

Dries van Noten

He may not be a household name like Galliano or McQueen but Belgian fashion designer Dries van Noten has a loyal band of fans, despite the fact that he doesn't advertise his label. His clothes speak for themselves and customers like his mixture of formal and leisurewear designs. He was instrumental in bringing back femininity to women's fashion.

The designer was born in 1958 and studied at the Antwerp Fashion Academy, graduating in 1980. He came to the attention of the fashion world in 1986 when he showcased his menswear collection in London. This was part of a show presented by himself and five other designers from Belgium, who had formed together as the 'Antwerp Six'. This collective made an impression and put Antwerp on the map as a fashion center to be taken seriously.

Still based in Antwerp, he supplies over 500 shops across the world. The first stores to order from him were prestigious shops such as Barneys in New York City, Pauw in Amsterdam and Whistles in London. He also has several shops bearing his name. The first of these Dries van Noten outlets opened in Antwerp in 1989. Other locations followed, including Tokyo and Hong Kong. It was the Paris and Milan showrooms that he opened in 1993 that really set his career going.

He has a heavy workload in producing four collections every year of summer and winter clothes for men and women. The children's line has ceased production. The Dries van Noten look is often colorful, ethnic in feel with great fabrics and layers. The designer likes to design ready to wear lines for women that reflect their desire for comfort as well as looks. He does design in black, white and gray but his clothes usually have color such as a silk sash scarf in gorgeous pink. He likes floral patterns and embroidered finishes. Sometimes, he combines black and color as in a black and floral silk camisole.

His Paris 2006 show included high heel sneakers, hooded anoraks made from silk and cotton parka dresses. The Dries van Noten label easily transfers from the catwalk to the stores. Other designers may be more flamboyant and grab the headlines but Dries van Noten has added a welcome dimension to the fashion scene and brought some focus away from the usual Paris, London, New York and Milan. It's fashion that most people like with top of the range materials to make the wearer feel special.