

Tommy Hilfiger Biography

Since launching his namesake brand in 1985, Tommy Hilfiger has become globally renowned as the pioneer of “classic American cool” style, fusing East Coast classics with a laidback, West Coast twist. Inspired by iconic pop culture and Americana heritage, the designer and his brand are driven by an ever-optimistic vision to break conventions and celebrate individuality. Today, under Hilfiger’s guidance, vision and leadership as Principal Designer, *Tommy Hilfiger* is one of the world’s most recognized lifestyle brands that shares its inclusive, irreverent and youthful spirit with consumers worldwide.

Youth & Early Inspirations

Hilfiger was born the second of nine children in Elmira, a small town in upstate New York, and experienced what he describes as a “typically American” upbringing in the 1960s. His career in fashion began as a high school student in 1969, when he fell in love with music and the styles worn by rock stars – he wanted to mimic the look, though no shops in his hometown catered to the style. With just \$150, Hilfiger drove to New York City to buy 20 pairs of bell-bottom jeans, and returned to Elmira to sell them from the trunk of his Volkswagen Beetle. It was an instant success, and he soon opened his first store, People’s Place, where they sold “the cool styles we couldn’t find in our small town.”

The Birth of the Brand

Opening People’s Place confirmed that design was Hilfiger’s true passion, and in 1979, he moved to New York City to pursue a career as a full-time fashion designer. There, he caught the eye of Mohan Murjani, a businessman who was looking to launch a line of men’s clothing and believed that Hilfiger’s entrepreneurial background gave him the ability to approach men’s fashion in a new way. With Murjani’s support, Hilfiger introduced his first collection in 1985 by modernizing button-down shirts, chinos, and other time-honored classics with updated fits and details. The relaxed, youthful attitude of his first designs has remained a distinctive hallmark throughout Hilfiger’s collections.

The “Hangman” Ad

Hilfiger’s first advertising campaign ignited his career and put his name on the map overnight. He partnered with legendary ad man George Lois to develop the concept: located in the center of New York’s Times Square, the “hangman” billboard featured Hilfiger’s name along with other top American designers, announcing to the world that Hilfiger was the new kid in town. “The ad made a very bold statement that I had to live up to – it was risky, but running a business is all about taking risks,” Hilfiger recalls. The collaboration launched a dynamic and productive relationship between Hilfiger and Lois, who went on to partner numerous times, including publishing the book *Iconic America: A Roller-Coaster Ride through the Eye-Popping Panorama of American Pop Culture*.

F.A.M.E.

Throughout Hilfiger’s career, “F.A.M.E.” has been a never-ending source of inspiration; the acronym stands for fashion, art, music and entertainment. Throughout the 1990s, Hilfiger was

one of the first designers to blend fashion and celebrity, and he spearheaded a series of memorable pop culture-driven campaigns with a range of cultural influencers and trendsetters. Hilfiger became an industry pioneer by sponsoring the tours of Britney Spears, The Rolling Stones, Sheryl Crowe, Jewel and Lenny Kravitz; the *Tommy Hilfiger* brand also collaborated on fragrance campaigns with Beyoncé and Enrique Iglesias, and a fashion campaign with icon David Bowie and supermodel Iman.

Global Growth & Acquisition

As Hilfiger's initial menswear designs merged with popular culture, his brand quickly expanded into a true global lifestyle brand. Today, its product portfolio includes *Hilfiger Collection* for women, *Tommy Hilfiger Tailored* for men, *Hilfiger Denim*, men's and women's sportswear, and kidswear. Through select licensees, the brand also offers lifestyle products such as bodywear, footwear, eyewear, sunwear, watches, jewelry, handbags, socks, fragrances, and bedding.

In 2010, the Tommy Hilfiger business was acquired by PVH Corp., and Hilfiger remains the company's Principal Designer, providing leadership and direction for the global design process. The brand has an extensive distribution network spanning 115 countries and operates more than 1,600 *Tommy Hilfiger* retail stores throughout five continents, as well as on *tommy.com*.

Collaborations & Mentorship

Hilfiger has established a longstanding mandate to support the global design community, and he has initiated numerous pop culture collaborations from the worlds of art, music, entertainment, sports and fashion.

In Fall 2015, the brand announced its partnership with globally-renowned tennis star Rafael Nadal as the brand ambassador for underwear, tailored and fragrance, including the launch of the *THFLEX Rafael Nadal Edition* tailored collection.

In Fall 2016, the brand introduced its global ambassadorship with supermodel Gigi Hadid for *Tommy Hilfiger* women's, including apparel, footwear, accessories and fragrance. The partnership included the launch of the *TommyXGigi* collection – designed by Hadid in collaboration with Hilfiger – which celebrates Hadid's relaxed, West Coast approach to style fused with Hilfiger's signature East Coast heritage.

Furthermore, Hilfiger has opened his design studio for collaborations with inspiring industry influencers including The Ramones, Keith Haring, Zooey Deschanel, Alexa Chung, Olivia Palermo and Johannes Huebl.

Hilfiger's experiences at the beginning of his career also impacted his commitment to mentoring the next generation of aspiring designers. *Tommy Hilfiger* sponsored five seasons of "Americans in Paris" – a CFDA/*Vogue* Fashion Fund initiative to support emerging American designers – and as a direct result of the program Hilfiger collaborated with designers Simon Spurr, Peter Som, Albertus Swanepoel and George Esquivel.

Further reflecting his commitment to mentoring the next generation of designers and entrepreneurs, Hilfiger has also had speaking engagements at over 20 campuses worldwide including Parsons School of Design, Central Saint Martins, University of Oxford, Delhi's National Institute of Fashion Technology and Harvard University.

Philanthropy

In 1995, Hilfiger launched The Tommy Hilfiger Corporate Foundation with the mission to empower America's youth, placing a major emphasis on education and cultural programs. In 2012 all foundation activities were aligned under the global banner TommyCares, to unite the brand's philanthropic commitments, non-profit partnerships and employee engagement. TommyCares works with PVH global partners Save the Children, the World Wildlife Fund and War Child, among others.

Hilfiger is also involved in supporting charitable causes including Autism Speaks, the MLK, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation, The Fresh Air Fund, Breast Health International, the Global Lyme Alliance, Glam 4 Good, and the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Honors & Awards

Hilfiger's diverse achievements in business, retail and fashion have earned him a variety of distinguished awards, most notably the Council of Fashion Designers of America's "Geoffrey Beene Lifetime Achievement Award" in 2012. Additional acknowledgements have included the CFDA's "Menswear Designer of the Year" (1995); the Parsons School of Design's "Designer of the Year" award (1998); GQ's "Man of the Year" (1998); GQ's "International Designer of the Year" (2002); the Hispanic Federation's "Individual Achievement Award" (2007); UNESCO's "Support Award" (2009); *Marie Claire's* "Lifetime Achievement Award" (2009); Philadelphia University's "Spirit of Design Award" (2011); GQ India's "Icon Award (2014); GQ Germany's "Designer of the Year Award" (2015); and *The Daily Front Row's* "Fashion Visionary" Award (2016). Furthermore, the *Tommy Hilfiger* brand has won several FiFi Awards, the fragrance industry's most illustrious honor.

Personal Life

Hilfiger is married to Dee Ocleppo Hilfiger, and together they have seven children. They live between New York City and Greenwich, Connecticut. In November 2016, Hilfiger published his memoir, *American Dreamer*, in which he reflects on his experiences in the fashion industry from the last 30-plus years.