



Waistcoat with shirt front, wool/
cotton/polyamide. Cotton shirt.
Silk bow tie. Wool suit trousers
with crease. Leather belt.
All from Dsquared².



DSQUARED²

Pair of kings

A passion for jeans and Italian tailoring put the designers behind Dsquared² into the spotlight and won them a starry following. DV Man meets Dean and Dan Caten during the film festival in Cannes.

BY CAMILLA ALFTHAN FASHION: ROBERT NORDBERG PHOTO STEPHAN FEUGERE

BORN IN CANADA - MADE IN ITALY is the mantra behind the Dsquared² label, which was founded in Milan 15 years ago by Canadian twins Dean and Dan Caten. Celebrities have always played a crucial role in bolstering the duo's reputation.

From the beginning, they've had a following that includes such stars as Lenny Kravitz, Justin Timberlake, Robbie Williams and Madonna.

Their runway shows combine fashion, music and theatre. One much-talked-about show ended with Christian Aguilera stripping the clothes off the male models.

So, all things considered, it's fitting that I meet the Catens in Cannes, home of the paparazzi and the international film festival, where they are launching their first eyewear line and inaugurating their new store.

In a town that's packed with movie industry people and international partygoers, they

are hosting an evening at a private villa for guests including Paris Hilton and Dita Von Teese.

Wearing matching silk tuxedos and Dsquared² jeans, the twins spend much of the evening posing for photographers and talking to the press while the crowd sips champagne around an illuminated pool. As is customary in Cannes, the party goes on until the early morning, until the Maseratis ferry the guests home again.

My rendezvous with the duo takes place the following afternoon. They are relaxing on the jetty of the legendary Hotel Martinez, surrounded by their young male friends.

- Last night was work. You can't get too drunk when you are doing interviews all the time. The fortunate thing is that there are two of us. So one can always tell the other to have a glass of water, says Dean, pouring me a glass of rosé from the wine cooler behind his deck chair.

In front of us the Mediterranean looks particularly blue after weeks of rainy weather. The horizon is almost invisible and cluttered

with fancy yachts which are important places to meet in Cannes.

- Several people asked us to join them on their boat. If you're just walking on the Croisette, they won't ask you. But if they see you on a boat, you're with the boat people and then you get invited, Dean tells me in the straight-forward manner which is typical of the twins.

Keeping track of who's who can be a challenge. They look the same and always wear similar clothes. They even have the same rings, apart from the fact that Dean now wears Dan's wedding rings as he recently divorced. They always do things together and sleep in the same bed when they don't have partners.

-We don't share clothes as much today. That's where we used to fight when we were kids, but now we can afford it. If there's something we like we get two of it. Some people may think it's weird but for us it is natural. We're lucky to have such a special bond.

When they are not speaking at the same time, or in total sync, one twin will start a sentence which the other will finish.

→



Suede **jacket** with leather details.
Wool suit **trousers** with creases.
Laced leather **boots**.
All from Dsquared².



Double-breasted wool jacket.
Cotton shirt. Cotton jeans.
All from Dsquared².

– If someone say something that sounds silly, it is Dan. If it makes sense, it is Dean, says Dean, who is 15 minutes older than his brother and the one who tends to take the lead.

With homes in London, Milan and Noventa Vicentina, where their factory is located, the Catens are a modern rags-to-riches story. From being a small start-up and a select favourite among celebrities, their fashion line has grown in the few past years into an international brand with stores in Milan, Capri, Hong Kong, Istanbul and Kiev.

Much associated with low cut jeans, Dsquared² is also about nifty, Italian tailoring, accessories, perfumes, women's wear and, above all, a sexy attitude. The collections are based on intuition and what the twins would like to wear themselves.

Getting a grip and finding a way through is how they describe their start in the fashion world. The youngest of nine children, they dressed their sisters and their brothers' girlfriends. Their first influences came from TV series such as *Charlie's Angels*. Eager to learn the craft, they went to Parson's in New York to study fashion and then, when they were 19,

a Toronto-based designer recruited the duo.

– He said we had good taste. And taste is something they can't teach you at school. He said we were like little racehorses. If you race them too young they would fail, because we had so much ambition. He wanted us to focus. First, you need to understand proportion and fit and then you can do the rest afterwards. But you need to understand the basics first. Everything was a challenge and a learning lesson.

The twins went on their first trips to Milan to buy fabrics and learned how to sell the collection but after six years the company closed.

It wasn't until several years later, when they were over 30, that they decided to go back to Milan.

The first three years they did anything to make money – styling, test shots with photographers, hosting parties at a nightclub. They met designers like Donatella Versace and always packed the club.

– Linda, Naomi, everybody came. It's about how you manipulate things. What's important in life is who is in front of you and how you respond, the twins exclaim passionately, their last line in total synchrony.

“Some people may think it's weird that we sleep in the same bed, but for us it's natural.”

It was when they made a deal with a factory to produce their first collection that things started falling into place.

Traditionally, designers start with women's wear and although everyone advised them against it, the twins started with the men's wear. If it all went wrong they would at least have clothes to wear, they figured. When they took the collection to the showroom, they were told they did not fit in.

– We'd spent all our money. We had all these clothes. Now what are we going to do? Shoot us in the head? No, we're survivors and in September there's this fair in Paris. This gives us two months to prepare price lists, make photos and a little catalogue. Thirty-five pieces. Four fabrics. We went to Paris and sold the collection for half a million dollars. It was a blessing in disguise that they did not believe in us. If we hadn't sold anything we wouldn't be here today.

– A lot was about human nature. We'd go to fabric fairs and see a stand that was really busy and go and look at it. We figured that if our stand was busy people would come in. So we called all our friends in Paris and asked them to come over. People had never heard our name before but when they saw the crowd, they were like; 'I have got to get this.' They were just going crazy. We put on some of the clothes and walked around in them. We were the models and the sales people. We did everything. Even now we're doing all sides of the job. Our minds are always open and thinking about the next thing. Whenever you do something that comes from your heart and that you believe in, you are fine. There are other people out there who believe in the same thing. It's been our key and our motivation for so long. Ten years from now we'd like →



DEAN & DAN CATEN

BORN: 1964, in Willowdale, Ontario, Canada, the youngest of nine children.

LIVE: In Milan, London and Noventa Vicentina.

CAREER: Graduated from Parson's, New York, in 1983. Launched the first Dsquared² collection in 1994, followed by a women's wear line in 2003. The same year they received the La Kore award, considered the Oscar of the Italian fashion industry, for Most Original Designers. Among their many collaborations in the music industry, the Catens have dressed Britney Spears for her Circus tour and appeared in Fergie's video, *Clumsy*. In 2007 they opened their flagship store in Milan. In 2009 the twins started hosting their own radio show, *Dean and Dan On the Air - Style in Stereo*, while also starring as judges on the American reality TV show, *Launch My Line*.





Corduroy jacket. Checked wool jacket.
Denim shirt. Silk bow tie.
Low-cut cotton/elastan jeans.
Laced leather boots. All from Dsquared².

to be more established and have more stores.

Is it because you come from a large family that you learned to fight for yourself?

– Our dad was really poor and struggled. The less money you have, the more you have to exercise your brain to be accepted and to fit in. You need to do something that puts you apart. Our father forbade us to wear jeans. Jeans are for poor people and people will think you are poor. It was the 70s and it was all about jeans. So we looked ridiculous at school wearing polyester slacks. The cool kids were in jeans. But it was his paranoia. And that's probably why we're doing jeans today.

What does your name stand for?

– Dsquared² is about two creative forces working together, Dean and Dan. It's mathematical. You only get one chance with your own name so we thought of something that would resemble us. Two of the same. Friends

can come and go but that one is built in.

Did you ever play tricks on people?

– Mean tricks and fun tricks. Once we went to a friend's apartment and Dan stayed downstairs on the ground floor. I went on to the balcony on the third floor, screamed and hid myself so the people thought the kid they saw on the balcony minutes ago was now laying on the ground. They panicked and almost jumped off the balcony themselves. When they found out they were furious. We were about ten. Today we only do fun tricks.

Celebrities are a big part of who you are now. Who was your first big name?

– Madonna. There were these mud-splattered jeans and she was like, 'Oh my god, it would be so great for this new video.' We didn't do women's clothes at the time so we made some suggestions. She loved everything. There was this t-shirt that was on every

fucking magazine cover. Six covers altogether and she loved it.

And you got the credit each time?

– Well, it was a little bit of a scandal and I don't want to go into it. She was under contract with another designer and they got the credit by mistake. But then she said, 'You know what, you're small and you don't have a PR office and the wrong people got credited for your work. I want you to do the world tour. Then people will know that you did it for me.' That was very good of her. So we did the whole cowboy segment of that tour.

Who was your first male celebrity?

– Lenny Kravitz. He bought our stuff and we didn't even know. He's a great, great guy. Love him. And you know, he kind of epitomizes our style. He's stylish but he doesn't look dressed up. It's uncontrived, cool and accidentally chic. He looks fashionable, but not like he's wearing a costume. That's a really fine line. But that look has been studied for hours. It not just something he pulled together. And that's the best part about it, because, by the end of the day he looks cool and that's what we want to do.

So why do you think the stars come to you?

– Madonna came to us because it would be too easy for her to go to Donatella. She loves to find the new thing. Malcolm MacLaren did the video before her. But Madonna comes in and takes vogueing to the masses. That was a huge success for her. So when Madonna says, 'These guys are cool,' it means something.

Rihanna was buying our things and she told us that the people who listen to her music are also buying it. So it is a win-win situation, if you know what I mean. Let's go and get them girl!

I hear that people literally rip off your clothes when you go to certain clubs. You go home wearing something else.

– Crazy. It's true. Right down to the underwear. That's Dan. He likes to exchange underwear with young, sweet guys in the bathroom. I'm wearing Ray Bans today. If I wear Dsquared² glasses people will ask if they can have them.

You first fashion influences came from TV. Now you are doing a fashion programme in America. Can you tell us about it?

– It's about contestants who want to start their own fashion line. We're the judges and we give them challenges. We also have many celebrities who give their point of view. Sometimes we're watching them thinking, 'The writing is on the wall.' They don't even know. Some people just don't get it. But we are completely positive. All the contestants love us. They take notes of what we say. We're teaching them to grow.

Do you both design everything for your collections?

– Yeah, we do. We also have a team of designers. There are so many things, from the sketches to the actual finishing. We have the greatest seamstress who's been with us

Suede fur coat with raw edges.
Checked cotton shirt with shirt front.
Silk bow tie. Striped denim hat.
Loose fit cotton jeans.
Crocodile-embossed leather belt.
Laced leather boots.
All from Dsquared².





What's important in life is who is in front of you and how you respond.



Tuxedo jacket, wool/cotton/polyamide/silk. Cotton denim waistcoat. Cotton shirt. Silk bow tie. Cotton chinos. Leather belt with metal decorations. Patent leather shoes. Striped cotton cap. All by Dsquared².

for 12 years. She has her teams. She'll design what gets passed. And then we talk about it. Then they are changing the sketches, cutting and pinning, and it becomes something else. At the end of the day it all comes together when you do the fitting.

How has the recession affected your work?

– Everyone talks about it, but we are fortunate because we're not that big. We have a hundred stores that sell us and six or seven stores that are our own. We make real clothes that people actually need and buy. We're not this intellectual line that can make a pretty fashion job and get the picture in the magazine and then not make any money. We're like, 'What do I need? What do I want? Why am I not wearing that?' You ask yourself those questions. You want something that is kind of cute and makes you feel in a certain way. An intellectual designer will make something that looks pretty. But who the fuck's gonna wear it? It's about that discipline. If you have the structure and the basis you can build from that. But you need to know how to cut a garment. We can sew and draw and make a pattern. Ask a designer today and they can't sew anything. You get respect from your people when they see that you know what you're talking about. Maybe we have that sensibility that we see it differently than the patternmaker and the seamstress, and that's a gift that we

feel God gave us. You can't train someone to have good taste, just like you can't teach Celine Dion to have a good voice.

Your fall collection is full of sharp tailoring and your signature jeans. Are there also some Obama references in it?

– If only it were that calculated. But there was just one black guy in the show. For the spring-summer collection we did a hip hop look and decided we only wanted black models. So we had to fly them in from L.A., Atlanta and New York because we couldn't find any in Milan. Tyson opened our show. *Vogue Italia* does a black issue, we get a black president. Sometimes things just happen. You can't place it. But there's got to be something in the air. We had these shirts with Martin Luther King and inside it said, 'I Have A Dream'. And then it becomes a reality the same year.

You know, our dad died. He had a longer name than us. His name was Catenucci. So we made this t-shirt and wrote Mr. Catenucci on it. We sold 10,000 shirts.

We didn't speak to him, so it was our way of saying to him that we were proud of where we're from. He died the same year. It turned out that he had signed one of his paintings Caten. It was his way of saying that he was proud of us without ever saying it. Fluky things happen.

He was an Italian immigrant in Canada. There was a lot of racism then and he wanted his kids to grow up as Canadians. He only shortened the boys' names since the girls would get married and get new names. He could not afford to change all nine.

Your fall collection seemed to be of a past era.

– We were inspired by the rich men of the old Hollywood era in the 1930s. Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire, on and off screen. That means a lot of tailoring, tuxedos and tails, mixed with jeans. Rich men, poor men. The way to wear it is to buy one good piece and not be afraid to mix with what you have already.

What would be a man's worst fashion mistake?

– Men are men, so no Linda Evangelista eyebrows. You're a man, baby. Good for her but wrong for you.

THE ROSÉ BOTTLE IS EMPTY and Dean and Dan's friends have already left. It's time for the twins to go back to the hotel to change for that evening's party which is hosted by Quentin Tarantino. A-list celebrities have already announced their arrival to what is the hottest ticket of the festival. It may all be work, I think to myself as I'm walking back to the Croisette, but someone's got to do it. □