

# Roberto Cavalli: Young at Heart, and Always Colorful



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**T**echno beats were blaring during a noon meeting at Roberto Cavalli's Fifth Avenue offices on Wednesday. Sure, it was a little early for the *unst unst* of dance music, but what else would one expect from the man who not only outfits but also helped define the aesthetic of the party-ready jet set when he launched his line of vibrant, sexed-up designs in the seventies? Cavalli, 73, was in town this week to fete the 5,650-square-foot Soho flagship for his more youthful Just Cavalli range (*below*). Naturally, the new digs, which opened to the public in October, were celebrated with a *lively bash last night*. But the store isn't the designer's only new venture—he's bowing a Cavalli Club in Miami next year, and, in addition to designing Just Cavalli and his more luxurious main line, he's pushing his own brands of vodka and red

wine. It's all part of Cavalli's ever-evolving role as a businessman—rather than a strict fashion creative—a transition he accepts but also laments. Ahead of yesterday evening's festivities, Cavalli sat down with Style.com for a candid chat about why New Yorkers wear black, how he hates being copied, and what it means to be sexy.

— Katharine K. Zarrella

### **Why did you launch Just Cavalli in the first place?**

Sometimes people call Just Cavalli a second line. It's not my second line. It's a line for the young. Before I [launched] Just Cavalli, I started to see how many people around me were copying me. There was Cavalli style all over, and I said, "Why am I giving so many opportunities to other people? Maybe I should just start to copy myself." So I started Just Cavalli to copy myself. But slowly, I began to love Just Cavalli very much. I was able to make Roberto Cavalli more chic, more sophisticated, and more about the red carpet—more glamorous. I love Just Cavalli because it's young. I'm not a young man, but in my mind, I'm very young. I like to go to the disco, and I like to see beautiful girls.

### **When most people think of New York fashion, visions of black-clad women pop into their heads. But your designs are colorful, vibrant, and full of print. How do you feel Cavalli clothes relate to a New York audience?**

Oh, please. New York became like that because everyone wants to look skinnier. Black is the color people wear when they're gym fanatics. And it's true, if you wear black, you look at least five kilos less than what you are. I do it myself. I was relatively fat many years ago, and I started to dress myself in black all the time. I know why I dressed in black—to look thin. But black is negative, it's not positive. And it's a little more American. I think designers who are Italian or French are more

colorful. But I do love the Japanese fashion. Japanese fashion is black and gray, but it's *wow*. It's harmony. I adore that.

### **Why are you so drawn to color?**

My fashion is colorful because I love life. I wake up in the morning, I open the window over where I live on a wonderful hill in Florence, I see the sun, and in the springtime I love to see the first peach flowers that are kind of white and a bit pink. And then I feel like I want to put out something colorful. I don't follow fashion, I follow my feelings, and my clothes have a lot to do with my mood. And I think that should be the case with every woman—every woman should be the designer. And every woman should understand that if you are a little bit colorful, you can show your happiness to your boyfriend.



**Do you feel that Americans have very different tastes compared to European women?**

Yes, because [American women] trust designers like Michael Kors. He's one of the biggest copy designers in the world. I just want to tell him to stop copying me! Stop! All the time I write those comments on Instagram. He copies everybody! And Americans like Michael Kors! And you love so many other designers who do that—he's not American fashion. He is international fashion made in America. It's not fair. The American women, they all dress the same.

**Maybe if New Yorkers wore a bit more color, we wouldn't have a reputation for being so chilly.**

Don't be silly. New Yorkers aren't chilly. I've met so many American women who are warm and romantic and so charming. But American women, in my opinion, have to be a little bit more open-minded.

**What do you think it means to be sexy today, and how has that changed throughout the course of your career?**

I started out making very sexy clothes because I [launched my line] after minimalism. And sexy had a lot to do with my success, because after minimalism, every woman wished to be a *woman*, to be feminine. But the line between sexy and vulgar was very thin. And to be sexy and not to be vulgar, you need to have a very good fashion sense. Today, I don't think fashion should be sexy because women have become more mature. They understand that they can be sexy just by speaking with their eyes. To be sexy, you don't need to show your body. In my opinion, it's much more sexy when a woman is covered. I'm a man. I love to be able to fantasize. I think we should transform the word *sexy* to *sensual* because it's more modern. Sensual is glamorous. Sexy is not.

## **Has your approach to design and your role as a fashion designer changed since you opened your house in the seventies?**

Of course it's changed. I don't know how I've changed, but I know why. Today I feel I have more responsibility. Today I have people working for me, and I know that I cannot be so arrogant in fashion like I used to be. Before, I'd say, "I'll do what I want!" Today, no. My dream is to make one fashion show where people say, "Roberto's getting crazy!" Before, I was a little bit more natural—and by that I mean crazy.

## **What's next for the Cavalli brand?**

What I'm working very hard on now is the Cavalli Club [in Miami], because it's completely one world—music, fashion, movies. It's all a part of our life. It's very difficult to understand this Cavalli world in the States, because Americans are more sensitive to their ideas than European ideas. I remember before, America was the number-one place to appreciate things made in Italy or made in France. Now, they love everything made in China. It's an evolution I accept, but I would like to be stronger, and more famous in America. It's a big challenge, but you'll see. You will love my fashion and you will love my store, and when you see my Just Cavalli pieces, you'll think next summer, when you're in Saint-Tropez, you'll want to wear this kind of thing. And you will feel very sexy.

Photo: Steve Eichner ; Courtesy of Just Cavalli

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