

## All About Women

### An Interview with Diane von Furstenberg, DVF Studio



Diane von Furstenberg

**EDITORS' NOTE** Diane von Furstenberg first arrived in the fashion world in 1972, and by 1976, had sold millions of her iconic wrap dress. In 1997, after a hiatus, she reemerged on the New York fashion scene with the re-launch of the dress that started it all. In 2005, von Furstenberg was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) and, one year later, was elected the CFDA's new President. She sits on the board of Vital Voices and is also a board member of the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA).

**COMPANY BRIEF** Headquartered in New York City, Diane von Furstenberg ([www.dvf.com](http://www.dvf.com)) was founded in 1972 by the designer and is renowned for its iconic wrap dress and signature prints. A global luxury lifestyle brand, it has expanded to include ready-to-wear, swimwear, handbags, footwear, eyewear, luggage, accessories, DVF by H. Stern fine jewelry watches, fragrance, and rugs. Its collections are sold in over 71 countries and in 33 namesake retail boutiques worldwide.

#### How do you define the DVF brand and the vision behind it?

Before it's about DVF being a brand, it's about my being a woman, because everything I did to start, and everything I do today, does not start with marketing. Marketing does not initiate anything. Therefore, everything is much more authentic. The authenticity and the emotion behind anything authentic is what makes everything

different for my brand, and it has allowed me to make mistakes, to sell my company, to pull it out of the ashes, and to start again. That is what gives me an edge over other people. But when the company gets bigger, you have to constantly make sure everybody follows that. I never say, we cater to this age. There is nothing like that. A woman is a woman, and a woman starts to be a woman at the age of 14 and remains a woman until she dies. I'm not saying that everything is right for everything at every age, but it's about being a woman and maintaining a certain spirit. When I started in the business, I was in my early 20s, and I did things I thought were right for me, but my mother was 45 and it was right for her, and then it was right for women I knew of various ages. Now I'm 63 years old and clearly I can't wear everything anymore, but I can still wear quite a lot, because the spirit remains the same.

**Is that concept for your brand well understood? Your brand is very well known within the entertainment industry, which would make it seem more of a niche for that market.**

There is a lot of celebrity reach, but I fight that as much as possible, because I make clothes for women and for when they are women. Not when they disguise themselves, but when they are themselves – that's what I do.

**In the United States, this brand is strong, but you are truly a global brand and recently opened in Brazil.**

We are 50/50 with the rest of the world. Brazil has been a huge success. We did an incredible amount of business, something like \$750,000 the first month. But whether it's Russia, Shanghai, Brazil, Paris, London, or Athens, it's still the same spirit for the brand.

**You have branched out in the brand and carry natural extensions with handbags and other items. Are there additional extensions that make sense? Do you worry about becoming too broad?**

No. We are a private company, family owned, and very profitable, so we have no push to be growing. I want to maintain a select distribution so I do, and therefore the growth comes about via brand extension. What I'm starting soon is home, and then beauty. But I'm not doing men's or children's or a lot of things.

**Your product can be purchased online, but there are many who feel that you need to actually touch the product to make the sale. Can you really drive sales online?**

Of course. Young people buy everything online, especially once they buy and they know what it is. Online is a huge business and will only continue to grow.

**You have been very involved with mentoring and helping young designers.**

I'm President of the CFDA so a big part of what I do is to mentor young designers. But I also mentor women who are not designers. My mission in life is to empower women. I do it through fashion, as well as through mentoring – I talk at universities, and then I do it through philanthropy. I'm also very involved in Vital Voices.

**You recently started the DVF Awards along that line to honor extraordinary women. Will you talk about the development of that?**

I'm very engaged in philanthropy and that is a family foundation, and we each have a sector that we focus on. Women are very important to me, and through Vital Voices, I got more involved with helping women. This year, we had the Women in the World Conference and I was going to sponsor the dinner at the end of it, and then I thought it was a good opportunity to launch the DVF Awards where I could give exposure and some money to several women.

**What are you most focused on to continue the success and growth of the brand going forward?**

I want to leave a heritage. I want to leave the spirit of what the brand stands for. The brand stands for empowering women and making women feel confident and like themselves. Hopefully, one of my granddaughters will take over.

**Do you ever turn it off? Do you have the ability to get away from the business?**

I do, but I never get away completely. I travel a lot and I hike every weekend. I need the open space, the solitude, and nature to create a buffer. Things are always somehow on my mind, but I don't overdo it.

**Do you take the time to ever look back?**

I reflect all the time. I meditate and do yoga. Reflecting and being thankful are very important.

**For those young designers who dream of one day having a brand of their own, what advice would you give them?**

Follow your heart. Just be true to yourself. At least then if you make a mistake, you know it's your mistake. And don't listen to too many things. ●