

Street smarts

Alexander Wang, the boy wonder who became creative director of venerated fashion house Balenciaga before hitting 30, speaks to **DESIREE KOH** about travel, the Internet and the rise of Asia.



This is the face of the wunderkind who unleashed the power of dressed-down chic on the polished world of couture. His name is Alexander Wang and his brand of street style, mixed with a relaxed roll-out-of-bed vibe, has been making waves since he launched his first pret-a-porter collection in 2007.

"It is fun to play with something basic and effortless while putting it in an unexpected context," says the visionary once labelled a "bouncing boy genius" by The New York Times. The San Francisco native and Parsons design school dropout has amassed some of the industry's top awards, including the Council of Fashion Designers of America/Vogue Fashion Fund award and GQ's Best New Menswear Designer award.

In 2011, the Diane von Furstenberg protege opened the first Alexander Wang store in New York; it has since grown to more than 15 stores worldwide. Last year, a flagship store was launched in Beijing, and store openings are slated for Shanghai and Tokyo in the coming months. "Asia is such a vibrant and growing market – the clients are very sophisticated in their understanding of fashion," says the 30-year-old.

Wang's ready-to-wear and accessory lines for men and women – as well as a collection of lifestyle items curated by him – are also carried by 700 retailers globally, in addition to being shipped to more than 50 countries via e-commerce websites. "The Internet and social media have made (fashion) a lot more accessible," he muses.

With the growing global footprint of his eponymous label and his appointment last year as creative director of French fashion house Balenciaga, long-distance commutes have become a way of life. But he's unfazed. "I love to travel and am inspired by the surge of different people and backgrounds that I encounter." He also has a secret to handling perpetual motion. "I sleep very well on a plane!"

After the layers and rounded silhouettes of his 2013 fall collection, fans and critics alike are eagerly anticipating what Wang will have up his sleeve at Fashion Week in September. But when probed, he would only tease, "You have to come to New York to check it out." ■