design blends Art Deco with royal Indian styles and was built by my friends, the Nair family, who own magnificent, six-star palace hotels across country.

My favorite New York restaurant is Cipriani on Fifth Avenue. It's close to my home, the food and service are great. Serge, the maître d', is one of New York's best. I'm a terrible cook, so I eat there often.

I met my wife, Dee, in St. Tropez and every year we yacht along the French and Italian Rivieras. I like the privacy of yachting, the ability to gather my entire family in one place.

I wanted to be a professional athlete when I was young, but was too small to play football or basketball. I wore bell-bottoms and had long hair, but wasn't talented enough to be a rock star. Maybe I would have been an actor—though I'm very happy with the way things turned out.

I grew up on classic rock—the Beatles, the Doors, Hendrix, Led Zeppelin. Back then, we didn't download singles, we bought entire albums—and listened to every single word of every single song until the next album came out.

When you're raised in a family of nine kids you quickly learn to group together and work as a team. But you also learn to respect a wide range of styles and points of view, which was of enormous value when I developed my business because there are many different consumers with many different tastes.

The last great gift I received was a magnificent Haultence watch from my



wife. I gave her a great book and a piece of jewelry to go with it.

Nothing beats private jets—they're the ultimate luxury in life and the best way to save time and maximize flexibility.

I always thought you had to be far more accomplished to receive a lifetime achievement award, but if the CFDA is giving it out, I'll take it with pleasure.

The way children learn today is far different than 20 years ago. My youngest son is only 2½ and already knows how to use an iPad and iPhone. My oldest kids didn't even start on computers until they were in high school.

I probably wear my own designs 99% of the time. I'm a perfectionist and want to ensure that the fit is just right, that the piece washes properly. I'm definitely my harshest critic.

Every man should own a well-tailored tuxedo and great two-button navy blazer. The tux should be from



TOMMY BOY Clockwise from center: Tommy Hilfiger; a postcard from Elmira, N.Y.; a look from Tommy Hilfiger's fall women's collection; Jon Voight and Dustin Hoffman in "Midnight Cowboy"; Mr. Hilfiger's yacht; a men's look from fall; Jim Morrison; Leela Palace Hotel in Bangalore, India.



Anderson & Sheppard in London—and the blazer, of course, from Tommy Hilfiger.

One of my favorite movies from the '60s is "Midnight Cowboy." I really love Dustin Hoffman's performance.

My fall 2012 men's collection is influenced by everything from military prep to rock 'n' roll. The look is sophisticated—yet a touch rebellious and still buttoned-up.

America is still a great melting pot, with Hispanics, African-Americans, Asians and Caucasians—many types of people with many types of beliefs. These are the values that built America and it's important for me to portray this reality in my advertising.

I love Manhattan's Upper East Side—it's my home and where I feel safe. But I still enjoy the restaurants and ambience of SoHo and the East Village, where I lived when I was younger.

My hometown, Elmira, may be in New York State but it feels like Middle America—small-town U.S.A. surrounded by farmland with old-fashioned values and a laid-back style of living.

I'm not sure where or when, but one of my future dreams is to possibly open a hotel. Like my clothing, the style would be classic American cool paired with everything I love about luxury properties, like a great restaurant, towels and bedding.

—Edited from an interview by David Kaufman

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