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SPORTS LABELS WITH GLOBAL APPEAL

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Stephen Ferber created his own moodboards with inspiration for the shop design. A local interior decorator made his ideas come true.

Swedish *and exclusive in* New York

“I’m a retailer, not an artist, says Stephen Ferber – fashion entrepreneur with a solid professional background in fashion retail and his own label. His base is New York, and his store is in the Meatpacking District.

By YLVA ÅKESSON

Stephen Ferber was born into retail and fashion. His mother’s father was a furrier and his father’s father a tailor. For many years, the family had shops in Stockholm, at the prestigious NK department store, with the license for both Levi’s Store and Dockers Store, along with Red and Green’s concept stores in Sweden.

Stephen Ferber was buyer and store manager in the family business, before covertly starting the fashion label Stephen F five years ago.

His sights were set on the export market from day one. Last summer, he opened a shop under his own name in the old meatpacking district in Manhattan.

AFTER CONSIDERING SEVERAL large cities for his first shop, including Milan, Madrid and Paris, he finally chose New York. The language, and the fact that New York is a cosmopolitan hub for the entire world, settled the matter. The city itself is a monitor of the global economy.

“There’s big money here. And the city has never been more expensive,” says Stephen Ferber.

The interior, with brick walls and rough, brushed steel, alludes to the area’s commercial history. A pale colour scheme in the background sets off the garments.

“I want the cloths to stand out in the shop, and I’m not scared of colour.”

The floors are either wood or carpet, and the fitting rooms are generous. There is also a separate 20 sqm room for customers who want privacy when they buy clothes.

“The shop should convey what the label represents. ‘Super sharp but humble and relaxed,’” says Stephen Ferber, and emphasises that the ‘soft’ values are important.

“We offer all customers something to drink, and our four-legged friends get water and dog treats.”

Today, the label comprises menswear and a few accessories. But Stephen Ferber does not want to limit himself.

“I intend to build a lifestyle brand. My next unit won’t necessarily be a shop, but maybe a cafe or a bar,” he ruminates.

A women’s collection may be launched within a year or two.

Stephen F is characterised by very limited editions, perhaps only ten of each item, as is the case with one of the label’s signature pieces, the reindeer skin jacket. Or jeans that only exist in 99 pairs.

“We want to keep it as unique as possible. Without it being tailor-made. People want unique things. There’s a niche in the market for this. That’s what makes us interesting,” says Stephen Ferber with conviction.

THE LABEL IS not sold online, only in real shops, in high-profile multibrand stores next to designers such as Balenciaga, Givenchy and Paul Smith.

Visibility is what builds a brand. Opening a shop can be one way of achieving this. Working with the Swedish model Alexander Lundqvist is another way. Added to this, the New York-based Swedish hockey goaltender Henrik Lundqvist is one of Stephen F's famous ambassadors.

"He's a fashion profile in the USA, featuring in innumerable public events where he needs to look good. Henke dresses like a gentleman, he loves our style," says Stephen Ferber.

The label also appears in movies: In the Hollywood production John Wick from 2014, Michael Nyqvist and Keanu Reeves wore Stephen F.

STEPHEN FERBER'S SOLID personal background in the clothing industry is crucial. In every way. He moved to New York a year or so ago.

"This is a small company. It's all much easier if I'm on location," he explains. "If you can make it here..." as the song goes about the Big Apple." The downside of New York's rich potential is that it's a tough city. Running a small business is not a bed of roses. Stephen Ferber describes a reality that involves hearing No over and over again, and still not giving up.

"And you can and will get trampled on. Very hard," he says, and tells me about the search for suitable shop premises.

Again and again, the realtors hung up on him immediately when they didn't recognise his name or label, or when they heard he 'didn't even have a national security number'.

In the end, he found a shop by himself, in the meatpacking district. Not a prime location, but good enough. The address means that he has had to make minor adjustments to the collections. From more classic to young and rugged.

"We don't just offer suits and expensive leather jackets now, but more jeans and casualwear. Our target group is wider."

So far, the company is in the red.

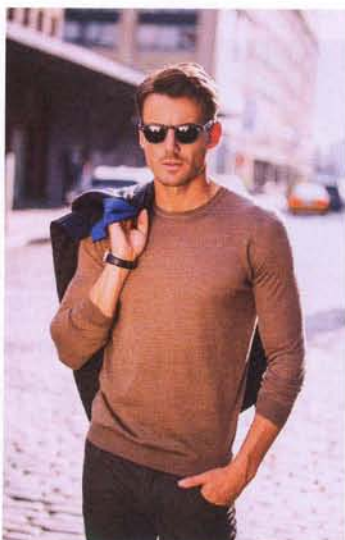
"I'm planning to break even by 2016," says Stephen Ferber.

Starting a business comes at a price. And not just in money terms.

"For me, every day is the world cup final. If I had been younger and less experienced I would never have coped. Luckily I have good people helping me. But naturally, this venture has been at the expense of my private life." ↻



Leather jackets are one of Stephen F's signature items.



The collection has evolved from a more classic style to younger fashion, to adapt to the location of the shop in the Meatpacking District.

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