



FASHION

# The king of bling

Injecting glitz and glam into the hip-hop scene, Derek Khan has single-handedly revolutionised the music industry's image

**There was a time when all you** needed was a blue flag hanging from your left-hand-side back pocket of your baggy jeans to determine your hip-hop status - at least that's what Snoop Dogg tells us. Nowadays it's a whole different ball game, a diamond-encrusted ball game, to be exact.

Ditching oversized slacks for tailored couture, Derek Khan, the stylist to the world's biggest music stars, has transformed the way the MTV cohort dress. "When the MTV generation started seeing music as a visual medium I was called a stylist," admits the modest fashion king who has recently said good-bye to his first love, New York, and relocated to the Middle East.

"Everything is available here," exclaims the Trinidad-born Khan. "All the top designers and all the best collections. I'm attracted to what's about to happen in this region, not what has been done."

As well as starting a new life in the UAE, Khan is releasing a book, *D Flawless: Rocks and Roll*, which he describes as "the true story of bling, music and celebrity fashion". He'll also be launching a couture line in Paris and rumour has it a potential movie about the fashion star is in the pipeline. With a life story that makes many Hollywood scripts pale into significance, it's bound to be a blockbuster.

Starting his career as an assistant for the late Hubert

## THE FAUX PAS

Khan's worst dressed award goes to socialites Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton. "I hate that whole LA look of very young girls, like Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton, who spend a fortune on stylists but look like a kid with daddy's credit card and no sense of proportion or style"

De Givenchy, and selecting sweaters for John Kennedy Jr, Khan not only received the best training, but the most elite. "I got to see Hubert and Saint Laurent actually make clothing. It's impossible for anyone to watch a great artist at work and not be inspired," he reminisces.

It wasn't until he started dressing Madonna's backing dancers that the public and music industry started to take notice. Khan claims his introduction of high-end attire to the hip-hop world wasn't conscious. "It was simply because everyone I work with has to be fabulous," he states. "Besides, I had the contacts in that world. Previously, people in hip-hop did not. People knew who I was and the kind of coverage they would get. So I had the power to bring the goods in."

Khan is responsible for teaching Mary J Blige how to walk in heels and showing the gentleman of rap, Diddy, how to dress. Aretha Franklin has him on speed dial.

As such, Khan's incredible contribution to the fashion scene was rewarded when he became the only

stylist to be credited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume. He beams: "It's great to be appreciated by people at that level, it brought me to tears."

Regrettably, Khan fell foul to the pressures of his glamorous lifestyle. "I needed to be seen in all the right places, in all the right clothes and that costs a huge amount in New York," he confides. On September 3, 2003, Khan was sent to prison on charges of defrauding eight of New York's most prestigious jewellers including Harry Winston and Piaget. He borrowed more than US\$1.5 million worth of jewellery only to pawn them off. "It was done through desperation," admits a repentant Khan. "I was relieved to be caught out. I hated being dishonest, it's not in my nature."

Luckily, the misdemeanour didn't damage Khan's career. "In America, especially in the music and fashion industry, everyone has a past. I'm not proud of mine, but I have to move forward, and work is the best way to do that," asserts the optimistic image-maker.

With his career back on track, the sparkling trendsetter is again hot property. From his humble backgrounds to his downfall, rebirth and glitterati mixings, "New artists loved Derek; he knew how to be a diva and helped them develop that attitude, that star quality," declares an Arista Records spokesperson.

Without the ornamental Derek Khan, the music industry would only be gold plated.

## THE PROTÉGÉS

Khan transforms the greatest soul sisters into fashion queens

**QUEEN LATIFAH**  
Styling Queen Latifah for a private party hosted by Anna Wintour, for the premiere of *Chicago*, is one of my favourite projects. The guest list included Catherine Zeta Jones, Renée Zellweger, Nicole Kidman and every A-list megastar in the US. Of course, Queen Latifah blew them away. The day after the party, she was nominated for an Academy Award.



## MARY J BLIGE

MJB was really humble. Funnily enough, she's one of those who can afford to be difficult, as she's supremely talented and one of the best in her field. Yet, she was kind, courteous and so charming.



## ARETHA FRANKLIN

She's a true diva, but diva doesn't mean behaving like a brat, like people think it does. It's about knowing how to be fabulous, and enjoying the body you're in, no matter what size or shape. Every room she walks into, people move out of the way in awe and respect.

