



DESIGNER PROFILE

CLOTHES ENCOUNTER

Roland Mouret, famed creator of the Galaxy cocktail dress, enters U.S. orbit

BY Michele Meyer PHOTOGRAPHY BY Aaron Richter

The opening of Roland Mouret's first U.S. outpost, on New York City's Madison Avenue last November, was the crowning achievement in what was a very busy year for the French fashion designer—a year that also saw the 53-year-old collaborating with Banana Republic on an extremely successful 30-piece capsule collection and expanding his eponymous line (which already encompassed shoes, sunglasses and handbags) to include five styles of bridal gowns. Not bad for a designer who lost the right to work under his own name in 2005, when he and his financial backers split, at the very moment his much revered Galaxy cocktail dress—with its sleek pencil skirt and flattering cap sleeves—elevated him from obscurity to the center of the fashion world.

Heralded as the dress of the season, with waitlists at major department stores across the globe, the Galaxy was the fashion equivalent of a viral video, ubiquitous on red carpets, talk shows and the pages of major fashion magazines. While the dress was supposed to be Mouret's starting point, the ensuing drama between the designer and his business partners resulted in a bit of career interruptus.

"Every low becomes a high, because you learn and come back stronger," Mouret now says of the experience. Stronger no doubt refers at least in part to his partnership with "American Idol" creator Simon Fuller, who helped Mouret buy back his name in 2010. Now back at his namesake label and with complete creative control, Mouret faces another challenge: living with the legacy of the Galaxy.

"[It] gave me my three lines in the fashion Bible," Mouret says of the frock.

And though it isn't easy living in the shadow of a smash hit, Mouret doesn't seem to mind. "I love the fact that my dresses are more famous than me," he says. "The most important thing is the clothes—and women wanting them."

Characterized by their sharp tailoring and feminine silhouette, Mouret's designs have found fans in Scarlett Johansson, Dita von Teese, Victoria Beckham and Halle Berry, among others. The secret to his *va-va-voom* silhouette lies in a discrete "power mesh" slip inside each of his shapely



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garments. "Dresses are for undressing," he explains of the construction. "The lining controls the body without the embarrassment of tugging off Spanx in front of a lover."

In addition to the mesh slip, trompe l'oeil folds and draping are staples of Mouret's style. His Moon cocktail dress—a 2011 follow-up to the Galaxy—pulls back shoulders and pinches the waist by combining cap sleeves with a darted midsection. "I use trick after trick with techniques I created," Mouret says. "I'm proud >



that my craft came not from schooling but as a natural gift.”

The designer’s fashion roots trace back to—of all places—his father’s butcher shop in Lourdes, France. There, he learned how to strategically fold his apron to cover stains and to cut according to the underlying form. At just age 12, the designer was already customizing his own clothes. “I realized that you can be the person you want to be through clothing,” he remembers. “It can transform your life.” And there may be no better example of fashion’s transformative power than Mouret himself, who did not take the typical path to mainstream fashion success.

After a short time at a Paris fashion school, Mouret quit. “The best advice I got from an instructor was, ‘The way to learn fashion is to be outside the classroom and meet people,’” he remembers. “After three months of college, I went clubbing for 10 years.”

During that time, the handsome Mouret learned about fashion firsthand with day jobs modeling for Jean Paul Gaultier, Yohji Yamamoto, Giorgio Armani and Gianfranco Ferré. Inspired, he moved from Paris to London and began working quietly on his namesake label.



STAR POWER

Clockwise from top: Mouret’s New York City flagship store; Victoria Beckham in the Moon dress; Dita von Teese in the Galaxy; shoes and bags from Mouret’s winter 2014 collection



This spring, Mouret will debut buttercup, lilac and grass-green A-lines inspired by American couturier Charles James. And in July, his pre-fall collection will present a departure from his classic tailored dresses with zipper jackets and plaid trousers.

“I’m trying to open new doors while staying true to myself,” he says. ☺

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