

# DVF on Redefining a Legacy Brand at Fashion Tech Forum

Diane von Furstenberg, Jonathan Saunders and Paolo Riva discussed how they plan to redefine DVF for a new generation at Karen Harvey's Fashion Tech Forum.

By [Kristi Garced](#) on October 14, 2016



📷 Diane von Furstenberg in her Meatpacking District headquarters. Photo by Ryan Pfluger

**NEW YORK** — Diane von Furstenberg was her ever-charming, wise-cracking and refreshingly honest self at the Fashion Tech Forum on Thursday afternoon at the Duggal Greenhouse in Brooklyn.

Joined on stage by her company's newly appointed chief creative officer, [Jonathan Saunders](#), and chief executive officer Paolo Riva, the trio discussed how they plan to redefine [DVF](#) for a new generation.

“They are pretty much a dream team,” von Furstenberg said at one point of Saunders and Riva. “There is the brand, and then there’s the heritage that exists and then there is me — whatever

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I am. I am not really so involved in the brand. For the time being, we'll call me the role model. That's what happens when you get older; you become the role model."

Below, some highlights from the 40-minute chat that formed part of the Karen Harvey-organized forum and which was moderated by Nicole Phelps, the director of Vogue Runway:

**Saunders on his decision to join DVF as chief creative officer, a newly created role:** "With any brand that you consider working with, it's very important that there's an ethos and a strong identity there, and that was very clear for me [with DVF]. Women all over the world have an emotional connection to this brand...I think it's a brand that has such key, identifiable features. I came on board and I thought, 'Let's look at the beginning and at why Diane, as an individual, started this brand.' The effortlessness was important. The wrap dresses had personality, design — an emotional, decorative element to them. All of those values were important."

**Von Furstenberg on the appointment of Saunders:** "After the exhibition that I did in 2014 — the 40th anniversary of the wrap dress — [I thought], 'What does this brand become now? What does this brand become after me?' I was really looking for a businessman who understands products and a creative heir. I have admired Jonathan since he appeared on the scene as a young English designer. I loved his sense of color and print. It was so fresh, so modern, so new. When I found out that he had left his own company, I jumped on it right away. I said, 'Let's meet him.' Paolo and I met him at Claridge's, and after one hour, Jonathan was saying 'we.' And I thought that was a good sign. I said, 'Maybe you can come do some consulting in New York.' And he never left. I am extremely excited about this because I always knew he was talented, but I didn't know he was nice and I didn't know he was intelligent. Those were the surprises."

**Riva on reinventing DVF and disrupting the contemporary fashion business:** "We were not curating enough the product, the service and the experience that we were providing women...One of the reasons why we're extremely happy to have Jonathan on board is that he brings a package of knowledge on product and a fashion point of view which is very needed in the affordable luxury/contemporary segment in the United States. The disruption is offering [what we do] at our price point — an unprecedented level of quality, service, a fashion point of view and a direct dialogue with women that has

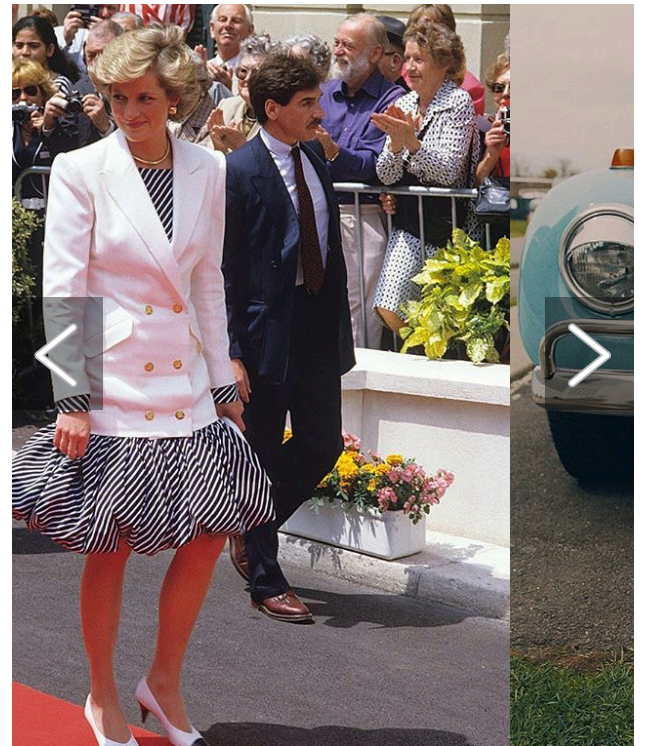


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not been offered at this level in a while. We were losing the focus on our customer. And [the customer] has evolved so much in her preferences, where she shops, how flexible and versatile she behaves in terms of shopping. A lot of brands were behind in that. We don't want to be behind her — we want to be ahead of her. We want to be inspired. Sometimes, it's the simple things. You can inspire by offering an amazing product. A great price point. An experience, great service and a fashion point of view.”

**Von Furstenberg on the evolution of her role within the company:** “We're in the fashion business. Things come in, they go out. Things change. It was time to really push the refresh button in a big way. Still being effortless and sexy and on-the-go...but I love the idea of stepping away from the creative [role]. I'm actually really happy to never have to do another color palette in my life....You don't want to take away from the heritage. As Jonathan said, there is an emotional attachment [to the brand]....and we want to keep that. That's the capital. But it's a good time now to refresh again. I am very happy to take a step backward in the business and watch them succeed.”

**Saunders on how he plans to shake things up at DVF:** “What's exciting is that everyone is questioning the traditional formats in which we communicate, both within the industry and directly to the consumer. At our latest presentation, I thought it was really important to spend time with editors to discuss the re-branding and the new direction we're going in...to sit down and speak to editors about the clothing and about how we could partner together in new and interesting ways. For me, that was invaluable. Even changing the format of that was a great start. Also, in thinking about how we structure the collections — because previously, the names that we were giving the collections were completely inappropriate for the seasons we dropped them in, so we're focusing on giving the woman what she wants when she wants it...For me, that's been the most enlightening process of the past few months: thinking about how we can do things in a different way.”

**Von Furstenberg's advice for budding designers:** “Everyone is trying to figure out how they're gonna make it to the next decade. The digital revolution has hit every industry and clearly, it is hitting our industry in a great and difficult way. Everything is transparent. You can find anything at any price... We're all surfing the tsunami. And we're not sure where it's going. My advice to everyone, especially small designers, is to really think about who you are: What is your identity, what is



your reason to be, what is it that you offer that is different? And really focus on that very much. And then, the truth is — don’t look at the old ways of doing business. You don’t necessarily have to sell to department stores...At this very moment, it is an advantage to be small. Everybody can have a web site. Everyone can do social media. There are a lot of different ways to do things. To be small is good...There is too much of everything. Too much pollution. Create the desire, the need. Focus on what women want and when they want it...Follow the calendar of a woman’s life. How she functions when the weather changes. Think about who you cater to. And make sure you give her what she wants — but she doesn’t always know what she wants. You also have to surprise her.”

» DVF Jonathan Saunders

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