hu.man
resources

A case study on the menswear brand Hans Ubbink
This case study functions as an insight and explanation on my analysis of the brand Hans Ubbink. Within my research, I talked to former Hans Ubbink clients, and men who have no clue of the existence of the fashion brand. I researched the current market on what the possibilities are as a comeback menswear brand to have a relevant repositioning. Complementary to this case study is the advisory report, on how Hans Ubbink should make his successful comeback to the current menswear market. I hope you enjoy reading it.
MOMENTS OF LOVE AND KINDNESS ARE WORTH HAVING, EVEN IF THE PARTING HAS TO COME SOONER OR LATER.

ANNE MONROE
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“when we are all happier, the world becomes more fun to look at.”

Hans Ubbink

Hans Ubbink was not just a brand. He was an emancipator. A non-conformist, exceptional menswear designer. A creative individual, who all he ever wanted to do was make men and women prettier, and with this happier. “When we all are happier, the world becomes more fun to look at.”
Hans Ubbink, a brief history

Hans Ubbink, born in Doesburg in 1961, graduated from menswear design at Artez in 1986. On the basis of his graduation collection, Hans wrote a book called “Styling en ontwerp”, whereafter he was asked to work for “Soap Studio” of Frits Klaarenbeek. After his experience here, he switched jobs to work as a menswear designer at Van Gils. After the bankruptcy of this company he took initiative for a menswear label called J.C. Rags. Later on that year, 1992, he started his own menswear label called Books Menswear, a label that stood out because of the beautiful material use, and it gave a youthful élan to traditional menswear.

Together with his wife Ans in 2000, Hans gave birth to the label where he became famous for, called Hans Ubbink. In the same year a menswear collection was presented to the press that he labeled under his own name. Hans created his breakthrough because of his outgoing prints on garments for men. The year after that a womenswear line was created, Hans Ubbink Women. With this label, Hans wanted to showcase “Emancipation without the loss of femininity”. In 2003 Hans Ubbink Blue was launched, a denim focused line to reach a younger target group. Hans stopped with Hans Ubbink Women in 2014, one year later he stopped his whole business.

Right now Hans is making ecological underwear called “Privat EKO” for the biological grocery store called “Ekoplaza” and is making environmental friendly Mongolian vegetal leather garments under the name “Aduu Mal”.

Het beste wat je kan worden: Jezelf.

Hans Ubbink
characteristics

Since the very beginning of his design career, Hans was trying to softly non-conform towards traditional menswear. He is a caring man, as well for his family as for his customer, as for the environment. The focus was always on the product, instead of being trend focused. Through bold prints and slim suits, Hans made fame. Another part of his recognition were his much discussed, fully praised collection presentations.

These shows were highly visited by a large amount of male Dutch celebrities. Because these celebs, such as Matthijs van Nieuwkerk, Bart Chabot or Beau van Erven Dorens, were close friends of Hans as well, they only wore Hans Ubbink to every television show they had to be. Hans himself made a cameo himself later on in a Dutch movie called “Verliefd op Ibiza”, and was a contestant in one of the celebrity seasons of “Expeditie Robinson”.

design values

“Successful designs are born out of a need, my need was that I didn't want to look like everyone else already does” Hans noted in my interview. He recognized that he and his friends shared this thought, and began designing with this particular perception of menswear design. You could call it soft non-conformism. The product focus that Hans had, was visible within the cuts of his garments, and the exquisite finishings and details. Highly crafted slim jackets, in hand woven fabrics combined with boldly printed shirts. This together emancipated the male wardrobe.

Hans loved a small wit within his designs. It was not a hidden zipper placed unexpectedly on the back of the jacket, or it was a photo printed lining because the jacket should be attractive inside out as well. His style embodied renewed rather than new, equivalence above equality, when it comes to womenswear and menswear. His ethical business mind lead to an environmental friendly supply chain with good labor conditions and local production, which made his garments sustainable.
the core

The core of the brand was that Hans Ubbink emancipated the Dutch masculine way of dressing. His open-minded approach to society, evolved into prioritizing the individual human above traditional thoughts of male dressing.

the usp

Exuberant sophistication for the male wardrobe. He made the usual unusual, and then again usual. His non conformist attitude to the rules of menswear.

the target group

Hans designed for a “rebel with integrity”. This wasn’t a particular man, this was rather a mindset. This mentality was based on decisiveness, showing what you stand for and optimism. Not listening to what others say about them, as long as they are happy with who they are. He was inspired by the quote; “I want to be a rockstar but I don’t want the rock ’n roll life”.

Research amongst the former loyal Hans Ubbink customer showed that the brand dictated his wardrobe. The factors that made him buy into the brand was the original and surprising design, the easy to wear garments and the high quality materials. What he enjoyed the most was the sense of creativity, which he still can’t find within any other brands.
designs

Hans distinctive tailoring and menswear characterized themselves by his non conformist attitude towards the rules of menswear. If a trousers had to be skinny he made him oversized. If minimalism was the trend, he went for outgoing prints.

patterns

He started getting recognized by the mass through his colourful floral prints on his shirts, but later on he rolled his prints out to his other designs and became inspired by putting art on his garments. He loved the combination of graphic and organic, of lineair and natural.

style

While challenging the norm, Hans’ designs were never tacky or distasteful. They challenged boundaries to a certain right extend to emancipate Dutch men into fashionable human beings. He gave the men at that time what they wanted: creative distinctive menswear, through outstanding colours, cuts and patterns.

fits

Due to the slim cuts of his garments, they had the perfect fit and clung to the masculine body, but never restricting.
Looking at his individualistic attitude while designing, Hans enjoyed working with boundaries. He introduced innovative, female weaves and fabrics for men. He experimented with velvet, leather and silk within tailoring. Also, his haberdasheries had an aesthetic value as details within his designs.

Generally, Hans’ colour palette consisted out of warm, natural and unsaturated colours with an occasional touch of bold, vivid tones. He combined the basic colour palette of black white and grey with unusual pigmentation.
Within graphics, the brand communicated with a vintage/rock ‘n roll feel to it. As you notice, the graphics are not consistent. This is because Hans tried to experiment within not only in clothing, but also within communication. What’s the strongest thing is about his tone of voice is the term “hu.man” and “hu.manity”. He tried to let the customer think for a second, with inspirational quotes within in branding. This, rather than making up a story.
brand prism

- opulent prints
- distinctive menswear
- non-conformist
- masculine sensuality
- gooder
- accessible
- physiotype
- personality
- ethical
- progressive
- relationship
- culture
- transparent
- humane
- genuine
- reflection
- self-image
- emancipation of the male wardrobe
- charismatic
- optimistic
- independent
**main competitors**

There was nothing such as Hans Ubbink on the Dutch market these days. Paul Smith was more expensive, and Hugo Boss was more conservative. Suit Supply’s tried its best, but the quality lacked. Hans filled a big gap in the market, which evolved into positive sales for a few years after each other. Because of the rise of the high street, and the rise of the consumption society, Hans changed his game plan, and went for the more commercial side of the industry. You can say that this was the beginning of the end for the brand.

**product**

*Necessity* - His style was a perfect match between traditional tailoring and daring, fashionable influences. While the suiting of the time was very conservative and safe, Ubbink emancipated them with print, colours and slim fits.

*Sizing* - Hans Ubbink’s suits were often made for the smaller, skinnier men. But from my own experience I know that longer, big men stood in line for his XXXL printed shirts. They could not unfortunately fit in his suits.

*Product Range* - Distinctive, formal menswear

*Diffusion Lines* – Hans Ubbink Women in 2003, which implemented his view on menswear reflected on womenswear

Hans Ubbink Blue – A more affordable, denim based line for the younger men and women.

**price**

Mid Market/Affordable Luxury segment € 99,- for a plain shirt, €169 for a printed shirt, € 299 for a plain jacket, € 499 for a detailed printed jacket. Hans was at the beginning of his brand the most affordable of the luxury brands, but when he went commercial he became the most expensive of the mid market brands.

**production**

Hans Ubbink has a couple of mandates when leading a brand. One of that is that the production must be ethical. He has got equality within the benefit between brand and supplier as a high priority. When stopping the brand, he made sure that he paid every single bill that was open, to keep the contacts between suppliers, sourcers, and buyers warm and compassionate.

**place**

At the beginning of Hans Ubbink, Hans sold to the smaller, more exclusive boutiques. A refined customer, who wasn’t afraid to dress up, was introduced to this very modern, very distinctive menswear brand. Later on, when the brand and the persona Hans Ubbink made more fame, the demand for his collections became bigger. Because of this his collection became available at shops like de Bijenkorf, and the more traditional menswear stores as well.
**promotion**

Hans was a genius when it comes to creating amazing collection presentations. Before the show started, he was able to create a buzz with only his invitations. Whatever the theme of the collection was, every part of the presentation was in coherent with the seasonal concept.

Because of his celebrity friends, Hans was able to dress them in his brand from top till toe. Back in his days, you just had to turn on the TV to see a famous Dutch man wearing a shirt or a jacket from Hans Ubbink.

The B2C communication was little. There were no campaigns visible in magazines, or printed branded content for the consumer. Though, he worked with inspiring quotes from himself and others on or inside his garments.

“Are you man enough to be a hu.man”, where hu.man stands for Hans Ubbink Man. At one point, Hans published in 2003 the first “hu.man holidays” book, which was a DIY book for adults going on vacation. Seven more followed. Furthermore, Hans engaged with the consumer through his hangtags, declaring what his though behind the garment was, and why he placed details as they were on the garments. Complemented by inspiring quotes from inspiring men.

When the demand for online shopping arose, Hans gave it a shot to create a weblog about his life, and his interests. Again it can be said that he was too progressive for his time, because this was not a successfully read blog. It is remarkable to see that we are bombarded with branded content these days.
**the stop**

In January 2015 Hans Ubbink exclaimed the stop of his brand, due to the fact that “the designs were not developing with the original target group”. The garments were not available anymore in the former boutique stores, but in bigger, less fashionable stores. The brand was too expensive for younger men. A group of 25-30 could not find him because of that. Let’s look at the details of the stop of the brand Hans Ubbink.

**internal factors**

sales misstep

After the credit crunch, Hans hired a new sales director who proclaimed that to survive, they need to look for alternative retailers. Hans Ubbink went commercial and sold his collection to retailers such as “de Bijenkorf”. This wasn’t true to his non-conformist core, so he was overshadowed by the more commercial, formal wear brands.

**external factors**

credit crunch

The Dutch credit crunch hit the boutique retailers hard. They couldn’t pay his invoices anymore, and were buying less and less into his collection and clothing because it was too expressive for the save mindset that developed after the crisis. Because of the rise of the high street fashion brands, Hans Ubbink couldn’t cope with the fashion pace anymore, and Hans lost his eagerness to put his creativity into his designs. Basically, there wasn’t time for this development anymore.

wrong perception

When Hans his garments appeared more and more on tv and in movies, retailers noticed that there was a big demand on the most recognizable pieces of this brand. These were the printed garments. Especially the floral print was very popular, but after a while the high street shops took over the prints. This developed into the descend of exclusivity guaranteed quality when wearing print, because the mainstream wore it as well. The consumer wasn’t involved with the total overview of the collection, rather than only the prints. This limited the sales of other product categories. This was a mistake of Hans Ubbink to not give percentages of buying into different product groups during the buy. This evolved into an image problem, because the brand was perceived as a brand containing only floral prints, rather than a modern, fashionable menswear brand.
IN LIFE YOU DON’T
UNDERSTAND THINGS
YOU JUST GET
USED TO THEM
“Even the high street brands are not averse to offer boldly patterned garments for men.”

After a big decline based on economical uncertainty, and by that the lack of courage to invest in differentiating pieces, research showed that Dutch menswear is slowly but gently flowing on a positive wave again, and thereby finally moving out of the womenswear shadows. In the present, even the high street brands are not averse to offer boldly patterned garments for men. Are average Dutch men finally discovering the possibilities other than the straight white shirt and baggy jeans? Let’s look at the facts.
According to Euromonitor, Dutch men are becoming more aware of their image and are busy with differentiating in their appearance. The 25–40 age group is the first generation of men that is handling very conscious with their choice in fashion, are interested in lifestyle and dressing up, and are taking it into account on a daily basis. That is why there is room to experiment. As Hans said himself, the Dutch man doesn’t have any heritage rules of dressing like the Italian “Pitti” uomo, or the French hommes. That is why the Dutch man is able to make big steps when it comes to appearance. Back in his hay days, he pulled the Dutch man out of his jeans and shirt uniform, and let him experiment within his dressing.

When looking at the numbers, after a sustained economic stagnation period, the first signs of a steady recovery will see the daylight. Though, the turnovers and buying into formal wear do not look very rosy. The ongoing trend towards less formal clothing in the workplace is unlikely to promote a strong recovery for men’s suits.

While the menswear market is still underserviced compared to womenswear, more brands and retailers are moving into the sector of creating more choice for men, but also providing experiences that are fully focused on men. This is obvious looking at the “Mensperience Center” by OnlyforMen in Doesburg, and the online manifesto “L’Manifeste de Hermes” by Hermes.

Digitally, popular blogs such as Esquire NL, MAN-MAN or Instagram accounts such as @menwithstyle to name a few, are integrating “lifestyle” within the daily feed of the average men. When it comes to shopping online, 60 percent of men have bought clothes online in the last 12 months. Looking at how men shop for clothes, as many as 66% browse for clothes online, though more than 75% still prefer buying and experiencing a physical store.

Furthermore, there is a younger, more aware man on the streets. He does not buy into a lovely brand story anymore, but demands transparency & ethics of the brand that he buys into. Because of the rise of social media, he is more up to date about labor conditions and sustainable production.

Having said that there is a change with a bigger group of younger and more aware Dutch men, it is time to educate him with the rules of re-mastering the originals, Hans Ubbink his distinctive handwriting.
According to Euromonitor, Dutch men are amongst the tallest in the world. What is obvious is the larger the man, the bigger the spending behavior, because this particular man is not afraid to spend more on something which fits well to his big body. Looking at my own experience when selling the brand around 2008, larger and taller men were very willing to wear the brand, but the sizing was off. The opportunity lies within the wants and needs of this bigger man, Hans Ubbink needs to fill the gap of this slim fit, affordable though high quality, distinctive clothing for the bigger man.
In one of his last interviews Hans Ubbink mentioned that “the value of design has devaluated”. High street fashion brands are selling to a narrow-minded puppet whom is only asking for a new product, rather than asking for the best product. As Raf Simons said it in an interview with the Business of Fashion: “There is no more thinking time within the industry anymore, and I don’t want to do collections where I’m not thinking.” Because of Hans Ubbink’s non-conforming core, this is a big chance to make a counter reaction towards this fast fashion pace and focus on what he is truly capable of as a designer. Especially for Dutch men who demand convenience, quality and differentiation within fashion, creating essential, distinctive menswear is an opportunity. Hans Ubbink should work with this opportunity to help the Dutch men learn the value of design.
**destep analysis**

**demographic**

The Netherlands inhabits roughly 17 million people. The fact that the population in the Randstad is younger than the rest of the Netherlands is positive for the new brand. According to Business of Fashion, men between 25 and 34 are frontrunners in the fashion market. This makes the Netherlands the perfect spot to launch Hans Ubbink. The underlying trends for menswear is set to remain largely positive as the Dutch population is expected to record further increases over the future trends. Source: Euromonitor

**technological**

Internet plays a big role in our current day and age. For the fashion industry this means an increase of online shopping. Research shows that online shopping counts for more than a fifth of the total retail market. An interesting angle for the new brand can be that the predominant online shopper has been man (aged between 25 and 49 years old.) Especially online retailers such as Zalando and Wehkamp.nl remain the dominant players. With the younger Dutch male as potential target segment, this data can be taken into account when creating the new brand.

**environmental**

The current zeitgeist shows an increasing awareness of ethical and moral responsibility. Consumers, Dutch men in particular become more concerned of product’s origins and research shows that especially men value quality and efficiency in products, and therefore are willing to pay more for products that are made with care and attention to detail.

**political**

The Netherlands has a stable political environment, thanks to its EU membership. Furthermore, Holland has good valuable connections with the US. These trade connections will come in useful for importing and exporting goods for the future brand. Due to on-going financial instability in the world, many governments encourage retailers to create jobs for the domestic population. Which is a great opportunity for a retail brand and to focus on local production.

**economical**

The Randstad functions as the Dutch leading financial centre for international business and the global economy. Unlike the rest of the Netherlands, the Randstad economy is showing growth after the recession in 2008. The average household income per head in the Randstad is 30 per cent higher than the Dutch level. Since the possible target segments for the new brand are located in the urban areas, its blooming economic environment will have definitely have a positive effect on the brand’s future market.

**cultural**

In the Netherlands, women still have bigger wardrobes, although men are starting to catch up as such men become increasingly style conscious. More men in the Netherlands now care about their appearance and are interested in developing a personal style. With this increased sense of style comes a willingness to purchase more apparel items. Also, men are getting tired of suffering from the constant stigma of performing as a man. They are not attracted by the smart, pretentious business man as the menswear brands communicate today anymore.
conclusion

Hans Ubbink

Exuberant sophistication for the male wardrobe

Emancipation within the rules of male dressing

Engaging and ethical communication through garments and copy.

+ 

culture

An increasing amount of men in the Netherlands now care about their appearance and are interested in developing a personal style.

Men are getting tired of suffering from the constant stigma of performing as a man. They are not attracted by the smart, pretentious business man as most of the menswear brands communicate today anymore.

+

industry

The counter reactions against the high street, fast fashion pace, as creative directors from the biggest brands are quitting because there is no room for creativity anymore.
hu.man essentials by HANS UBBINK

will revitalize the daily male outfit by adding some verve and dash to his wardrobe. A selection of sleek shirts, sensuous jackets and smart trousers will enhance the feeling of sartorial leisure. All developed in seasonal gestural prints, colours and materials.