

Interview



A New Step for Olivier Saillard

By Sandra Iskander

It is a new era for J.M. Weston with the opening of a new boutique on the world-famous Avenue des Champs-Élysées and the arrival of a new artistic director, Olivier Saillard.

Stepping down from his role as the director of Palais Galliera after a quarter of a century, Saillard admits, "It was a complex decision to quit my work as a museum director after twenty-five years. But after 140 exhibitions, including numerous ones dedicated to designers I deeply admire (Madame Grès, Azzedine Alaïa, Comme des Garçons, Jeanne Lanvin, and Cristóbal Balenciaga), I had the feeling of a complete work. I started at Palais Galliera with an exhibition of Azzedine Alaïa and ended with a retrospective on Martin Margiela, I was very lucky. The proposition of J.M. Weston came at a turning point in my life. I was 50 years old and felt like new perspectives. I like the fact that there was a factory, that it was a French house with a human heritage and its own know-how. I remember I immediately thought of Rimbaud, that Verlaine would call *Thomme aux semelles de vent*. After all this is what convinced me. I saw all the poetry [surrounding] this brand founded in 1981 in Limoges."

Taking on the new role at J.M. Weston seemingly became an extension of Saillard's work experience, explaining that, "I am a historian, so I first immersed myself into the history of the brand. I visited the factory in Limoges and went into the archives. The history is very interesting. J.M. Weston is a fictitious name. The founder was called Edouard Blanchard. At the beginning of the 20th century he sent his son to the United States, to a town called Weston, near Boston, so he could train in the traditional Norwegian welt technique and the Goodyear stitching. As for the initials J.M., we don't know their signification. Then I also went into some research and found traces of the first Hunt shoes dating back to 1937. I like the idea that J.M. Weston is inline with durability. These are shoes of great quality that one keeps for a long time. I like this aspect, quite eco-friendly and thus modern."

And it appears bringing back the old is Saillard's forte with the now artistic

director dipping into the archives to give the house's iconic designs a breath of fresh air and bringing them to the house's new flagship boutique. "In the atelier here, I have a range of shoes I stored, the Hunt derby, the Half-Hunt derby, the Republican Guard boot, the Moccasin, eleven of the iconic styles of the brand that I observe carefully so as to better immerse myself. There is a mood board on the wall where I pinned the faces of Carl André and writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach, some paintings of Soulages. The Papers collection is inspired by the 40s. Shoes are bolder, with square toes, leather wallpaper motifs in the inner side of the shoe. I don't like neglected interiors and I like the idea of bringing paper to the feet in order to feel lighter. Again, the Weston shoe is made to last. Fashion always focuses on the new seasons and the collections to come. This absolute duty of novelty is absurd. I wish to set some [new] dressing habits," he explains.

Accustomed to putting on exhibitions at Palais Galliera for twenty-five years, Saillard is also bringing his know-how in attracting an audience to good use at J.M. Weston by hoping to renew how we discover new collections. "I suggested we hold performances rather than shows, not necessarily to show new collections but to show the spirit of these timeless shoes, for the day, for the evening, for yesterday, for tomorrow, for ever. When a Weston is used, we send them to the factory. These shoes are passed on from generation to generation. Last June we presented a performance called *Défilé pour 27 chaussures* at the Grand Palais in which dancer and choreographer Mathilde Monnier, who directs the *Centre National de la Danse* in Pantin, showed eleven iconic shoes of J.M. Weston. It's a different way of telling the story of the house, to breathe some mythology and poetry back around the name of J.M. Weston. Then, we worked with Laetitia Costa, and photographer Katerina Jebb, to embody the new aesthetic of the Weston shoes that can be worn just as well by a man or a woman. For this campaign, I thought of androgynous women of Berlin in the 40s," the designer says.

Saillard doesn't stop his "performances" at how the new collections are



(Olivier Saillard (opposite page), the new J.M. Weston boutique (top and right), and Mathilde Monnier's performance showcasing J.M. Weston's 11 iconic shoes (top left))

presented either, extending his ideas to how the house's boutiques are designed with the designer explaining, "We opened the Champs-Élysées boutique last July. The one who enters the store should be considered as a visitor before he becomes a client. I remember visiting the Comme des Garçons store as a student just to be able to see the pieces, without buying. I like the idea that one gets into the history of the brand in this way. Fashion is not only about buying. True luxury today is time. Because taking time is to give oneself the one for thinking and studying. Joseph Dirand designed the new store on the Champs-Élysées where the house settled back in 1932. In this space inspired by Art Déco, we will open the chapters, as the ones of a book, to explain the brand. Shoeboxes are blue, as the main colour of the earthenware of Limoges, boxes we conceived so they can fold to take less space in the wardrobes and can fit in a suitcase. A space is dedicated to the description of the making of the shoes and, for example, how the 180 Moccasin needs 180 gestures made by different craftsmen. Another one is dedicated to shoe care and a third one to the knowledge of various leathers."

***"The shoe means walking, travelling,
it means somewhere else..."***

- Olivier Saillard

When he isn't immersing himself in the history of shoemaking at J.M. Weston, Olivier Saillard reads. "I read a great number of books. For a while, I used to read three books a week. I've had a habit for the past thirty years, to turn down the pages where there is an excerpt that evokes clothing. I now post them on Instagram. I find this app is a very nice tool for sharing." And of course his love for putting on exhibitions is very much alive with Saillard sharing that he is "working on an exhibition about menswear fashion

with the Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery. It will be shown from June to October 2019 at Palazzo Pitti in Florence, in collaboration with Museo della Moda e del Costume. Also, I'll be showing at the Centre National de la Danse in Pantin on November 10th and 11th the Ephemeral Museum of Fashion that was first staged at Palazzo

Pitti and based on collections from the Galleria del Costume e della Moda. On the same occasion, we'll be showing the performance with Mathilde Monnier and J.M. Weston, *Défilé pour 27 chaussures*."

J.M. WESTON BOUTIQUE
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