

INTERNATIONAL *habit*

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Scandinavian Fashion Business

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JOHN HENRIC

Maxjenny Forslund:

QUEEN
of prints



Maxjenny Forslund is the best model for her bold and expressive design. The bug print in the background is made with photographer Helene Toresdotter. Coat and dresses in Messy Garden print.

MASTER *of print*

Last autumn, Maxjenny Forslund decided to leave the industry's entrenched buying system of trade fairs, seasons and sales tours. Today, her collections evolve at their own pace, and her private and professional life blossoms as brightly as her expressive prints.

Text and photo CHRISTINA BILD

MAXJENNY

Owner and designer:

Maxjenny Forslund.

Established: 2016.

Headquarters: Kødbyen, Copenhagen.

Turnover 2018–2019: DKK 3 million.

In August 2018, Maxjenny Forslund said bye-bye to the fashion business's sacrosanct calendar of trade fairs and buying periods. She also decided to stop producing two major collections every season, in favour of smaller collections, released at her own pace. Her gut feeling told her this was the right way to go, but, even though, stepping away from the established norms was somehow scary.

“When I made the decision, I'd just been offered a central location at the Revolver fair in Copenhagen, and turned it down. I said to myself, this is it, it's over, that was my a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

When she started Maxjenny in 2016, she followed the standard procedure; designed a collection, booked a stand at the trade fair and found an agent. And was pleased with the orders she got. But even if she is (almost) as passionate about accounting as she is about design, she didn't really want to face up to what she was actually earning.

“It was my partner who made me realise that I need to sell through my own channels in order to make money. Even if I knew he was right, it was hard to rethink. The procedures are so ingrained in this business.”

A FEW MONTHS LATER, Maxjenny Forslund was ready to take her first steps on the new path, with her own online store and pop-ups, but also open for retailers requests, according to her own specific system.

“I just tell them to visit my website and

choose what they want. With an online code, they can check the wholesale price. And it has actually been ridiculously successful,” she says with some surprise, and adjusts her apple-green glasses.

Even though she is a native Swede, Maxjenny Forslund has lived in Copenhagen for many years, and this is also where her company is situated. Her combined office, studio and shop is situated in hot district Kødbyen in Copenhagen, together with the company's stock for deliveries to retailers and customers.

“The website is doing incredibly well. It's a pure pleasure for me to spend a Friday night at home on my couch and just enjoy the beep from my mobile every time a purchase is made,” she laughs and describes the latest orders from the UK and Ireland.

A large part of her customers are located in Stockholm, many more than in Copenhagen, but also in London, New York and Dallas. ►►



Garden Royal Collection is Maxjenny's homage to the Swedish royal family's protection and care of the unique Drottningholm Palace Theatre and its 18th-century aesthetics.



Maxjenny Forslund surrounded by her magical world of prints. The bug print on the blue dress and on the carpet is from a collaboration with photographer Helene Toresdotter. The print on the pink dress is based on a painting by the artist Oliv87. Pillows and carpet in collaboration with designer Lisa Hilland.

“For some reason, I sell quite a lot to Texas. I guess there’s someone there with a large network who likes my stuff.”

Maxjenny found her best customers through networks, where a key person serves as a micro-influencer. This is also the platform she considers to be most useful for new markets.

“You need a dedicated person to collaborate with if you want to make it in, say, Japan, but it doesn’t have to be a store. It could as well be a regular customer with a large network.”

International expansion is also the next step in the process.

“Maxjenny 2.0 is my focus right now, but I can’t do it alone, I need to find the right person to partner with.”



The designer’s own photos are the base for all prints and Maxjenny Forslund never runs out of ideas. There are always new prints in line to be completed and transformed in to wearable, eye-catching clothes.

EVEN IF THE MAXJENNY brand is relatively new, Maxjenny Forslund is certainly no rookie. She started her company when she was still at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and Design, and in 2000 she exhibited her screen-printed stools and machine embroidered sofas for the first time at furniture fairs in Milan, New York and London.

“As a student, I was so focused on success. It was serious business from day one. I shared a stand in Milan with a few fellow students, at a cost that swallowed half my student grant. And I went to every party to network and exchange business cards,” she says, and goes on to describe how she began planning her graduation show in her second year.

On graduating, Maxjenny had already started producing interior design and textiles for her company Maxjenny Superstudio and was freelancing for other companies. Her style was spot on at the time, and her red hair and outspoken personality featured regularly in the Swedish and international magazines for years.

MAXJENNY GREW UP in a family where creativity and business was a way of living. Her mother, Margareta Forslund, is a textile designer, and her father, Owe Johansson is a silversmith. It was not unexpected that their daughter would become a designer of some sort, but her choice to do a five-year degree in furniture and textile design was mainly a choice based on the school’s reputation.

“I can’t recall ever deciding what I wanted to do, it just turned out that way. But I was sort of born into the profession. I’m contaminated, but in a good way”, she says with a big laugh, and continues:

“I know what it’s like to keep track of every penny, and I thank god for my back-



Multicoloured bags, also designed by Maxjenny Forslund, and dazzling earrings complete the look at Maxjenny's pop-up store at Moodgallerian in Stockholm.

ground! I'm very pragmatic. I'm not doing this to realise my dreams. Attention doesn't pay the bills."

PATTERNS AND COLOURS have always been Maxjenny Forslund's passion, with the Memphis group and the Italian design companies Cappelini and Moroso as sources of inspiration. Her shift from furniture, glass and carpets to fashion is largely due to the inertia of the interior design industry. Physically, clothes are easier to handle than furniture. In 2005, she started her first pure fashion project, Les Couleurs Nationales, inspired by the artist and stage designer Léon Bakst.

"It was a very artsy project, where wearable deconstruction was the theme. All the garments were black, with outerwear in bright colours."

After that she pursued a career as a freelance textile designer for some years and had two kids, before deciding to start Maxjenny.

"When I launched the brand in August 2016, it was on my own terms. Everything had to be smart. Smart textiles, smart cuts, smart sizes, smart digital solutions, smart international website, smart production lines, smart PR. A company with few people, which I could easily take to the next level."

HER COLLECTIONS ARE based on a dozen styles with a good fit, including plain coats, full skirts and neat dresses. The fabric is either densely-woven viscose or Gore-Tex made of PET bottles, bought in the UK and printed and sewn in Lithuania or in Ikast in Denmark. The prints, which have become her trademark, consist of collages of her own photos, a process requiring patience, time, and many megabytes.

"When I make prints, I have to hurry to get started, since they have to marinate for a while. After four weeks or so, I can open the file again, and then things have fallen into place. It can take me two to three weeks to find the right colour harmony – for one single colour theme."

The prints have imaginative names, such as Messy Garden, or Sicily Stockholm Royal Pink, and feature anything from insects, plants and flowers to churches and historic buildings. Inspiration is everywhere – from Österlen where she lived as a child, to her home town of Copenhagen, and Abruzzo in Italy.

"I'm constantly in a flow of colours and shapes, and sometimes, I fall in love with things that I put next to each other. I don't start from scratch, it all happens organically, and new designs are always waiting. I don't work like fashion companies usually do, attending

trend seminars for inspiration and that kind of thing, but I am involved in the art scene, and I'm constantly looking for colours. It's a very pleasurable process."

You don't have to spend much time with Maxjenny before you understand her success as a businesswoman. She is enthusiastic, quick-witted, and the words gush out in a mixture of Swedish, Danish and English. And her opinion of the sometimes trend anxious and selective fashion industry is thoughtful and sharp.

"I want to be inclusive, not exclusive, and I notice what's good for my business. For instance, I can see immediately if someone has worn one of my pieces to an event that is reported in the magazines Femina or Svensk Damtidning. Then my mobile starts beeping frantically, it's wonderful!"

IN 2019, MAXJENNY organised two pop-up stores, first at NK, Nordiska Kompaniet, in Gothenburg, and most recently at the Mood shopping mall in Stockholm. She also collaborated with the photographer Helene Toresdotter, the graffiti artist Oliw87 and designed carpets and cushions with Lisa Hilland, now sold at NK.

"I love working with other people's designs, and these collaborations put me in touch with a different and larger public."

After nearly 15 years in the business, Maxjenny Forslund has finally found her niche on the design scene, with the freedom to control her own time and creativity.

"I've never felt better and more harmonious than now, both mentally, physically and business wise. I worry so much less about deliveries and production now. I'm so happy that I dared to take this step. You need to be the designer of your own life and get others to work for you, not the other way around." ↻