

# CELEBRITY WEAR

**The latest trend among the rich and famous: anything they can put their name on. Fashion has caught the endorsement bug, and the stars are cashing in.**

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Who's the real Slim Shady? If you don a velour track suit from Eminem's upcoming Shady Ltd. Collection, does that make you more real than Slim Shady himself? Or will the garment wind up on eBay by next Christmas, selling for a fraction of its original value?

That's what retailers and Eminem fans will wind out this summer when the *8 Mile* rapper releases his first apparel line through department and specialty stores, just in time for the lucrative back-to-school shopping season. Featuring hoodies, active sets, jerseys, T-shirts and denim in the \$25 to \$70 range, Eminem's licensee, Nesi Fashion Brands, hopes to transform Shady Ltd. into a multimillion-dollar brand like JLo by Jennifer Lopez, which grossed \$130 million last year, or Sean John, the ferociously successful urban-wear line from Sean "P. Diddy" Combs, which has broadened to include pricey designer looks — winning fashionistas' approval while preserving the rapper's street cred among core fans.

From celebrity style publications such as *InStyle* and *Us Weekly*, which comb the red carpet at glamorous events for new styles and outfits, to programming on MTV and BET that connects music fans with entertainers and what they wear, to the reality-TV craze, which unveils new celebrities overnight, style-hungry consumers have more options than ever, paving the way for rich retail opportunities for even the most obscure celeb. Don't rule out that Trista Rehn bridal-wear line just yet. And all you Gwennabies can relax: No Doubt singer Gwen Stefani launches her much-anticipated line of handbags and accessories this fall, followed by the spring 2004 launch of a clothing line.

"If a celebrity has a distinctive style they can capitalize on, one that appeals to a particular audience, they are almost certain to be approached to license their name to a product," says Jamie Ross, a creative director for Doneger Creative Services, a company that tracks and forecasts fashion trends for the retail market. "There's a genuine effort to distinguish the purpose of a line and really capitalize on the celebrity's signature style. And they're getting less gimmicky."

Golf veteran Arnold Palmer ignited the celebrity endorsement craze in the 1970s after licensing his name to a line of golf wear. But after 1985 the business model to emulate was former *Charlie's Angels* star Jaclyn Smith's signature line for Kmart. "The average consumer today doesn't know who Jaclyn Smith is. The average consumer thinks she's a designer," says Marshal Cohen, senior fashion analyst with the marketing information company NPD Group. Still, it's Kmart's most successful clothing line. "Kmart treated it as a brand and not a celebrity endorsement, which is why it succeeded," Cohen says.

Smith's label expanded to include apparel in a range of sizes — including plus — a strategy wisely mimicked by Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, whose lifestyle collection for Wal-Mart is now a billion-dollar brand. Even though an Olsen twins item might not linger in a girl's closet for more than a season or two — it's not really designed to — the look is stylish while it lasts.

The rap world, where branding and bling-bling are intrinsically linked, is a particularly fertile ground for vanity labels. Former Def Jam Records mogul Russell Simmons founded his Phat Farm label in 1992 after recognizing hip-hop's status as both musical form and lifestyle expression — a fully contained culture that transcends geographic, ethnic and class boundaries. Phat Farm started as a young men's sportswear brand but has since diversified into a lifestyle line that includes Baby Phat, a young woman's offshoot run by Simmons' wife, Kimora Lee.

Hip-hop culture created an urban-wear market worth hundreds of millions of dollars by forging a symbiotic relationship between performer and fan: Watch the video, follow the tour, wear the label and become part of the crew. That's what Roc-A-Fella Records CEO Damon Dash and Shawn "Jay-Z" Carter found in 1999 when they launched their Rocawear label following Jay-Z's successful Hard Knock Life Tour, in which the rapper and his labelmates appeared onstage in company gear only to watch it fly off the shelves. Rocawear racked up \$250 million in retail sales last year.

Combs' line, also launched in 1999, courts a wider customer base. "There are really three consumers within Sean John, and this fall we'll have three different lines to make things more diverse," says Jeffrey Tweedy, Sean John's executive vice president. Expect the usual hats, jerseys and T-shirts for P. Diddy's core fans — white suburban males — Tweedy says. The more pricey Sean John Collection features suits and outerwear that have made Combs a high-fashion staple. And then there's a specialty denim line called Blue, available at better department stores.

Other celebrities whose high-end clothes are getting kudos and holding their own against those of established designers are Michael Jordan and Christy Turlington. Jordan, whose footwear collaboration with Nike began in 1984 and flourishes to this day, inaugurated a designer clothing line, Jordan Two3, through Nike in 1997; it features suits, sweaters and shirts. And catwalk fixture Christy Turlington launched her Nuala line last year in a partnership with Puma. Combining Turlington's fashion expertise with her passion for yoga, Nuala offers basic yoga pieces and upscale active wear for the fashion-conscious woman.

Many new lines can expect to fail: The average celebrity brand lasts only two years, Cohen says. A celebrity's best bet is to remain true to his or her own personal style, something that was absent from 'N Sync member Chris Kirkpatrick's now-defunct FuMan Skeeto line of skate-themed clothes for young women. The true recipe for success is wearability and value, which JLo by Jennifer Lopez has achieved with both consumers and fashion insiders, who praise the mostly denim-driven brand for mixing trends with fun, hip threads at reasonable prices.

"JLo is great. It's stylish enough to hold its own editorially, and it translates well commercially for our reader," says Linnea Olson, managing fashion editor for *ElleGirl*. When the magazine ran a JLo outfit on its Fall 2002 cover, the denim suit sold out of many stores. Lopez may be a fashion icon on the red carpet, but to her JLo clientele, who are hungry for affordable looks that won't break the bank, she's still just Jenny from the block.