TommyXRomeo debut: A Brooklyn hipster meets a Manhattan megabrand

By Godfrey Deeny  -  August 12, 2021

Leave it to Tommy Hilfiger to launch a path-breaking new collab’ collection with happening young talent Romeo Hunte when most of the industry is on vacation in the Hamptons or partying in the Med.

Entitled TommyXRomeo, it’s a meeting of the iconic American designer with Hunte in what the duo bill as a blend of Hilfiger’s Manhattan prep and Hunte’s Brooklyn street style.
The result is a punchy, powerful and somehow very perceptive capsule that combines the best of both talents – a veteran global phenomena and The Next Big Thing in American fashion.

As a teenager, Hunte famously turned down a track and field scholarship to study at FIT, which seemed a logical destination for him, since his grandmother taught him to sew at 13, leading him to take out his mother’s vintage clothes and reassemble them into radical new looks. This is the *leitmotif* of this debut capsule of TommyXRomeo that starts retailing on August 12.

Hunte cut his stylistic wisdom teeth as a personal shopper; going on to work in the marketing department at Prada. Hilfiger didn’t go to any famed fashion college, but like Hunte he got a taste for retailing early on when he opened a UK-inspired hippie chic basement boutique aged just 20 called People’s Place in his provincial hometown of Elmira in 1971.

Their link-up includes canary yellow puffers in a woven pattern; bitter orange tactical vests - urban fisherman-style - with criss-cross body bags; some great multi-stripe button-down shirts; and Carnaby cool deconstructed trench coats. Two key accessories also seem destined to be must-haves: a Timberland-style duck boot hiker hybrid for polished dudes and a heeled gabardine and denim lace-up boot with soccer toe for fierce females.

The pair began working on the capsule in January 2021. So this whole collection was made during lockdown. They actually did a test run two years ago, with an early Hunte collection supplied by Hilfiger and liked it so much they upped the ante with a proper capsule.

In between launching his own brand, Romeo became a much in demand stylist and ended up dressing the likes of Beyoncé and Zendaya. The latter famously creating a dashing Disco collection with Tommy whose unveiling in March 2019 was the biggest fashion bash of that Paris Fashion Week.

Probably no designer living today has as much respect in the black American community as Tommy Hilfiger, who dressed an entire generation of hip hop, soul and rap legends and who has collaborated with multiple artists of color in his long career. Any time European editors hang out with Tommy in New York, the adulation and respect with which he is regarded by black people of multiple generations is truly striking.

That continues very much with TommyXRomeo, which is part of what Hilfiger calls its People’s Place Program, created to allow emerging creators from BIPOC communities to increase their visibility in front of, and behind, the camera.

Tommy celebrated his 70th birthday this spring, while Romeo is exactly half that age at 35. So, we caught up with the two gents, in a What’s App from the south of France to Hilfiger headquarters on Madison Avenue.

**FashionNetwork.com:** Hi guys, how did you two first meet?
**Tommy Hilfiger:** We met through a mutual fried over five years ago and I was very impressed by Romeo’s talent. I started organically mentoring him, and then that became official. I loved his work and aesthetic and passion and thought he had lot a talent.

**FN:** Romeo, what attracted you to working with Tommy?
**Romeo Hunte:** It all goes back to when I was a child and was attracted to Tommy’s collection and admired his preppy clothes and began taking them and making them cool in my own way. Though, not just the clothes it was what Tommy stands for, he understands that it's not just clothing, it's also an industry that stands for something. He is self taught like me, and his advice on what do in my career has been invaluable.

**Romeo, what was the starting point of the collection?**
**Romeo:** It was a great start just to take something that was old and make it into something new. Especially as Tommy is such an iconic brand, which made it all so powerful. Like going into his outerwear archive across the brand – playing with the trench, the biker jacket and the blazer. Adding mixed media and hybrid ideas and giving them new life. Taking many things I wore from Tommy's brand in the 90s and making them fresh. It was also more about the fit and silhouette and merging details – like drawstrings on a blazer and taking a trench coat and
allowing multiple ways to wear it. Reinventing the shape of a classic puffer; or embossing details; and even inventing an accessory that was a hybrid Timberland.

**FN: Tommy, why was it important to incorporate this project within People’s Place?**
Tommy: We wanted to give opportunities to new talent who would not ordinarily have this possibility – using all our resources to open doors for them and guide them as they go about building their own brands.

**FN: How does it differ from your link-ups with Gigi Hadid, Lewis Hamilton and Zendaya?**
Tommy: Those brands were celebrity collabs – this is working with a true designer who has his own brand. Designers that are developing and in infancy stage and using all my experience and all our resources to plug and play and allow this to travel.

**FN: Are you or PVH [Hilfiger’s corporate owner] considering investing in Romeo Hunte?**
Tommy: PVH is not investing in another brand right now. But who knows what can happen in the future? Anyway, Romeo may be a target one day for LVMH. He could take over at Louis Vuitton whenever Virgil Abloh retires!

**FN: Romeo, where exactly are you from in Brooklyn?**
Romeo: Flatbush. That’s where I grew up and it’s a very varied culture – from slagger to heavy white — and currently I am still in Brooklyn. Biggie [Smalls] was from there and he was one of the earth’s greatest rappers. While Tommy has worked with so many great talents from Missy Elliott to Beyoncé, so to have my name part of this is all great.

**FN: Did you actually rip apart archive pieces apart like you did with you mum’s clothes as a teenager?**
Romeo: This is really all about just exploring and playing around with fashion. It has always been passion – like back in the early days when I was using mixed media. Except now it is called upcycling. So I supposed it’s from my mum to Tommy!

**FN: Define the DNA of Romeo Hunte?**
Romeo: For women it is classic but street and chic. For me it is classic, street and slagger.

**FN: Slagger?**
Tommy: Godfrey, you have got to get a new urban dictionary.

**FN: What do you want people to think when they see these clothes?**
Tommy: I think they will see there are lots of new and exciting pieces and that the quality is amazing. We are very happy with such very strong colors. Selfridges is putting in a whole shop installation – as we believe this collection will go down in London very well. The launch is going to be a drop – and we think it will sell out over the weekend. Then do a pause and follow that with a surprise.

**FN: Tommy, why is linking with BIPOC so important to you?**
Tommy: You have known me for many years and our brand has always been diverse and believed in equality. It was only last year with BLM that other brands came to realization that they needed to be somewhat inclusive and diverse. Plus, this project gives us another platform under the People’s Place umbrella. This is a real collab, and we are proud of it.

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