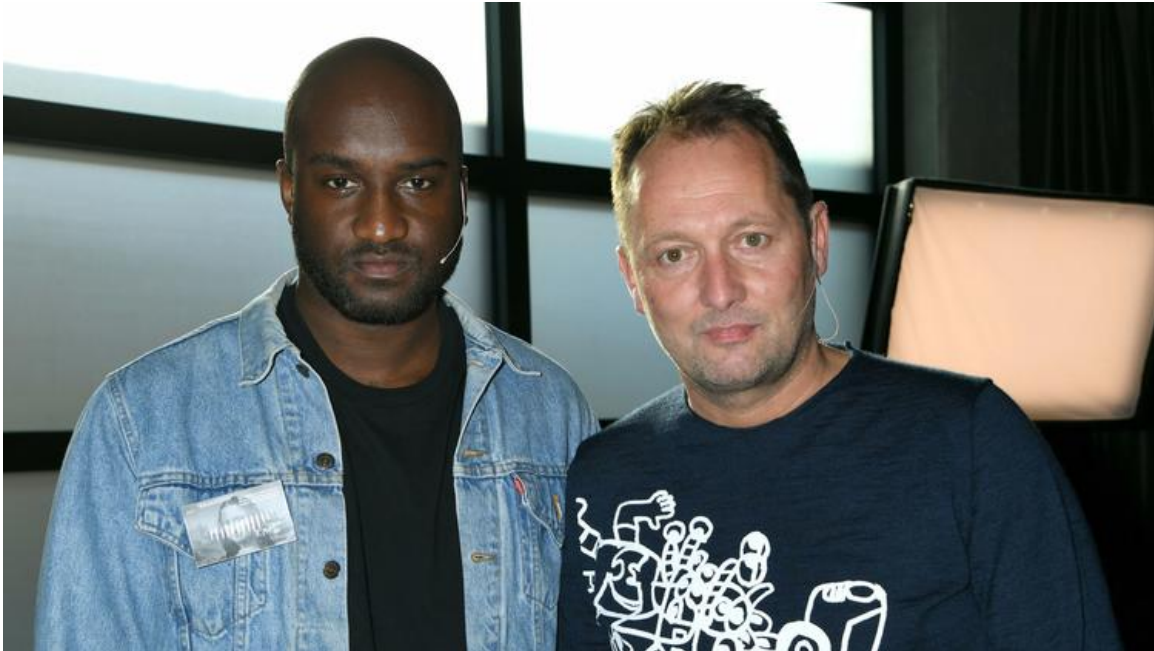


## Virgil Abloh, Ikea's Henrik Most on fashioning good home design



Virgil Abloh and Henrik Most at the Fashion Tech Forum in Culver City. (Graylock / Fashion Tech Forum / WWD)



By Kari Hamanaka | WWD

OCTOBER 10, 2017, 1:20 PM

**I**t started with a bag and now one of the fashion industry's hottest names in streetwear will merge with the company that's democratized home design.

Ikea and Off-White founder and creative director Virgil Abloh created buzz in the summer when it was confirmed the two would work together on a home collection to be sold at Ikea. The two discussed the thinking behind the partnership at the Fashion Tech Forum, held Friday in Culver City, Calif., marking the first time the conference was held in the Los Angeles area.

"For me, I'm a dreamer," Abloh said. "I'm just literally sitting around and thinking about how my ideas can impact or bring a different voice to the rest of the world and I looked at Ikea as sort of like pie in the sky, as this company that put design first [and] believed in the democratization of design. I was just thinking, visualizing if I could work with Ikea, that would open up to this door to this way of thinking that was usually left to clothing."

The stir that gave the two the push to collaborate was when images began to pop up on social media teasing Abloh's take on the well-known Ikea bag customers use while shopping the megastores. The interest fueled an already running conversation about design and it being attainable to anyone today, the designer said.

"We're at the end of an era where things can just be a utility. You can give emotional value into an object," Abloh said. "You take a kid like me that loves everything that a Millennial loves, but is now considering that square footage [in a home] outside the closet...therein lies this seemingly odd pairing [between Ikea and Abloh]."

Details on just what the collection is to consist of or when it's due out are less certain, but to hear Abloh and Ikea creative leader Henrik Most describe it, the product development process sounds as though it will be crowdsourced with Abloh visiting students in dorm rooms to pick their brains on their design aesthetics and where they shop for furniture.

"The first mistake is to try to brainstorm in a meeting amongst employees," Abloh said. "That's always leading off on the wrong foot. Consumer-facing. With this project, we eliminated the guessing game by involving [consumers]."

He likened the research and design process to an open source project. "We're not creating it in a silo," he said. "By the end, we might end up in a situation where it's created by everybody."

"We're not designing for the younger generation," Most said. "We're doing it together with them. The process is extremely interesting and at the core of this collection we like to interact with the young Millennials and create the collection together with them so we can share insights: what do you want, what do need, what's relevant instead of we, as a company, pointing the big finger. We want to learn. We need to be aware that as a company we don't own the truth."

Most, in an interview with WWD, when further prodded on details said the collection likely won't be due out until 2019 with the company uninterested in pushing out a few pieces at a time. Instead, he said the collaboration will reflect a full collection for the home.

"We want to make sure that when we present it, we offer solutions that make it possible for a young person to make their first home," Most said. "It wouldn't make sense to first come out with a chair and then you sit and wait one year. 'OK, when is the table coming? OK, now I need to wait for the bed.' So we want to make sure that when we launch, it will have all the ingredients that go into making a home. So [a release] will not be in '18; it will be some time in '19. It takes time, product development compared to fashion. We do a lot of testing of everything."

What is certain for Ikea is the May release of a streetwear-inspired collaboration with Los Angeles designer Chris Stamp of Stampd. The offering, which Most described as being for an active urban lifestyle, includes Ikea's first skateboard and plenty of pieces aimed at tackling storage and wardrobes, such as stackable acrylic boxes to show off a sneaker collection.

"You want to share what you have in your home. Young people, they use their clothes almost as home accessories where you hang your favorite dress or shirt on a nail on the door and it becomes an accessory in your home," Most said. "In the old days, you had a painting. Now, you hang a necklace. So it's catering to that and making it possible to show off who you are."

The collaboration with Stamp is set for a January prelaunch in Paris where there will be a pop-up store, Most said.

"I have big admiration for fashion designers in the sense that it's a tough world. Fashion builds on a logic where you, as a fashion designer, have the ability to reflect what goes on in society instantly. That could be for good or for worse," Most told WWD in talking about the home retailer's partnerships with the fashion set. "We've seen it with a lot of fashion designers like Rick Owens. Vivienne Westwood is a good example. It's about communicating with people about important topics that are relevant in society and that fashion designers can do in a way that is harder for a designer company because our product development is longer. You can design a fashion collection and get it on the street in a few weeks, but to develop a product like this [coffee table] will take two years so we learn a lot from fashion designers: the way they think, the way they tap into the sign of the times and also their aesthetics."

### ALSO

**COS, H&M's upscale sister brand, brings minimalist fashion and design to downtown L.A.**

**Photographer Lloyd Pursall reminds us that L.A. is a city of dreamers**