

THE

Donna Karan — one of America's hottest designers — talks about the shape of things to come with PBI's Judy DiEdwardo

DESIGNING

WOMAN

PBI: Tell me a little about what sparked your interest in fashion.

DONNA KARAN: I guess you could say I was born with it; it's in my gut. My mother was a model and my father was a haberdasher, so I grew up surrounded by the whole aura of fashion.



PBI *What was the very first item you designed?*

DONNA KARAN Well, as you know, I was with Anne Klein for a long time and designed many things there. But when I started my own company in 1985, the first items I designed were my signature body suit and the scarf skirt that wraps around the body. Throughout the past decade, both pieces are still valid and remain extremely popular. The concept on which they were based has been extended throughout all of my collections.

PBI *Tell me about your days with Anne Klein. Did she inspire you to develop your own company or was this clearly a stop-over for you?*

DONNA KARAN Working with Anne was an incredible experience. She was my mother, so to speak. She inspired me and supported my growth and development as a designer. Anne Klein & Company was my home — both before and after she died. To be honest, I thought I would be there forever.

PBI *Define the differences between Donna Karan and DKNY. Do you find that consumers of these two distinct lines are interchangeable?*

DONNA KARAN My collection and DKNY are about the same woman, just different sides. I compare them to pizza and caviar; a limousine versus a taxi — they each have different feelings yet I love and need them both equally. The Donna Karan Collection is all about luxury and having the very best. DKNY is about the realness of the street. And I find that most women have these two sides to them. My clothes address those different needs and desires.

PBI *Speaking of basic needs, you have a special sensitivity to those of us who aren't the five-percent body fat woman of the '90s! Why are you designing clothes that meet a broader range of physical dimensions than other designers?*

DONNA KARAN In reality, very few of us have perfect bodies — including myself. I'm like every other woman. There are times when I gain weight and I count on my clothes to help me out. As a designer, it's important to always consider the real issues that women struggle with.

PBI *Your clothes are known for their sensuous fabrics and rich textures. Do you have a favorite?*

DONNA KARAN I love working with fabrics that breathe, move, travel well and have a sensual feel against the skin. I particularly like wool jersey, wool gauze and, of course, cashmere.

PBI *As for color, your signature palette is black. Why?*

“In reality, very few of us have perfect bodies — including myself, I'm like every other woman.”

DONNA KARAN Black is the foundation of every wardrobe. It's sophisticated, it's city-friendly and it works. No other color survives the day-to-evening transition better than black.

PBI *What has been your greatest challenge as a designer?*

DONNA KARAN Problem solving: How to make clothes that accentuate the positive, delete the negative and really work within a person's lifestyle. My other challenge lies in perfecting what I've already done.

PBI *In what way?*

DONNA KARAN There are many ways to perfect something: new fabrics, a better fit, newer proportions. Also, after I wear my clothes for a period of time, I am able to see what's missing and what needs to be improved. For example, my early knit-wear didn't give the kind of support I had envisioned, so I

started adding Lycra to add more stretch and hug to the fabric. Another example is my first wrap skirt. It didn't have pockets. And when I wore it I realized how much I missed pockets. I assumed I wasn't alone in that thinking!

PBI *Is it more difficult for women than men to be successful in the fashion industry?*

DONNA KARAN Yes and no. Actually, men and women face different challenges in this industry. For example, women designers are closer to the problems at hand. They wear the clothes and therefore know what to do on a practical level. Men, on the other hand, are able to fantasize more.

PBI *Does the practical prevent you from fantasizing — getting a little outrageous?*

DONNA KARAN Absolutely not. I never limit myself. I start with the fantasy and then bring it down to earth so that it works. Just because something is *real* doesn't mean it isn't beautiful or luxurious.

PBI *Where does your inspiration come from?*

DONNA KARAN Where doesn't it come from? I'm moved by absolutely everything and everyone. You name it: the textures of the beach, my husband's sculpture, the street-style of downtown kids, whatever. That's a fabulous aspect to this profession. It involves pure inspiration.

PBI *Your fall fashion show was a big hit. What influenced the designs in that collection?*

DONNA KARAN As always, New York City inspired my fall collection. There's an energy here

that actually vibrates. I was also inspired by the kind of creative people who are drawn to New York. Capturing movement and character — the kind that is only found here — excites me. On a literal level, I take the city's textures and translate them into fabrics with things like pavement tweed and asphalt knits.

PBI *What is the "hot" item this fall?*

DONNA KARAN The empire dress, without a doubt. I love its modern grace and drama.

PBI *What other aspects of fashion have you expanded into?*

DONNA KARAN The Donna Karan Company is forever expanding to fill in the gaps or complete missing pieces of the puzzle. Both Collection and DKNY are head-to-toe concepts with their own accessory divisions: hosiery, eyewear and shoes. Collection also has Essentials — seasonless key pieces that form the foundation of a wardrobe. There's Menswear Collection and Menswear DKNY, which also have footwear divisions and an Essentials line, as well. Next, I created DKNY Kids to dress all the children in my life, starting with my granddaughter, McKensie. Donna Karan New York Intimates is my line of lingerie and foundations — a final note in the head-to-toe theory!

PBI *The Donna Karan Beauty Company is one of your most recent accomplishments. Why did you create a fragrance as your first beauty item?*

DONNA KARAN Fragrance is the first layer of dressing — an invisible bodysuit. Scent is a woman's most basic, personal and unique possession. I created my perfume to be a comfortable, familiar scent that has the power to invigorate and the sensuality to arouse something inside every woman who wears it. It's not about the overpowering scents of the '80s — it's about catching a woman's personal, unique chemistry.

PBI *How does your design philosophy influence the visual imagery for your fragrance?*

DONNA KARAN The relationship between art and fashion is one of craftsmanship, of ideas, of creative spirits, and of responsibility to people, to changing events, to modern attitudes and to the way they all mix. I see this relationship and interaction every day of my own life. I created this perfume to remind me of some of my favorite

things: casablanca lilies, the skin scent of suede and the warmth of cashmere.

PBI *Your husband, Stephan Weiss, has been an integral part of your venture into the beauty business. Can you elaborate on his role?*

DONNA KARAN Stephan is a sculptor, an artist and my kindred spirit and partner. Together, we created Donna Karan New York Parfum. I designed the fragrance and he designed the bottle. Being an artist, he was the perfect person to take on this project. And what he developed was simply phenomenal! The shape is organic with soft, smooth curves. It looks strong and confident, yet

soft and feminine — like the women who this fragrance was designed for.

PBI *I was surprised to find that your new bath and body line does not smell at all like the fragrance. Why not? Isn't fragrance layering the standard concept?*

DONNA KARAN I wanted Donna Karan New York Bath & Body products to appeal to all women — including those who don't wear my fragrance. In that sense, my bath and body products don't duplicate Donna Karan New York Parfum —

they complement it.

PBI *Do you have any other products in the making?*

DONNA KARAN Yes, of course! We are currently working on treatment products and a men's fragrance for distribution sometime in 1994.

PBI *By sheer definition, fashion changes as quickly as the moods of its consumers. What is your fashion forecast for 1994?*

DONNA KARAN I think women's fashion will forever be influenced by the newness in fabrication. That's why I love working with fabrics so much; that's where the future of fashion lies.

PBI *You recently launched Donna Karan New York Bath & Body as a separate line rather than an extension of an existing line. Why?*

DONNA KARAN While most other beauty companies follow the launch of a fragrance with a group of line extensions, I chose a different path. My products are treatment enhancements. These products were created by leading dermatologists and a chemist to ensure optimum moisturizing benefits to the skin. The bath and body line was created to moisturize, protect and beautify the skin — not perfume it. ♦

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