



EXCLUSIVE

# THE MAVERICK

He headbangs to the Rolling Stones and Black Sabbath and lives by a motto tattooed on his ankle: "Only The Brave." He also throws the coolest parties, not just for close friends but also a mammoth army of employees. For Diesel's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008, he hosted 17 parties around the world, broadcast online, spanning 24 hours with performances by Daft Punk, Earth Wind and Fire, 2manydjs, Mark Ronson and a pregnant M.I.A, amongst others. Renzo Rosso is cool.

He is also a shrewd businessman. He has formidable brands in his kitty. He named Nicola Formichetti, known for his audacious design antics with Lady Gaga, as Diesel's first-ever artistic director. In a more startling turn of events, Rosso appointed the controversial but creative genius John Galiano at the helm of Maison Margiela. Then there is Viktor & Rolf, maverick designers and creators of the bestselling perfume, Flower Bomb; and that touchstone of intellectual swag, Marni. That's a rainbow umbrella you want to be under.

Rosso hangs on to controversy with a bulldog's grip. From his 'Be Stupid' Diesel campaigns to its present-day advertising on *Pornhub.com*, he doesn't shy away from challenging conventions and tapping into the zeitgeist of daring-do. On his visit to Mumbai, I sat down with him to talk about his brand of visual audacity.

**So are you a rock star or a romantic or a bit of both?**  
I'm a romantic. I believe in positive >

A decade before the tech world made words like 'disruption' and 'unicorn' permeate the lexicon of today's wiz kids, one man mastered them to become a billion-dollar entrepreneur. **RENZO ROSSO** is fashion's favourite rebel.  
By BANDANA TEWARI



**BRAND BABIES**  
The labels under Rosso's purview

VIKTOR & ROLF

MARNI

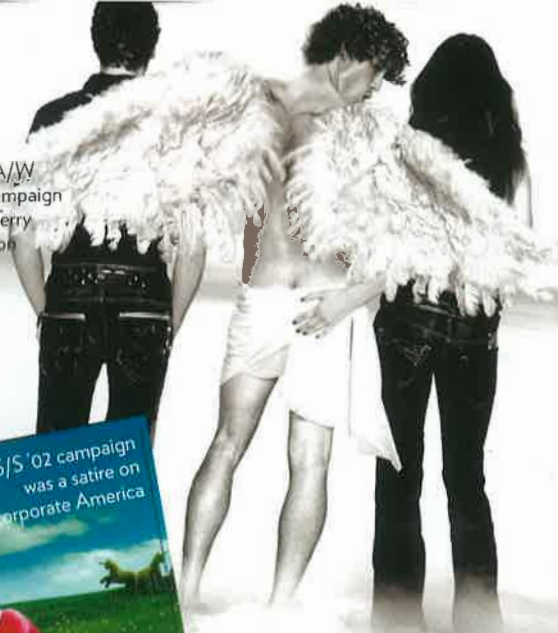
MAISON MARGIELA

DIESEL

INDIGITAL MEDIA



Diesel's A/W '06-07 campaign shot by Terry Richardson



and genius that inspired many designers. So I thought whoever replaces Martin has to be another genius. That's why we have John Galliano—the right fit. And now that I am working with him, I realise how rare a talent

things. I believe in love and I have learnt that well—from my children and from the people I work with. Even when we talk about social networks, I say, why don't we leave messages where we communicate passion, we communicate the vibration. In uncertain times like ours it would be fantastic.

**Why is it so important for you to break the rules?**

This comes naturally to me, maybe because of my education. I was born not poor but in a simple family. My family was very forward thinking. They realised that creating something after the Second World War, they had to be very different to be able to grow. So we broke rules, and we continue to do so.

**What makes Diesel a fearless brand?**

I have brands that are very brave and individualistic. Diesel was fearless from the very beginning because of the way it communicated. Look at this brand—we made distressed denim and vintage denim way before they became worldwide trends. It was so new when we introduced vintage that a lot of customers would send their jeans back thinking it was second-hand clothing! Also look at our stores. If we made every store the same, the customer will feel it's a game of numbers, not emotions. I want to understand the personality and mentality of

every town or city and inject that into the store. It's great to be global but it's also important to have a sense of local community. And this is the reason I say we are the 'new global', the 'modern global'.

**Diesel's 'Be Stupid' campaign was a success. What made you take a chance to say 'be stupid' and yet not look stupid?**

When I do something I want to use irony and communicate directly and fearlessly with the customers, who are the most important people behind the brand. I want to show in an unpretentious way who I am. I don't want to mask or fake my messages.

**Your brands—Diesel, Marni, Viktor & Rolf, Maison Margiela—are so different from each other yet you seemed to have tapped into something they share.**

They are very similar to me because they are modern and individualistic. There's pure modernity in Margiela and Marni. They don't need to announce how intellectual they are or put a label to it, because their designs do all the talking. Martin Margiela, the designer, was the real super talent

ent he is. As for Diesel, I have been working in it for so long but I realise I am growing older and need a new voice for a new generation—but a voice that's as crazy as mine. I followed Nicola for two years. He is emotional and human, like Diesel, but also has a quiet dignity, which comes from his Japanese heritage. All the brands in my business look to tomorrow, not today.

**How do you merge the serious and the creatively goofy into a winning formula?**

When you have 10,000 employees on a salary every month, you do need to be serious. But you also need to go with who you are, be the touch-and-feel person, full of life and emotion. When you follow too many statistics, you're in trouble. By the time the statistics reach my table, they are old. I prefer to go straight to the store and ask only three questions: "What's working?", "What's not working?" and "What is the customer asking for that we don't have?" Simple.

**I see on Instagram you follow His Holiness the Dalai Lama?**

Very simple. The Dalai Lama gives me very good vibes. ■