

GILDAS LOAËC OF KITSUNÉ

BY MARA HOBERMAN
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In 2002 Gildas Loaïc and Masaya Kuroki founded Maison Kitsuné as a way to combine their two stylistically intertwined interests: music and fashion. A decade later the company has gone global on both fronts, with boutiques in Paris, New York City, and Tokyo and an impressive roster of recording artists hailing from France, Britain, Sweden, Australia, and the United States. While staying true to their ultra-hip Parisian pedigrees—Loaïc got his start as Daft Punk’s manager and Kuroki worked in Jean Nouvel’s architecture studio before turning to fashion—this dynamic duo has steadily grown Maison Kitsuné into a chic lifestyle brand with a cult following. From the company’s buzzing Paris headquarters, Loaïc chatted with *Whitewall* about Manhattan real estate, Japanese coffee, and plans to Kitsuné-fy the classic French striped sailor shirt.

WHITEWALL: *It’s been just over 10 years since you founded Maison Kitsuné with Masaya Kuroki. How has the company evolved?*

GILDAS LOAÏC: Masaya and I both liked the idea of creating a brand that would be all-inclusive. Our ambition was to make a real music label and a real fashion label—both together and not faking it on either end. We started small; we were self-financed. Bit by bit we built up the company, always tweaking and making improvements along the way.

WW: *What are some of Kitsuné’s latest creative endeavors?*

GL: Something we did for the first time, just recently, was a live fashion show. We were invited by Pitti W to present our women’s line in Florence. We had

never presented in Paris—or anywhere in Europe—during fashion week, so this was an exciting move as well as a nod of recognition from the fashion world. It was also an interesting occasion for us to play with the presentation in terms of what we do, specifically—combining music and fashion. We wanted to organize a show that really got to the heart of what is Maison Kitsuné. So we had Kitsuné bands perform while wearing Kitsuné clothes. It’s our original idea, but it took ten years to present it in this way.

WW: *Can you describe the concept of the show? Who performed?*

GL: We wanted an excuse to create something that plays with today’s media, like YouTube, and I liked the idea of involving my friend [the filmmaker] Loïc Prigent. So we made a fashion show that was also a music show and it was also kind of like a TV show—inspired a bit by the U.K.’s *Later . . . with Jools Holland*, where the host introduces bands and then they play. Yelle, Citizens!, Say Lou Lou, and Eli & Fur performed. Loïc filmed everything, including some fun backstage moments, and put up a video on YouTube. Our friends Verbal and Yoon helped style the show and also acted as the emcees. Verbal is a famous rocker in Japan, part of the band Teriyaki Boyz. And he’s also a jewelry designer with Yoon, so it was exciting to have them to accessorize and host the show. Everyone was wearing two hats at Pitti!

WW: *Bringing together different talents and creative forces—whether it’s your recording artists modeling the clothing line or your partnerships with other designers like Pierre Hardy and Edward Green—is something Maison Kitsuné*

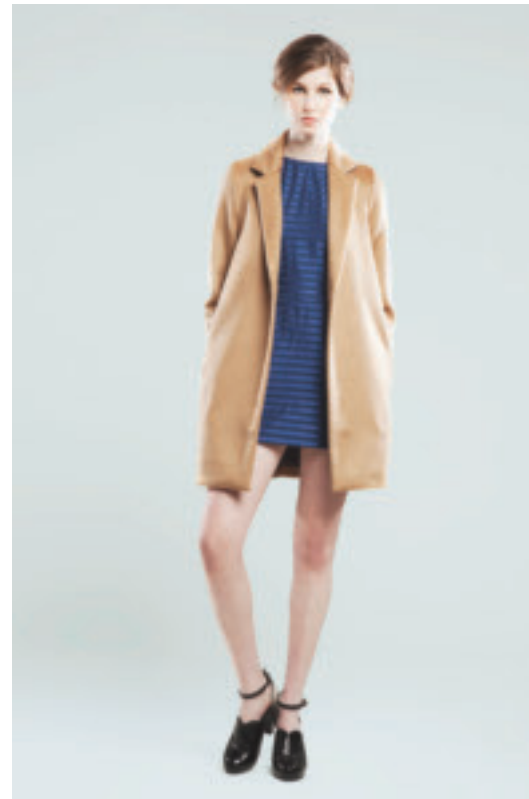


WHITEWALL 79



Clockwise from top:
Maison Kitsuné men's
Spring/Summer 2014
collection. Kitsuné at the
office, Gildas Loaëc and
Masaya Kuroki. "Dream
Concerts Art Show."
Office and store details.

Opposite page:
Maison Kitsuné
women's Fall/Winter
2013 collection.



does so well. Any upcoming collaborations?

GL: Masaya and I will be the art directors for the men's and women's lines of the 120-year-old French brand Petit Bateau, for the next six seasons. The first capsule project [in stores late February 2013] is a twist on the classic striped *marinière* shirt. We're updating the fit and adding a nautical knot logo. It's exciting because it represents a totally different dimension from where we are with Maison Kitsuné—a larger scale, a different clientele, and another way of working.

WW: What do you enjoy most about partnering with other designers?

GL: It's fun to interact with people from our own generation, like when we work with Pierre Hardy or our friend Julie Rousselet's cashmere brand, Flouzen. On the other hand, we've also enjoyed collaborating with older brands like J. M. Weston and Mackintosh. The established brands have a long history and savoir faire. It's interesting to play with these traditions.

WW: In addition to Paris, you now have boutiques in Manhattan and Tokyo. How does the Kitsuné style translate in these cities?

GL: It's funny, because when we opened in New York people kept telling us our look was really "Bostonian." Preppy, I guess, with the cardigans and button-down shirts... Our main market is really Japan—that's where we spend most of our time, when we're not in Paris. We weren't planning to come to New York; it's just a happy coincidence that the NoMad Hotel came to us with an offer to take over their lobby space. When we were first discussing the project, maybe two years ago, I would mention the address to friends in New York and they would be like, "No. Nope. Wrong idea. Bad location. Are you kidding?!" Now those same friends say what a great neighborhood we're in! We get ladies over fifty coming down from the Upper East Side just to shop at Kitsuné!

WW: Yes, that whole neighborhood north of Madison Square Park is really on the rise. What are some of your favorite spots?

GL: Eataly is just down the street. There's a great coffee place, Stumptown, in the lobby of the Ace Hotel. I heard Dover Street Market is opening on Lexington, a few blocks away.

WW: Speaking of coffee... your store in Tokyo has a café, right?

GL: Yes, we have two spaces in Tokyo. One, Café Kitsuné, is more of a hangout. There's a Japanese garden. You can have a coffee, listen to music from our label, and check out the Kitsuné Tee and Kitsuné Parisien lines. We're working with an amazing coffee maker, Eiichi Kunitomo, founder of Omotesando Koffee.

WW: Other than great coffee, what attracts you to Tokyo?

GL: Lots of very nice customers! No, but really, I've been going there every two months for the past ten years. It's like my second home. When we were opening in New York, it felt a little like we were coming out of nowhere, but in Japan everybody already knows us. We have a proper following, and the fact that Masaya is Japanese makes us even stronger. He's like a local celebrity!

WW: What are some of your favorite addresses in Tokyo?

GL: It's the endless shopping city! I especially like Land of Tomorrow, Isetan, United Arrows, and N. Hoolywood.

WW: Are you a collector, of art or objects?

GL: I'm not an art collector... yet. All my money goes back into the company for now. I do have lots of vinyl from when I had a record shop. But it's heavy and I have too much, so I'm divesting. I appreciate that records are art objects and that the sound is amazing, but digital sound can also be good and it's way lighter! Now to DJ, all I need is a flash drive that fits in my pocket.

WW: What are your favorite venues to DJ?

GL: In Tokyo there's a great club called Sound Museum Vision. It has the biggest base sound system in the world! In general, I'm pickier these days. I used to travel to Australia often, but now that I'm a father of two, it's harder to make those long trips.

WW: What's coming up for Maison Kitsuné's recording artists?

GL: There's a lot to be excited about in 2013. Yelle is releasing a new song in early February. Our band Citizens! is going on tour in the U.S. in March. And Two Door Cinema Club is also touring America—they're headlining at Coachella. Meanwhile, we're working on the next compilation CD and putting out a lot of singles from small bands.

WW: And looking further ahead, what else is on the horizon for Kitsuné?

GL: We will open a second space in New York and a bigger store in Paris. We're also looking into opening boutiques in Osaka, Seoul, and Hong Kong.