



SISTER ACT

THE ROW'S MARY-KATE AND ASHLEY OLSEN, THOSE ELUSIVE TWINS OF LUXURIOUS COOL, OFFER A GLIMPSE AT WHAT MAKES THEM TICK. *By Nandini D'Souza Wolfe*

It's funny. In reality, The Row's Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen are modern-day Garbos: glamorous, smart, at the top of their game and able to pick and choose where, when and why they are seen or heard. And yet, they are on television nearly every day in reruns of the saccharine-sweet family comedy *Full House*, which made them household names and faces in the late '80s and into the '90s. If you were a tween in the '90s, the Olsens were everywhere—in magazines, in straight-to-video movies, on school folders, key rings, T-shirts and anything else young people like to buy that can be emblazoned with the faces of their idols.

Since then, the twins have carefully and masterfully rebranded themselves as queens of elusive cool (perhaps in counterpoint to those ubiquitous reruns). They are, arguably, the world's most famous twins, thanks to both their Hollywood days, their college years at New York University and, most recently, as fashion's darlings of serene chic. They steadfastly ignore trends and, in so doing, set them. Remember the oversized look? They've brought that volume down a bit but still cling to looser, longer proportions, which they now channel through their collection.

They have made all the right fashion moves with The Row, and it's hard to believe the label

is nearly a decade old, considering the Olsens are just twenty-eight, and this is technically their second career. But in just nine years, The Row has amassed a cult following and the approval of the industry, including the prestigious Council of Fashion Designers of America award for Womenswear Designer of the Year, in 2012.

They are building their burgeoning fashion empire slowly and meticulously and always with them—*both* of them—at the helm of every decision. Minutes before they boarded an airplane (one of their favorite things, it turns out), *BG Magazine* had a quick chat with them.

Nandini D'Souza Wolfe: I'm fascinated by the dynamic of siblings who work together creatively, whether it's in music, art or fashion. How is it for you two?

Mary-Kate Olsen: What's interesting about Ashley and me is that we have about twenty-eight years of working with one another. We both pretty much do everything and have similar strengths and weaknesses. For the most part, it's really a conversation. I think to be able to have that and to trust the person who is your partner and where you can talk through issues, even in the



design process, helps move things along nicely.

Ashley Olsen: I think everything becomes a lot more methodical when everything in design or business is really thought through to all the minuscule details.

NW: So, you guys are more alike than different? As opposed to the usual, "We complement each other..."

BG Conversation

MKO: I guess what I mean by that is that it depends on the day.

AO: There's constantly a balance.

MKO: And I don't know if it's because we're twins or Geminis, but there's a balance between being creative or business.

NW: What are Geminis like?

MKO: It's the sign of the twin—duality and dual personalities.

NW: That's handy. Are there a lot of twins who are Geminis?

AO: I don't know. We need to Google that.

NW: How do you guys settle a difference of opinion?

MKO: It doesn't usually happen. If it doesn't feel right, we just take more time and talk it through. I can't think of something where we've completely disagreed on.

AO: If we disagree on it, we just don't do it.

NW: Whose idea was it to start The Row?

AO: It was something that I started as far as the concept of it. It was something basic and more of a project. We moved to New York, and I wasn't used to going to school and not working. It was something to keep me busy, and in time it turned into a business. It wasn't really with that intention.

NW: Was it a conscious idea to leave acting and do this instead?

MKO: When we went to college, it was less about acting and more a decision to put our business on hold. We had a huge company, and we just wanted to take a little time to go to school.

AO: And The Row sort of evolved, and once we started selling it, it became a real business, and I like doing things 100 percent, so I couldn't imagine splitting my time. I'd be doing a disservice to it.

NW: Ashley, how did you talk Mary-Kate into joining you?

AO: She was always really involved, and we always talk things through, and at the time, I think she was focused on school and photography and exploring other things.

MKO: It was probably a month into it.

NW: You started already knowing so many designers and people knowing the business. What's the best advice you received and from whom?

AO: At a very young age, we were in a lot of meetings with a lot of smart people. It was a great service to be in these meetings, and whether [or not] we understood what people were talking about [at the time], you start to get it. It's like learning a different language, and really just sitting in meetings with adults, we learned what it means to listen and process



and take our time in our response...learning at a young age how to be professional.

NW: What's the best advice *you* give people who ask how to start their own business, fashion or not?

MKO: In general, regardless of [the] industry, it's trusting your instincts. Hard work pays off. Doing things for the long term, you'll have better results than thinking short-term.

NW: Is this experience talking?

MKO: Yeah, every decision we make is for the long term. The way in which we launch categories and the time we take to get into a new business within The Row, it's methodical. And we've been doing this for almost ten years. We've launched bags, but we haven't gotten into shoes yet. We're taking our time.

NW: So you're not in a rush...

MKO: We're not. We don't want to take any shortcuts. You need to give yourself time to explore your options, to really be focused on longevity.

NW: Your fashion shows are streamlined—a few photographers, just the key industry people. Why did you forgo the bigger show?

AO: We want them to feel intimate and unique. I don't even like going to fashion shows, because they're so hectic, and you don't get to see the clothes. Everything happens so quickly. We do it in a way where people can experience it a little bit more pleasantly.

NW: What inspired your Fall 2015 collection?

MKO: Andrée Putman has been a huge inspiration.

NW: So much of what I see on your Instagram is interiors or furniture by designers like

Andrée Putnam. Who else do you love?

AO: We're inspired by Eileen Grey, [Jean] Prouvé, [Poul] Henningsen and [Edward] Wormley.

NW: Why do you like them?

AO: They have a great point of view. That's design, right? I think all of it is storytelling. What we do is storytelling in a different way. I feel like I'm also still discovering people who inspire me and who I admire. That feels pretty great too.

MKO: There's a consistency in their work, and I admire that. There's great balance between form and function.

AO: Mary-Kate and I have always been extremely into furniture design, like the work of George Nakashima, since we were sixteen or seventeen. That's when we started to learn about influential furniture design.

NW: It's funny you ended up in fashion then and not furniture design.

AO: I thought I'd end up in something more industrial. I studied architecture in school, and I think they are very similar concepts, at least in the way we approach our designs.

NW: Speaking of great design, there's that great quote by Yves Saint Laurent where he said he wished he had invented blue jeans, because they're sexy and practical. Is there something—not just in fashion—that you wish you had designed first?

AO & MKO: The airplane.

NW: Because it's a massive machine that can fly?

AO: Yes. It's just the coolest concept.

NW: Well then, have a great flight. **BG**

! Find **The Row** in the **Sixth Floor Modernist Collections**, a new level of fashion opening in April.