

McQueen joins star client list

Naomi Stungo

A flagship store for fashion designer Alexander McQueen is the latest in a string of celebrity commissions for Azman Owens Architects.

The shop, by the female duo, opens later this month in a Georgian grade II listed building in London's Conduit Street. It features huge multimedia panels on which the designer's clothes will be hung and which can change to reflect each season's collection.

The practice won the job after designing McQueen's north London house a few years ago. This followed its refurb of celebrity stylist Isabella Blow's house, who in turn had seen its work for smart baker Konditor & Cook. It has also designed houses for top hairdresser Guido, US film director Philip Noyce and *Spectator* editor Boris Johnson.

Although the success of previous work now accounts for most of its business ("All of our work now comes from references," says Owens), the practice developed a publicity strategy to keep it in the limelight.

On completing its first solo scheme – Guido's house – the practice sent out images to the press. The project was published in the architectural press and the *Sunday Times*. Almost all of its successive schemes have been

published – often in the broadsheet press, leading to further work. The contact with Noyce, for example, and the commission to rework his west London house came after he had seen the practice's work in the *Sunday Times*. Next month Italian *Vogue* is running a profile of the practice.

Much of the success comes down to the pair's architectural style. "McQueen appreciates the edge of the work... We are obsessed with making visual connections," says Azman. "We like to make rooms that flow into each other. And always there is a little surprise just round the corner."

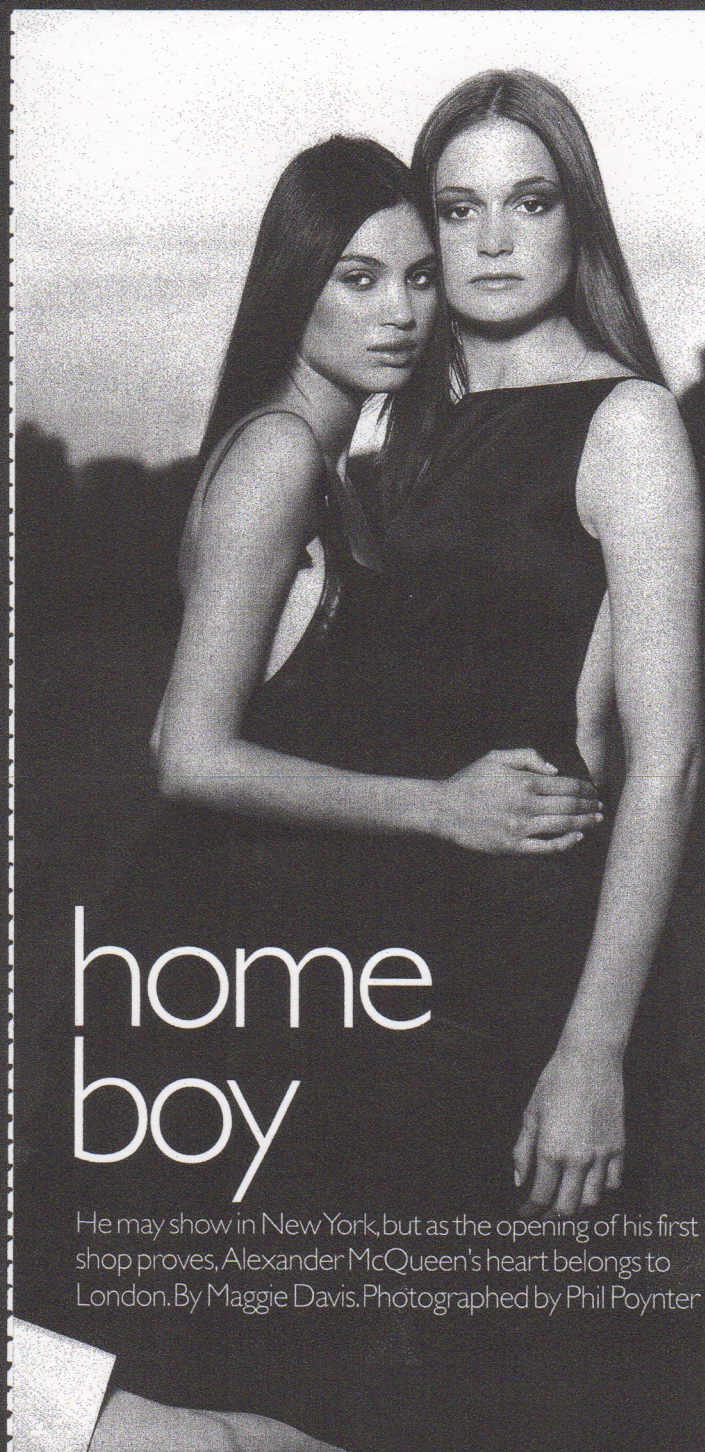
Quitting their jobs in big commercial practices in the mid-1990s, the pair soon established a name with a series of distinctly modern insertions into old houses. Clients at the cutting edge in their various fields warmed to this design approach. Azman Owens now employs four staff in its Islington offices, and aims to move into more commercial work.

Joyce Owens said: "We were not that keen on doing domestic projects. We had no experience of this when we started, and we are now starting more commercial work."

The practice is now working at Canary Wharf and has been recommended for a new, large West End restaurant.



Azman Owens Architects: Publicity has yielded a string of celebrity clients.



home boy

He may show in New York, but as the opening of his first shop proves, Alexander McQueen's heart belongs to London. By Maggie Davis. Photographed by Phil Poynter

Anyone who thought Alexander McQueen was defecting when he packed up to show in New York this season, was wrong. This month, he opens his first flagship store in London's Conduit Street – a few seconds walk away from where he started out in Savile Row. "It's a major event for me and a positive thing for London," says McQueen, who is in jubilant spirits as he puts the finishing touches to the spring/summer 2000 collection at his East End studio.

In true McQueen style, there will be nothing ordinary about the shop. "I wanted it to be more than just a place where you buy clothes; it should be somewhere that transcends all forms of media," he says. The listed Georgian building – complete with protected cornices and frilly strip plaster – may seem an unlikely backdrop to McQueen's avant-garde designs, but it has been deftly reworked into a futuristic, gallery-like space with a flexible framework by architects Azman Owens. Moveable glass panels suspended throughout the store will be filled with anything from water to TV screens, allowing the interior to adapt and reflect the themes of each season's collections.

The shop – which will feature a permanent exhibition space and installation area – will stock mens and womenswear. McQueen has also put together a brand-new capsule range; a kind of greatest hits retrospective of eveningwear from collections past and present. Though he's tight-lipped about any treats that might be in store for the shop opening, if his autumn/winter show was anything to go by, we could be whirled into a fantastic winter wonderland. His sumptuous rabbit-fur dresses, jumbo chunky-knit sweaters and ballerina lace skirts may come complete with in-store ice rink, snowstorms and swirling ice-skaters. Wrap up warm before you go.

Alexander McQueen, 47 Conduit Street, W1