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Roland Mouret on carving out a stellar galaxy

Celebrity favourite Roland Mouret is about to open his fashion 'maison' in Mayfair - here he recalls a colourful career.

BY HILARY ALEXANDER | 14 FEBRUARY 2011



Designer Roland Mouret in his London 'maison', soon to open in Mayfair Photo: EDDIE MULHOLLAND

The sunlight streaking through the lead-light windows illuminates the ornate cornicing, oak panelling, Robert Adams-style fireplaces and stainless steel rails where soon will hang the latest collection of the London-based designer who turned the 'red carpet' into his own private celebrity galaxy.

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Roland Mouret, designer of the Galaxy dress - THE 'It' Dress of 2005 - allows himself an ear-to-ear grin, raising his left eyebrow in a perfect imitation of Clark Gable, and spreading his arms wide.

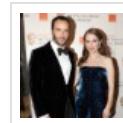
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"I have to pinch myself. It's fantastic ...weird, to be the

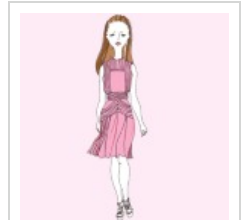
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master of your own house. Look!" He points out into the street, "Trees, like a little garden. It could be the Avenue Montaigne. It could be 'Breakfast at Tiffany's' was filmed here. It's really exciting. It's London. This is one of the best locations in the world. It was always my dream to open my own house.

"We are standing on the ground floor of No.8 Carlos Place, in Mayfair, at varying times over the last 118 years, a private home, bank, and the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Now, the six-storey, Grade 1 listed, late 19th century building opposite The Connaught Hotel is the flagship home of Roland Mouret, a blend of retail space for womenswear and menswear, design workshops, showroom, studios and the designer's own private atelier, where he sketches and snacks on 'home' deliveries of Italian meat and steamed vegetables from his favourite restaurant.

Inside, this first 'residence' of the brand has been designed by Jerome Dodd, owner of the eclectic London antique haven, Les Couilles du Chien, mixing the original features with smoked mirrors, and contemporary art works by Bouke de Vries, and Tomasso Barbi, "to reflect the fantasy".

By turns mysterious and modern, it sets the seal on Mouret's name and his label; is an affirmation of his value as a designer; and concrete evidence of the mutual trust and faith between him and the entertainment tycoon, Simon Fuller, his partner since September, 2006.

No. 8 Carlos Place, which will be launched next Monday (February 21st) during London Fashion Week, is also a fabulous, fitting climax to a fashion drama with more plot twists and turns than 'The Devil Wears Prada' meets "Mission Impossible".

A butcher's son from Rouen, Mouret dropped out of fashion school in Paris, in 1979, was 'discovered' in a club by Jean Paul Gaultier, became a catwalk model, creative director and stylist, then moved to London and opened a bar; so far so "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll". He then sold the bar, and, with the small profit, embarked on his fashion career, designing for a fringe collective, 'People Corporation', before setting up on his own.

He launched his label at London Fashion Week in February, 1998, in an old warehouse at the Truman Brewery in East London, with a live performance by Marc Almond. The clothes were handmade, without the use of patterns, from raw silk, wools and organza, ingeniously draped and folded on the body, and held together with hatpins and stud fasteners. The collection was critically acclaimed, made the cover of Italian magazine, *Collezioni* - and made his name.

Within a few years Mouret had entered into a partnership deal, become the darling of the fashion set, and the leader of the 'demi-couture' movement. The invention of 'the galaxy dress', launched with his autumn/winter 2005 collection, bought him worldwide fame. Then came a blow-up with his backers and in October, 2005, he walked away without even the rights to use his name, when every celebrity worth a headline was wearing his label.

A year later came the offer from Fuller, who told him: "it's not music, it's not popular culture, but look at the headlines! Fashion is the glue of every artistic endeavour."

He showed his womenswear collections under the title of 'RM by Roland Mouret', and launched menswear in January 2010, as "Mr". Finally, in September last year, he acquired the rights to once again use his own name.

"I am so happy in this country, to make this magic moment. Now I can have a legacy to make other people dream. I first was inspired by London when I was 11 and we started our English lessons by bringing a bowl and a spoon to school so we could have an English breakfast of Kellogg's Cornflakes and a cup of tea. Later, in Paris, I would dream of having my own fashion 'house'. The first 'maison' I ever went into was Yves Saint Laurent when I was 22 years old. I was going to pitch my sketches and I fell asleep while I was waiting," he grimaces, agreeing he had probably been up all night at 'Le Palace'. "It was my 'QG' (quartier-général/headquarters), all the beautiful people of the 1980's went there".

"What I loved and what I always wanted is that feeling that 'the person' is there. It's not a shop, it's a 'house'. And this is the feeling I have here. I hate the concept of big

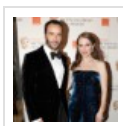
shops because they are like tombs or mausoleums. I want my house to be full of life. It's here I can shout, I can argue. My staff and my customers will all come and go through the same doors."

"I'm 50 this year and I realise I have created a technique and a business. I can succeed because what I am doing doesn't exist until I do it! If Yohji (Yamamoto) and (Azzedine) Alaia had a bastard son, it would be me. I work around the female body and I try not to mistake models for real women - who wear bras! Ever since The Galaxy, people always ask me will I do another and I suppose every season there is a style which is what I call a version of the female body."

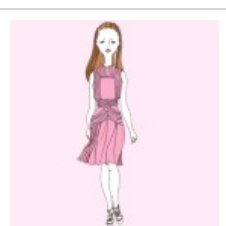
"In the beginning, my parents, especially my father, didn't understand where my talent comes from. But I explain to him, to be a butcher requires precision, I work like a butcher with fabrics. The link between us is the love of craft and the love of what we do.

"Yes, I think my father would be very proud of me."

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