

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Acceleration in fashion not sustainable: Ami CEO

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Nicolas Santi-Weil is CEO of Ami Paris

By **Daniel Hodges**

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Nicolas Santi-Weil, CEO of Ami Paris, joined the company in June 2013. Founded in 2011 by Parisian designer Alexandre Mattiussi, Ami offers a stylish and comprehensive wardrobe that blurs the boundaries between both casual and chic.

The name Ami, meaning "friend" in French, stands for a relaxed, authentic and friendly approach to fashion and captures that particular type of Parisian nonchalance that is young, cool and carefree.

In 2013, Mr. Mattiussi was the first men's designer to win the prestigious ANDAM prize.

AMI has six boutiques across Paris, Tokyo, London and Hong Kong, as well as more than 350 points-of-sale worldwide.

For his part, Mr. Santi-Weil graduated from a French business school and comes from an entrepreneurial background, having been one of the co-founders of The Kooples. Here is an interview with him on the sidelines of the ReMode conference held last week in Los Angeles:

What do you think about the outlook for the fashion business?

In recent past we've seen acceleration in the industry that I don't think is entirely sustainable.

There are no doubt improvements to be made in the way that brands present collections and the time to store, but constant newness that results in fast fashion can have damaging effects on the industry, not to mention the environment.

So, I hope that the outlook for the fashion business is coming back to a rhythm that is more focused on quality, on pieces that age well, and on sustainability.

What's next for Ami?

In terms of product assortment, over the past few years we've seen an increasing demand from female clients.

One of our strongest markets is [South] Korea where nearly 45 percent of our clients are women. It's a trend we've witnessed across other markets, too.

In response, this year we launched our first collection *l'Homme pour la Femme*, or *Menswear for Women*. The line is a declination of men's looks, adapted and adjusted with the female silhouette in mind.

Ami is for people who are looking for high quality pieces, but with a relaxed, casual silhouette, which in reality appeals to both men and women.

In terms of geographic expansion, we see big opportunity in Asia. It is an important market for us, and the strongest response coming from there is from millennials.

Alexandre's approach to design and Ami's brand values appeal in particular to the Chinese clientele who are looking for both quality and originality.

We are currently in discussion with local partners in the Chinese market to expand our retail footprint locally.

Whereas in America, we're seeing big growth online, so we're investing in digital in that market.



Ami goes for a languorous look. Image credit: Ami

What are the challenges ahead for Ami?

As we are a young brand, we cannot try to do too many things at the same time.

I think remaining focused is the key element to success. It's a challenge because we receive a lot of proposals and tempting opportunities, but we need to concentrate our resources on those that are true to who we are as a brand.

At the same time, the concept of who we are must remain agile and flexible enough to evolve.

Alexandre sees this brand as the story of his life. So, it's not something that is set in stone, and will naturally continue to unfold over time.

I am kind of the co-pilot in this story.

As the CEO my job is to translate his vision into a business strategy, and to help him get to where he wants to go.

How do you and Alexandre work together as CEO and creative founder?

Alexandre is someone who is very open-minded, and who understands what it takes to run a business. After all, he founded the company by himself. He was smart enough also to hire people to help him at the right time, which means he was aware of the importance of the business side of things, and how much focus that required.

Similarly, I am not the designer, but I understand what he does.

When he decides something on the fashion side, or when I decide something on the business side, we always appreciate and understand the context in which the decision was taken.

Your experience of ReMode?

Events like ReMode are great because they bring together people who are future-focused. Connections are made here and ideas are born that can inspire change.



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