



DRESS YOU UP

WE TALK TO VICKY LEWIS, CREATOR AND DESIGNER OF THE MANCHESTER FASHION LABEL, VICKY MARTIN



Designer Vicky Lewis founded the Vicky Martin label in 1987, at the height of Hacienda fever in Manchester. It was, she says, a good time to be at the forefront of clubwear (which is putting it mildly, we feel).

Seventeen years later, Vicky Martin is still a hugely successful brand, operating from a Manchester-based workshop where all garments are individually made using fabrics sourced in Paris, Italy and England. Fans of Vicky Martin include Courtney Love, PJ Harvey, Liz Hurley, Victoria Beckham, Denise Van Outen and assorted soap stars.

We spoke to Vicky to find out more about the label - and her new standalone store at the Triangle...

Did you always want to be a fashion designer?

My background was business studies and management. I wanted to be a lawyer originally, but realised that I would be far too bored and creatively stifled; so, when I was 19, I enrolled on a college fashion and textiles course. I set the company up two-and-a-half years after graduation.

You were pretty young, then...?

I was 24 when I started the business - so there was a bit of blind stupidity on my part. At 24, you don't think you can fail. You just do things and don't think about the consequences. Had I been five or 10 years older, I'd probably have been a lot more cautious.

Presumably it took a few years for Vicky Martin to become the rip-roaring success it is now...

(apologetically) To be honest, it was an immediate success, and within three years of starting I had five retail outlets. At the time,

nobody was doing what I had set out to do: ie, clubwear. It was the mid-Eighties, Manchester had the whole Hacienda thing going on, and no-one was designing or manufacturing clubwear in Manchester at that time.

Have you encountered any problems, en route?

Oh yeah. The first major problem we had was in 1996 when the bomb went off. We lost our shop in the Royal Exchange and it was the first sign of any trading trauma. Before that, we'd done very well for nine years.

How did you turn things around?

We opened a shop in the Victoria Quarter, in Leeds, within three months. We also started to look at concessions, and opened our first in Selfridges at The Trafford Centre. So it made me look at other areas of the business, rather than simply relying on the shop in the Royal Exchange which had been the main part of our success.

Without the bomb, I don't think I'd have done that. I also don't think Manchester would have all the high-profile stores it has now, without the redevelopment. I think something positive will always come out of a negative.

Who are you aiming your clothes at these days?

We are primarily eveningwear. I don't describe it as 'clubwear' anymore, because I don't believe people go clubbing to the extent they used to in the 1980s and 1990s. We do some daywear, too: a range of denim, for instance, is very popular.

Lots of glam celebs are big fans, we notice.

We've done very well with the younger girls in Coronation Street and Emmerdale; Liz Hurley

Vicky Martin Stores

42 Queen Victoria
Street
Victoria Quarter
Leeds LS1 6BE
0113 244 1477

The Triangle
Unit 31
Manchester M4 3TR
0161 832 8234

Vicky Martin is also available at:

Selfridges
1 The Dome
The Trafford Centre
Manchester
0161 629 1270

Selfridges
Dept 932
The Bullring
Birmingham
0121 600 6852

Open
54 Church Street
Liverpool L1 3AY
0151 708 3320

has bought from us. Tina O'Brien from Coronation Street wore one of our dresses to the Soap Awards last year, and it made every newspaper and magazine. So yes, when you get PJ Harvey or Courtney Love wearing one of your dresses, it's fantastic public exposure.

Do you ever switch off as a fashion designer?

I tend to find that, wherever I am, I'm still thinking about what the next collection will be. I've just been to Barcelona for four days and I've picked up an awful lot of inspiration there; so, no, I never switch off. I'm aware that I have to create something all the time.

You opened a store at The Triangle in October. How has it been received?

It's been great and we've had a very positive response. We opened with a view to being busy from next autumn, and it's a lovely shopping centre with some great stores, so I'm really pleased to be in there. And it's wonderful to have a standalone store in the centre of Manchester again.

Is this expansion on a grand scale?

Well, we opened a concession in Liverpool recently... in a store called Open, funnily enough. That's been well-received, too. We're still a relatively small, self-financed company. But I like that. I don't want other people throwing money into the pot and then telling me what I can and can't do. The brand could lose its individuality.

Is Vicky Martin - and therefore Vicky Lewis - staying in Manchester, then?

I'm born and bred in Manchester. Both of my children are at secondary school in Manchester and I can't see me wanting to relocate.

So I'm not going anywhere...