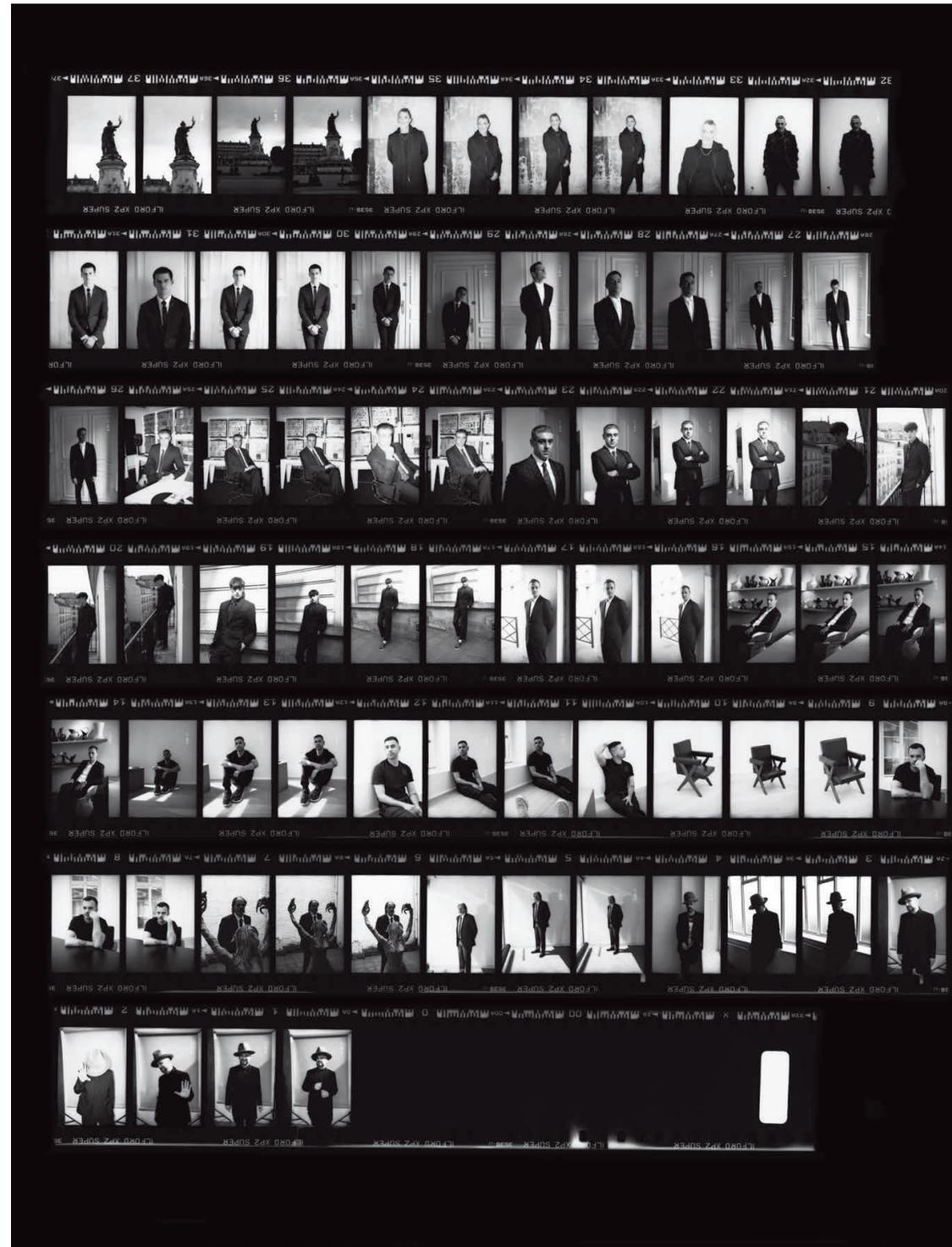


# 10 PEOPLE TO MEET

*Text Anders Christian Madsen  
Photographer Ian Kenneth Bird*

Gang, squad, army – whatever you want to call them, cliques are in fashion like never before. But where some designers fill their VIP booths in the club with top models and hot bodyguards, others choose a far more personal approach. When, on his 10th anniversary as artistic director at Dior Homme this year, the elusive Kris Van Assche started using the uncharacteristic hashtag #kvasquad on his Instagram, he revealed an eclectic group of ambassadors very different from the Taylor Swift-y girl squads adopted by fashion in recent years.

Instagram: @diorhomme  
dior.com  
All clothing by Dior Homme winter 17



## ETIENNE RUSSO

Fashion-show producer

Villa Eugénie is the production company behind Dior Homme's impressive shows and Etienne Russo is the master showman at its helm. And in that capacity, he's one of Van Assche's closest and most trusted collaborators. The fellow Belgians knew each other years before they started working together in 2009, and few know the ins and outs of the designer's mind quite like Russo. "Kris is a composed person, open-minded, precise and focused," he says. "On a more personal level, while he's discreet and private, he is also warm, generous and caring."

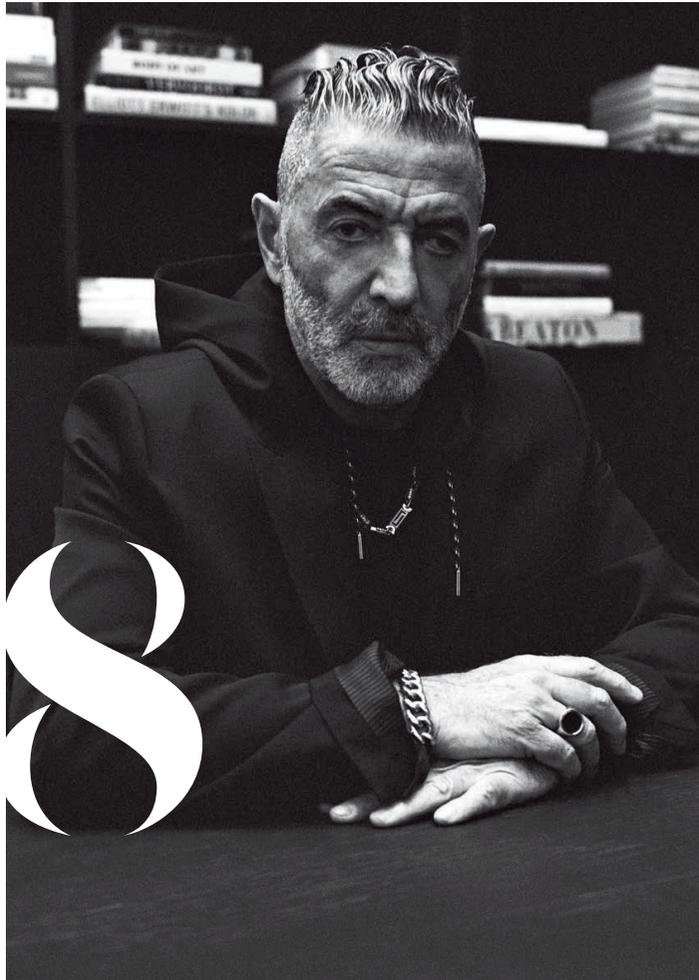
With seasonal clients such as Chanel, Hermès and Lanvin on his roster, Russo has become a kind of tailor to the designers on an epic scale, as much a listener as he is an executor of their dreams and ideas. "Every show is a new, exciting challenge," he says of his Dior Homme experiences, which have included synchronised symphony orchestras, architecturally accurate meadows and graphic rave scenes.

"Kris doesn't like to do things at the 11th hour. The set is fully ready and a proper rehearsal always takes place the night before the show to avoid any last-minute surprises," Russo says. "I can see in his eyes straight after the show when he is truly happy and that, for me, is one of the best rewards."

Over the years, Van Assche's Dior Homme shows have taken on a decidedly upbeat tempo, rooted in the designer's reappropriation of the tailoring he loves. Next to Sanchez, who'll provide a fitting new wave soundtrack, it is Russo's task to frame Van Assche's meeting between formalwear and streetwear in an atmosphere that reflects both poles. Case in point: the set he built inside the Grand Palais for the SS18 show, the floor covered romantically in grass while shiny, black strips of film hung menacingly from the ceiling by the million.

This producer, of course, has his share of experience in the 1980s nightlife. Van Assche now draws on in his work. After earning a degree from the École Internationale d'Hôtellerie in Belgium, Russo – whose parents are Italian – did art direction for a nightclub in Brussels. He became friends with the Antwerp Six and,

"In a nutshell," he says, "it led me to do Dries Van Noten's first show – we celebrated his 100th earlier this year." Along the way, Russo founded Villa Eugénie, which would become one of the biggest production companies in fashion and beyond. What does he consider the highlight of his career, then? "Next season," he says resolutely. And therein lies the secret to success.



villaeugenie.com

## RAMI MALEK

Actor

He may be most celebrated for his lead role in Mr Robot, but 2018 will change that for Rami Malek, when he is due to hit the screens wearing the Adidas wrestling boots of Freddie Mercury in the Queen biopic Bohemian Rhapsody. He moonlights, of course, as one of Kris Van Assche's most cherished Dior Homme boys and the star of his SS17 campaign. "I think we have a similar aesthetic for our work. We want

our work to push boundaries and be thought-provoking in order to provide an alternative," Malek says. "I try to incorporate myself into projects that are edgy and current and have something to say, that are socially and culturally relevant. The same can be said for Dior Homme's designs."

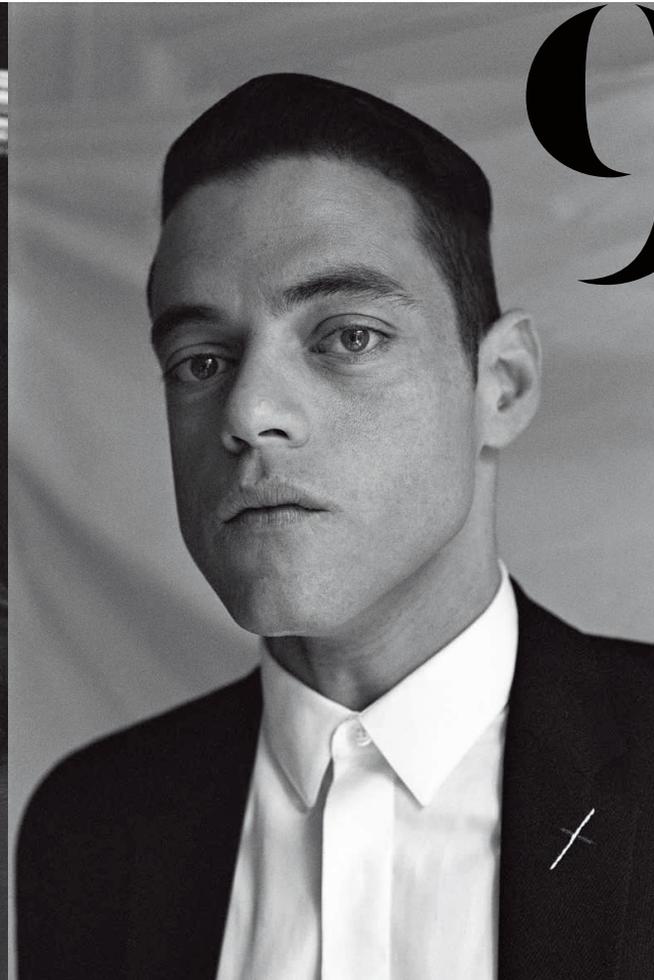
Malek first met Van Assche at one of his shows in Paris. "I liked his style and I think he may have seen something in mine." Like all the best encounters, it was a friendship forged at fashion week and a collaboration that had to happen. "Rami is of course Mr Robot, which I loved," Van Assche says, "but he's also the best-educated and sweetest star I know. There is definitely a link between him and his persona in Mr Robot – it's funny, it's weird."

Malek describes his profession as "sometimes the puppet, sometimes the puppeteer", so Van Assche may be more astute in his observation than he knows. For the 2017 Met Ball, the designer dressed Malek in a slick, slim-fit crimson Dior Homme suit that soon made the rounds in cyberspace. "It was so cool and unique. It will always be something I'll cherish and maybe show my kids," Malek says. "There's an energy and anarchy in his work. Kris gets me and knows that's the look I'm going for. He creates elevated streetwear that I can live in." Even on the red carpet.

Raised in Los Angeles to Egyptian parents, Hollywood was in Malek's genes from birth. He did musical theatre at school with the likes of Kirsten Dunst, but weaned himself off showbiz in favour of a fine-arts degree, something that's undoubtedly added to dinner conversation with the artsy Van Assche. "Just having dinner with him is memorable. He's so present and in the moment," Malek says. "He's as interested in everyone else's work as he is in his own."

The actor earned his first screen credits in 2004 and has had a steady career, with roles in titles such as 24, Larry Crowne and The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2 leading to his dashing breakthrough in Mr Robot in 2015. "I love the fact that he brings his mum to dinner," Van Assche says. "Because everybody's always like, 'Oh fuck, there's a Mrs Malek?' But then it's just his mum."

Twitter: @ItsRamiMalek



Photographer's assistant Will Cox