



BALMAIN

BALMAIN KIDS SPRING SUMMER 2022 COLLECTION

When some members of the Paris fashion press mentioned to Olivier Rousteing that his latest offerings for Balmain seemed to channel many distinct and varied influences, the designer quickly contradicted them, noting that the origin story behind the highly praised collection was actually much simpler than that.

“There’s really just one inspiration behind each and every one of these designs,” Balmain’s Creative Director explained. “Me.”

As Rousteing noted, he has recently been absorbing and exploring many previously unknown facts about his life story. For the Netflix documentary ‘Wonder Boy,’ Rousteing was closely followed by a film crew for several months, as he deftly navigated his way through a series of bureaucratic obstacles and emotional landmines in search for answers about his birth parents. Rousteing, ‘né sous X’—an orphan who did not know his own origins—grew up obsessed with questions regarding heritage, race, belonging and fitting in—and the moving film reveals how he was ultimately able to discover that, as he now often proudly proclaims: “I am ½ Somalian, ½ Ethiopian and 100% Français.”

The power of that new knowledge propelled the designer to create what is clearly his most personal collection to date. For his latest Balmain designs, Rousteing set his focus upon the many unique strands that weave together to form who he is today. “I contain multitudes. I am the orphan adopted by loving parents in Bordeaux, the passionate fan of the music of my youth, the heir to a rich Balmain legacy, the designer devoted to the transformative power of French couture, un vrai parisien—and, as I have recently learned, I am also an African. Each of those distinct strands form a part of me. Each is reflected in this collection.”

When it was shown in Paris, Rousteing’s biographical direction surprised and wowed the world’s fashion critics. And for the latest Balmain Kids designs, Rousteing and his design teams have continued to build upon the compelling themes of that recent successful presentation.

GEOMETRIC INSTITUTIONNEL

Among the many strands included in Rousteing’s latest Paris presentation, one of the most important was that of a devotion to Balmain’s heritage.

That’s no surprise, of course. History has been a fundamental influence for every one of the designer’s collections. For over ten years, Olivier Rousteing has consistently built upon the incredible legacy that Pierre Balmain left behind.

During interviews, Rousteing notes that his great respect for the house’s impressive heritage echoes his own personal search for clarity about his own origins. “Both my focus on this house’s legacy and my recent individual quest for answers underline one shared, basic truth,” explains Rousteing. “In fact, it’s a principal that we’ve made sure to include in our Balmain handbook. It now forms the first line of our definition of this house’s distinctive DNA: ‘By celebrating where we come from, we can clearly see where we are headed.’”

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For this season's Balmain Kids offerings, Rousteing's devotion to and respect for heritage can be quickly spotted in this grouping's sharply tailored lines, which riff on the celebrated silhouettes of Pierre Balmain's daring "New French Style"—sharp and precise Parisian couture cuts that highlighted Pierre Balmain's architectural training.

In addition, the spotlight is placed on house's distinctive codes: eye-catching black-and-white contrasts, golden buttons, and a host of Balmain's singular graphics—including plays on the house logo, monogram and coat-of-arms. Balmain's best-known signatures—those pieces that regularly reappear on house runways, season after season, decade after decade—are also included, with Rousteing putting forward new spins on the classic Balmain marinière, blazer and smoking.

BIJOUX

Rousteing's devotion to the traditions and savoir-faire of Parisian couture—including the type of skilled and exceptional artisanal embellishments that have set French fashion apart for centuries—is another of the key strands that were woven into the latest Balmain presentation.

And, once you combine that couture inspiration with the designer's well-known passion for the rebellious music that he blared on a constant loop during his youth—as well as his fascination with the incredible style of the legends that created those hits—well, you end up with the quintessential spirit of today's modern Balmain.

Unsurprisingly, most of these rock-meets-couture offerings rely on the house's signature color combo—beginning with the-darkest-of-blacks and adding intricate embellishments that rely on the-richest-of-golds—creating Balmain Kids dresses, pants, jackets and tops that perfectly echo the luxe-meets-troublemaker attitude of Rousteing's most celebrated runways. Golden embroidery also serves to spell out the house's name, founding date and location. And there's one striking multi-colored pattern, set atop a short dress, which manages to expertly recall the many impressively bejeweled dresses that Balmain just showed in Paris.

CORNE DE L'AFRIQUE

Olivier Rousteing explains that many of the patterns, embellishments and relaxed silhouettes that he recently showed in Paris channel the rich colors, techniques and craftwork of the Horn of Africa—the region that he now knows as the home of both his birth father and mother. During Paris' long COVID-19 lockdowns, Rousteing had the time he needed to explore his newly discovered heritage and he was constantly inspired by the beautiful weavings, mesmerizing motifs and jeweled embroideries that he came across—artisan traditions that help make clear the region's long history of melding together contributions from many cultures and influences.

The Balmain Kids collection is transformed by Rousteing's plays on those tones, graphics and patterns, allowing even the most familiar styles of jackets, tops and dresses to assume entirely new looks.

And while Olivier Rousteing may include inspiration from far-off lands, he stresses that his collection, like every house offering, remains completely Parisienne. "These designs reflect my own style, house signatures and our founder's legacy—and, ultimately, each of those essentials reflect what surrounds

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us,” explained Rousteing. “There’s so much in everything we do that builds upon what my team and I see here, every day—the styles of our transformed-yet-eternally beautiful Paris. This is a truly diverse and dynamic fashion capital, where we can celebrate the unique beauty and contribution of everyone, whatever might be their origin. Today’s Paris is both French and global and looks well beyond the concrete limits of its Périphérique. Yes, I may have recently discovered more about where I look from—but I always knew that this where I truly belong. Paris is my home—and the refined essence of this city will always be at the heart of every Balmain offering.”

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