Calvin Klein

FASHION DESIGNER

b. November 19, 1942

He is a pioneering American fashion designer whose minimalist style and controversial advertising reshaped the industry.

"I'm crazy, and I don't pretend to be anything else."

Calvin Klein is a pioneering American fashion designer whose minimalist style redefined luxury and casual wear, and controversial advertising reshaped fashion marketing.

Born in the Bronx, New York, Klein took his early inspiration from his grandmother, an accomplished dressmaker. He graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology in 1963, then apprenticed at a Seventh Avenue coat manufacturer. In 1964, he married his college girlfriend, Jayne Centre. They had one child, Marci Klein, before divorcing in 1974.

In 1968, at 26, Klein founded his eponymous company with a childhood friend, Barry Schwartz. Starting with $10,000, Klein designed understated coats and suits in counterpoint to the era's flower-power trends. His breakthrough came when Bonwit Teller placed a $50,000 order. He soon expanded into women's sportswear.

In the 1970s, Klein became the first designer to win three consecutive Coty American Fashion Critics' Awards for womenswear and the youngest inductee into the Coty Hall of Fame. He popularized designer jeans, most notably with his racy 1980 ad spot featuring a teenage Brooke Shields. Despite some networks banning it, the ad dramatically increased sales.

In the 1980s, Klein launched highly successful women's fragrances, including Obsession and Eternity, and revolutionized the undergarment industry, making men's underwear a branded fashion statement. The 1985 blockbuster film "Back to the Future" used his designer briefs as the basis of a running gag.

Klein married his assistant, Kelly Rector, in 1986. They separated in 1996. He entered a substance abuse treatment program in 1988 and subsequently experienced relapses and a near-bankruptcy.

Despite setbacks, Klein expanded into affordable apparel, home décor, and cosmetics, and continued his controversial advertising. By the 1990s, Calvin Klein was an industry-dominant brand. His 1992 homoerotic underwear ads with Mark Wahlberg (then Marky Mark) and a waifish Kate Moss drew criticism for their sensuality and "heroin chic" aesthetic. In 1995, his CK Jeans campaign triggered allegations of pornography and a Justice Department investigation, though no charges were filed.

In 2003, Phillips-Van Heusen (PVH) acquired Calvin Klein Inc. (CKI). Klein stayed on as a consulting creative director. Months later, after disrupting a New York Knicks game while intoxicated, Klein returned to rehab. In 2006, CKI declined to renew his contract, formally ending his ties to the brand.

Later in life, Klein publicly addressed his sexual fluidity. In 2016, he began a relationship with Kevin Baker, a model roughly 45 years his junior.

In 2017, Klein published a self-titled autobiographical coffee-table book featuring his work and commentary.



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