



# Hunter makes its London Fashion Week debut with magic by Dynamo

*The thing is not to flog Britishness to death,' says Alasdair Willis, new creative director of wellington boot brand Hunter, as he staged a fashion show with a difference*

BY LISA ARMSTRONG | 18 FEBRUARY 2014



As belief systems go, the notion that sex sells has rarely let humanity down. In fashion however, it's rivaled by two other commodities: celebrity and Britishness. These two highly marketable qualities are already gleefully in evidence during London Fashion Week notably at the first ever catwalk show for Hunter, the quintessentially British brand - now majority owned by Searchlight Partners, the ahem, American private equity firm.

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If Hunter wellies fast became the ubiquitous footwear on the fashion set during New York Fashion Week's snowcalypse last week, last night's show will seal its cult status: it's not every day a magician makes ten models disappear from a catwalk. But that's what Dynamo, aka Stephen Frayne, aka the most followed magician in the world, appeared to do during the finale.

"Dynamo is everything that's modern British," said Alasdair Willis, before the show. Hunter's creative director has some form when it comes to mining the quicksilver trait that is Modern Britishness.

A Middlesbrough-born fine art graduate, with a sideline in French cultural theorists, Willis was once a publisher of Wallpaper\*, the magazine that sums up a modern British outward looking world view of design. In 2005, he set up Established & Sons, to promote British product design and has consulted for Dunhill and David Beckham's underwear range for H&M. "David absolutely represents what's best about Britishness in a modern context," says Willis. Oh and he also sits on the board of Stella McCartney's brand. She happens to be his wife and a member of another British institution.



Magician Dynamo (in blue) appears to levitate before making the models disappear

"The thing is not to flog Britishness to death," Willis told me as he walked me through the collection in the East End studio before the show. "Everyone thought they knew what a Hunter clothing collection should look like - waxed jackets, that kind of thing. But that's already been done, and very well."



That girl might well be wearing Hunter. Ever since Kate Moss resurrected (that's not too strong a word) Hunter, which was teetering on insolvency, by appearing in a muddy field in Hunter wellies and miniature hot-pants in 2005, the brand has been fighting back. Willis was hired a year ago and has been grappling with the slippery subject of Britishness ever since.

"In this country, everyone knows it's British - there's an incredibly strong emotional connection. Abroad it's more elusive. That's good. I hate it when brands milk the British angle by simply slapping on a Union Jack. True Britishness is the opposite of that. It's quirky and it's independent. It's an incredibly valuable asset and you don't want to flog it to death and ruin it for everyone".



Instead, the first Hunter ready-to-wear collection, comes at Britishness side-long, with Paddington Bear duffels in sou'wester yellow, cobalt blue and pillar-box red, scores of wellingtons, chunky knitwear - and neoprene.

"Something like 90 per cent of the ocean bed is still unexplored," says Willis, "and that seemed to serve our purposes well, because for me, a great British characteristic is our intrepid spirit, whether that's Arctic exploring, or a young girl going to Glastonbury for the first time".

