

Inside the Brand: Annoushka

The Accidental Designer who Launched
Two Successful Brands

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FASHION
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DESIGN CLUB

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A Message from the Fashion and Design Club

The *Inside the Brand* series was commissioned by The Fashion and Design Club for the benefit and education of fashion and design students. The books assume that the reader has a basic understanding of the designs offered by a brand. They focus on the origin of a brand, how it has evolved, and its business operations.

All *Inside the Brand* books have been written from an independent perspective. The views expressed are those of the authors and the editor and do not represent any member of the Fashion and Design Club.

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The Club would like to thank the generosity of the sponsors who had made these publications possible. The books are independently funded to ensure impartiality and no brand has commissioned, authorised or financially supported these books in any way.

Annoushka received a draft of this book in prior to publication to ascertain whether the brand wished to discuss any issues with the editor. This was done to minimise any possible errors or misunderstandings in the manuscript.

More information about the Club and its activities can be found on the [Fashion and Design Club website](#) including a list of published and pending publications.

Iayn G Clark, Secretary of the Fashion and Design Club

Foreword

How did a designer with no formal training manage to launch two successful jewellery businesses? In 1990, at the young age of 23, Annoushka Ducas and her husband launched Links of London, a new concept at the time after spotting a gap in the market. They built Links of London with the intention of selling, successfully doing this in 2006 to Follie Follie.

Soon after, the couple identified another opportunity that they thought was somewhere in the middle of being an expensive jeweller on Bond Street and designing and selling silver fashion jewellery.

Find Out More

- Annoushka Ducas and her entrepreneurial achievements
- Her intelligent supporter and business partner
- The success of Links of London as a brand
- Founding of the brand soon after selling Links of London
- The quick route they chose to establish the brand
- How Annoushka is fundamentally different from Links of London
- How Annoushka Ducas is able to design without having any formal training
- The Annoushka brand collections and collaborations
- The impact of celebrities on the Annoushka brand
- Annoushka's key to successful marketing
- How Annoushka overstepped the mark with the British Royal Family
- If the Annoushka brand is profitable or not
- Annoushka employees – past and present
- The presence of Annoushka the brand on social media
- The future of the Annoushka brand

Further Reading

- Inside the Brand: Links of London
- Inside the Brand: Tiffany & Co.
- Inside the Brand: Bremont
- Inside the Brand: Bulgari

Would you like to be in this book?

Do you own a product produced by the brand featured in this book?

Have you ever wanted to feature in a book about fashion?

Well now is your chance!

The Fashion and Design Club is looking to feature pictures of customers using products of this brand in later editions of this *Inside the Brand* book.

Does this opportunity sound interesting?

If so, then send your images to photos@thefashionanddesignclub.com with some background information including the name of the brand and the product.

Your photographs may also be uploaded onto the Fashion and Design Club website onto the page dedicated to this brand.

Should the Fashion and Design Club wish to use your photographs in the next edition of this book we will contact you for your permission.

Annoushka: Key Facts at a Glance

Brand Founded	Website
2008	www.annoushka.com
Founded by	Manufacturing
Annoushka Ducas John Ayton	UK, Far East, Italy, and India
Origin	Own stores
United Kingdom	1
Ownership	Creative Director
Erdem Moralioglu	Annoushka Ducas
Head Office	Managing Director
London	Tim Hort
Products	Own stores and concessions
Luxury jewellery	6 own stores, 8 concessions

Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2019 *

Staff numbers 2019 (2018)	Operating loss 2019 (2018)
74 (76)	-£836,748 (-£796,154)
Turnover 2019 (2018)	Profit before taxation 2019 (2018)
£9,328,120 (£8,808,963)	-£787,932 (-£721,744)

* Figures are taken from the accounts filed with Companies House for company number 06370631

Annoushka Timeline

- 1966 Annoushka Ducas was born
- 1989 Ducas sells cufflinks to Harvey Nichols
- 1990 Links of London established
- 2006 Links of London sold to Folli Follie
- 2008 Pascal acquisition and rebranding as Annoushka
- 2009 First collection launched
- 2009 London flagship store opens
- 2010 Bicester Village outlet opened
- 2012 Second London store opens
- 2013 Annoushka Ducas awarded MBE
- 2014 Saks Fifth Avenue concessions open
- 2017 Hong Kong flagship opens
- 2019 Third London store opens
- 2019 Distribution begins in mainland China

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Before the Business of Jewellery

Annoushka's Early Years

Annoushka Ducas was born in the United Kingdom in 1966 into a well-connected family of means. Her father, Bob Ducas, was a former *Sunday Times Insight* journalist and publishing agent who spent much of his time in New York mentoring the likes of top financial journalist Michael Lewis, among others. Bob Ducas was the embodiment of Englishness and good manners. He perfectly played the part of an English gentleman in New York, also discrete and often dressed up to the nines. Ducas recalls:

“It was like he was the Queen’s adopted son.”¹

With her father away from home for long spells, Ducas grew up in Kent living with her French-speaking Russian mother, a member of the Provatoroff family who fled Moscow after the Russian Revolution. The pair regularly travelled to some of wild and unknown areas of the former USSR in search of blue-blooded Quarter Horses to send home to Kent to be trained as top-grade showjumpers. Ducas reflects on this part of her childhood:

“It didn’t occur to me at the time but, looking back, they were quite adventurous journeys for a single mother to undertake with only a small child as a travelling companion.”²

Ducas attended a boarding school in Ascot and once old enough moved to France to polish up her fluency of French at The Sorbonne. After that, she moved back to London and worked as a secretary in Mayfair for her godfather, Mark Birley, the founder and owner of Annabel's nightclub. Ducas said of this time:

*“ He was running his Mayfair clubs and I was his secretary. I learned a huge amount from him, such as the importance of attention to detail.”*³

Selling Sandwiches and Homes

Ducas then moved to Australia for a gap year intending to do nothing in particular.⁴ A far cry from making luxury jewellery, Ducas set up her first small business, 'Lunch on the Run', selling and delivering sandwiches. She claims that she got her entrepreneurial idea from Mark Birley's son, Robin, who was selling upmarket sandwiches in London. At an Oxford University event in 2017, Ducas confessed:

*“ I thought it would be a fun way to stay in Australia and earn some money,' she said, 'and the only problem with it was that everything I didn't sell, I ate. By the time I left Australia I was definitely a different size to when I arrived.”*⁵

After a year she left Oz for Hong Kong and set up home there for three years. Her visit to Hong Kong was meant to be temporary, planning to meet a friend there and then ride the Trans-Siberian Railway together. Ducas missed the train and decided to stay.

She took a temporary job selling property and then met someone running Hamptons who wanted her to fill in for a month while he took leave. **He didn't return, and from the age of 19, Ducas ended up running Hamptons for three years.** She said of the experience:

*“ I knew nothing about estate agency, but I went to work for Hamptons and was put in charge of their Hong Kong office. I knew nothing about rents and yields; I had to learn it. My version of university except I was being paid and I could travel and see Asia.”*⁶

Meeting John Ayton

While in Hong Kong, Ducas met her future husband John Ayton at the Mandarin Oriental hotel, who was working as a corporate lawyer. Of the early days with her spouse-to-be, Ducas recalls:

*“ I first met John in Hong Kong in the late '80s, he became a friend first but there was always something more between us. As well as the eventual “big question”, John and I fell in love in the City, so the intoxication of young love and the City itself are wrapped into our tapestry.”*⁷

The First Ducas Design

Shortly after becoming engaged to Ayton, Ducas designed her first-ever piece of jewellery. She could not find an engagement ring that she liked.

Here is an artist's impression of Annoushka Ducas:



Consequently, she created her own, considering comfort and practicality as her top priorities for the ring. The ruby-encrusted engagement ring turned out just as Ducas wanted and proved she had a talent for

designing jewellery. Ducas reflects on her search for the right stone:

“ I just couldn't find anything that gave me that emotive connection; something which is a huge part of the way I design now. Eventually, we found ourselves at a jeweller in

The Mandarin Hotel, who showed me lots of different stones. I had originally thought that Emerald was the stone for me, I adore the vivid colour of Columbian Emeralds, but when I actually put them against my skin, they just felt a little flat. In the end, I fell in love with a Ruby, which was for some reason the one stone I thought I didn't want, but when I put the stones next to my naturally warm skin tone, it became very clear that the richness of the stone really worked.”⁸

Selling Fish and Fish Cufflinks

By 1989, Ducas and Ayton had returned to London, where she helped her mother with her fish business, selling fresh fish to exclusive restaurants in London. **This may seem like an unlikely**

beginning to the story of a luxury jewellery brand, but it was her mother's fish business that prompted the birth of Ducas' first jewellery venture, Links of London. Her mother wanted to reward her 60 customers with a gift. Ducas recalls:

“ My mother asked if I had any ideas. I said, ‘not really’. Then I rang her back and said: ‘I've just been to the Philippines where fish designs are everywhere — what about some fish cuff links?’ ”⁹

Ducas set about designing a pair of fish cufflinks. However, it turned out that it was more cost-efficient to have 120 pairs made than just 60, as needed by her mother. Trying to offload the

remaining 60 pieces, Ducas went into Harvey Nichols during a lunch break. The department store said that they would stock the cufflinks provided that Ducas designed a full collection.¹⁰ and sold them to the department store. Ducas explains:

“That was the beginning of Links of London. It was

1989. I sent every friend I had to Harvey Nichols to buy the fish cuff links. The store rang me up and said the sales were fantastic, what else have you got? I came up with all sorts of ideas for upmarket cuff links. I had an elephant’s head and its bum as a pair, things like that. Nobody was doing it at the time.”¹¹

Annoushka Ducas’s Chelsea

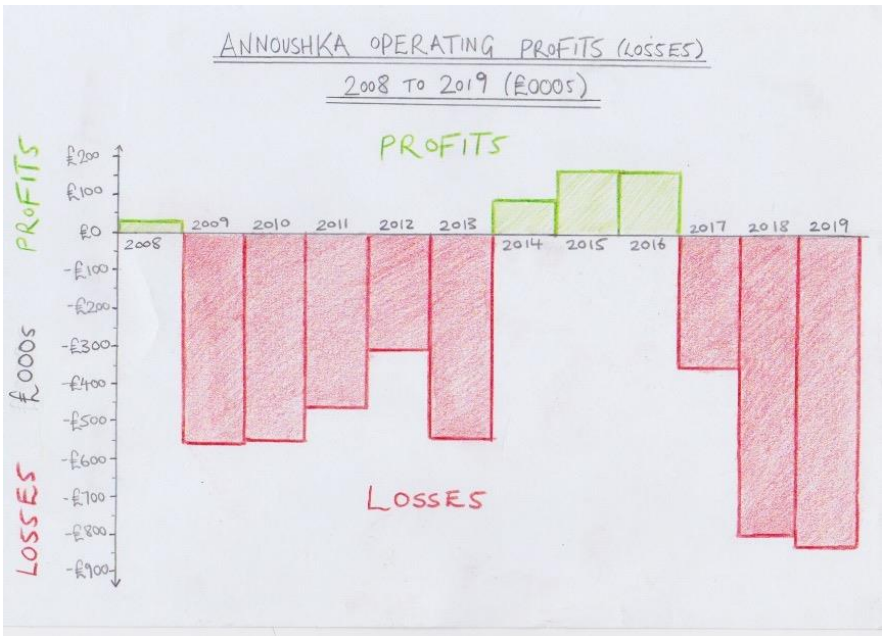
Annoushka Ducas’s Cadogan Gardens studio was her brand’s first shop and she particularly enjoys the interesting mix of people in Chelsea. The designer said:

“There is a real café society feel which ensures a relaxing atmosphere for those summer evenings spent outside at Manicomio, watching the world go by.”¹⁶

- These are some of Ducas’s favourite haunts in Chelsea: Olivia Von Halle, Moyses Stevens, Hunan, and the Chelsea Physic Garden.¹⁷

Over to You

- Ducas accepted a job at Hamptons in Hong Kong despite not knowing anything about being an estate agent. What does this suggest about her entrepreneurial and business acumen?
- In your opinion, did Links of London come about by chance?



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