

TITLE

Stella McCartney: responsibility's on the agenda

INTRO

She is one of the most successful fashion designers of our time and the woman behind the world's first vegetarian luxury fashion brand. But the road to the top has been tough. Stella McCartney talks to Anna Blom about panic attacks and the 'rich daddy's girl' label, and her own hard slog to get the fashion industry to become sustainable and modern.

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How can you become one of the world's most successful fashion designers without using real leather? Stella McCartney, founder of the fashion house of the same name and daughter of ex-Beatle Sir Paul McCartney, has done just that.

Famous for her feminine silhouettes and masculine-inspired garments, her fashion emporium is worth billions. Her 'Falabella' bag from 2010 is an icon, despite the fact that it is made using 'eco alter nappa', a mixture of recycled polyester and vegetable oils.

Ever since her graduation show from Central Saint Martins in London in 1995, she has refused to use real leather, furs or feathers. She has been vegetarian since childhood, and when she was growing up her father Paul used to challenge her and her siblings to come up with an alternative to meat for the family's dinner. Her late mother Linda McCartney even launched a successful series of frozen vegetarian food in the UK, long before today's veggie trend. This consideration for people, animals and nature has followed Stella McCartney throughout her life.

"For me, vegetarianism is based on ethics. My mum was very vocal and we were all educated to understand why we weren't eating meat. But actually, now I look at it from all different angles. I think it's very wrong to have the mass murder, every single day, of millions of animals," explains Stella McCartney to SPG.

With her heart-shaped face, porcelain skin and strawberry blonde hair, Stella McCartney looks like a mix between Grace Kelly and Pippi Longstocking. Cool and with the beauty afforded by a fortunate life, she's not afraid of taking a stand, whether it's fighting against breast cancer and violence against women or criticising the fashion industry's old-fashioned ways and

environmental pollution. But even though she's a pioneer in sustainable luxury fashion, she doesn't see herself as an activist.

"I'm a fashion designer. My first job is to make desirable, luxurious, beautiful clothing and accessories that women want to buy. But I will always take the opportunity to use a beautiful organic fabric. I obviously don't use any animal skins or furs in my collections which has a huge impact on the planet." [For example, Brazilian calf leather has 24 times the negative environmental impact of recycled polyester, according to analysis carried out by the fashion house - Ed.]

"If I can be environmentally-friendly without sacrificing design, then there is no reason not to."

But the journey towards this type of choice has been tough—despite the fact that McCartney was born in the limelight and had 'everything'. Booed collections, scepticism about the sustainability ideal which until recently was seen as uncool and the 'rich daddy's girl' label have stalked her. People turned their noses up when in 1997 she, at 25, succeeded Karl Lagerfeld at the French fashion house Chloé. "I think they should have taken a big name," said Lagerfeld to *Women's Wear Daily*. "They did—but in music, not fashion. Let's hope she is as gifted as her father."

She was. With the help of assistant Phoebe Philo, who is today a successful designer at Céline, McCartney managed to increase sales fivefold. Clothes for a relaxed, luxury-loving bohemian were her success formula: silky trench coats, lace and stiletto heels, mixed with horse motifs, seventies inspired jeans, diamond star aviator sunglasses and humorous T-shirts.

After turning Chloé into the hottest brand in Paris, Stella McCartney had bigger plans. In partnership with the luxury conglomerate Kering, her own fashion house was born in 2001. "I thought hard about setting up my own label, but I realised that after all my questioning and worry—I was even having panic attacks—what I most admired was people who were independent. So I thought, that's me!"

Her own brand sold well even though business was slow at first. According to the fashion website *Business of Fashion*, Kering issued her with an ultimatum in 2004: either she would have to turn a profit within three years, or risk losing their financial

support. McCartney put everything she had into expanding her client base. She had already reached a fairly wide audience through her extremely popular rose and amber scented perfume 'Stella', but now she also started a partnership with sportswear giant Adidas, and designed a budget collection for H&M which sold out in a couple of days - or just a couple of hours in some stores. One year before the deadline the fashion house was in profit. The rest is history.

Her dream of being a designer started early.

"I used to love all the old films with Audrey Hepburn and Doris Day when I was little and would get obsessed with the clothes. 'Annie Get Your Gun' was my absolute favourite. I would watch it and go to my mum's wardrobe to look at her clothes and try them on." (McCartney even made a small but memorable appearance in the film version of the fashion satire "Absolutely Fabulous" in 2016.)

Her childhood spent on a farm has been a large source of inspiration, from her parents' flamboyant clothes to the music that flowed there: from Neil Young and Bob Marley to Talking Heads. After her studies she went to apprentice with Savile Row tailor Edward Sexton.

"Tailoring is part of the DNA of the brand. That apprenticeship taught me a huge amount; from how to cut and construct a sleeve to the importance of fabrics."

Despite her passion for men's tailoring, her first menswear collection only came out last year.

"For so long now I've had men come up to me and say 'why don't you do menswear, when will you do menswear, please do it.' When designing the collection I thought of the men in my life, my husband, my father and my friends; they constantly inspire me. But I also looked at a lot of great men of the world."

It's an early March morning in Paris in 2017, and Stella is showing her winter collection shortly. It's the first show of the day and the model's hair is styled simply with water. Soon the catwalk is filled with black faux leather trousers, imitation suede jackets and faux leather bags. Silhouettes include equestrian-inspired tailoring, checked tweed from head to toe and oversized jackets with nipped in waists. A quilted hunting jacket reminiscent of a young Elizabeth II in the TV series 'The Crown'. Knit and silk crepe de

chine with prints from the eighteenth-century artist George Stubbs, of 'Horse Frightened by a Lion'. Short, checked plaid dresses and conical bras as projecting details on camel-coloured jumpsuits, a fifties feature that can be interpreted as a comment on how much more freely contemporary women can express their sexuality.

These are clothes for a woman who, according to McCartney, is "naturally sexy, naturally confident and modern". For the finale the models danced to George Michael's 'Faith' with a refrain by Princess Nokia: 'don't you f*** with my energy'.

And talking about energy: the Stella McCartney who once partied her way around London with Kate Moss is now the mother of four children who always tries to be home for story time. With a packed schedule and the world as her workplace it's challenging—but McCartney isn't afraid of challenges.

She recently started a collaboration with Californian biotech company Bolt Threads. Together they have created a vegan-friendly silk made from yeast, and those who visit New York this autumn can see the partnership's first piece—a gold dress in protein-based yarn—in the 'Is Fashion Modern?' exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.

As long as McCartney is driving development, the answer to that question is positive.

'Is Fashion Modern?', an exhibition about fashion design from 1994 onwards, is being held at The Museum of Modern Art in New York until 28 January 2018.

Fact box

Name: Stella McCartney.

Age: 46.

Family: Daughter of ex-Beatle Paul McCartney and the late American photographer, musician and animal rights activist Linda McCartney. Married to Alasdair Willis, former co-founder and publisher of Wallpaper and now creative director of the British brand Hunter. The couple have four children: two sons, Miller and Beckett, and two daughters, Bailey and Reiley.

Lives: London

Currently: One of the world's most successful female fashion designers and the founder of the first and only vegetarian luxury fashion brand. The designer doesn't use furs, skins or feathers in her collections.

Things you didn't know about Stella McCartney:

- She only wears clothes by her own brand
- She found the inspiration for her new menswear collection in the late George Harrison's wardrobe while visiting Olivia Harrison
- She designed her first piece at age 12: a pink bomber jacket in imitation suede
- When she enrolled at university, she used the pseudonym Stella Martin
- When the McCartney-Willis couple got married on the Isle of Bute they did a special choreographed dance for guests to the tune of Louis Armstrong's 'A kiss to build a dream on'
- If she could choose one book to take with her to a desert island, she would take her father's book 'Japanese Jailbird'. It's about the ex-Beatle's experience in a Japanese prison after being jailed for marijuana possession. He wrote it and kept it locked away until his children were old enough to read it and understand what had happened.

Source: Desert Island Discs on BBC Radio 4, 2017

Milestones (selected):

1971 – Stella McCartney (OBE) was born in London to ex-Beatle Sir Paul McCartney and the late American photographer, musician and animal rights activist Linda McCartney

1976 – The family moved from London to an organic farm in the British countryside

1983 – McCartney designed her first piece: a pink bomber jacket in imitation suede

1986 – Interned in Paris with fashion designer Christian Lacroix for his first couture collection

1995 – McCartney studied fashion design at design school Central Saint Martins in London. In her free time, she was an apprentice to Savile Row tailor Edward Sexton (then master cutter for the late Tommy Nutter, the re-inventor of the Savile Row suit)

1995 – The designer's graduation collection made headlines around the world after her supermodel friends Kate Moss, Yasmin Le Bon and Naomi Campbell featured on McCartney's catwalk

1997 – At just 25, Stella McCartney was named creative director of French fashion house Chloé, succeeding 'Kaiser Karl', Karl Lagerfeld

1998 – Stella McCartney's mother Linda McCartney died after a brief battle with breast cancer

2000 – Won Designer of the year at the VH1/Vogue Fashion and Music Awards in New York. The prize was presented to her by her father and David Bowie

2001 – Started a fashion brand in her own name with French luxury conglomerate Kering with 50/50 ownership. McCartney showed her first collection in Paris in October.

2004 – Initiated a partnership with sportswear giant Adidas

2005 – Released a collaborative collection with H&M. The line, which consisted of forties ladies' clothes and accessories, was sold in 400 H&M stores across 22 different markets and even on-line in Scandinavia. The collection was a huge success that sold out straight away and made McCartney known to the masses

2009 – Launched the international campaign Meat Free Monday with her father and sister Mary McCartney. The campaign aims to get people to decrease their meat consumption by eating vegetarian food one day a week

2010 – Launched the It bag 'The Falabella'. Today the bag in faux leather is one of the fashion house's best-sellers.

2010 – Released a line of clothes for children from newborns up to 14-year olds

2012 – Stella McCartney designed the clothes for the British Olympic and Paralympic teams

2013 – Awarded the Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) for her services to fashion

Awarded the H&M & ELLE Conscious Award by Swedish Elle

2016 – Dressed the British athletes taking part in the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro

Showed her first menswear collection for Spring/Summer 2017 on the catwalk

All the viscose in her collections is sourced from FSC certified (which means that the forest raw material can be traced back to its origin in sustainable forests) Swedish forests