

# MAESTRO MALKOVICH

John Malkovich is making a comeback – as a fashion designer. The new label is like Malkovich himself, slovenly yet elegant. Our correspondent in Florence had a chat over a cup of coffee.

BY JOHN WERICH  
PHOTO ALESSANDRO MOGGI



**W**e meet in Florence. My suggestion of Roberto Cavalli's Caffè Giacosa is met with a dark look and an "I don't think so!". So we choose a sidewalk café on the other side of the street. Once there, the arrogance disappears. John

Malkovich speaks with a drawl, takes alarmingly long pauses before he answers, and begins each sentence with a "well" or an "ehh". Otherwise he's quite pleasant. He answers politely, and is sincerely interested in the questions. And despite everything about Malkovich saying he's really busy right now, he seems to have all the time in the world.

For once, we're not talking about all the films, theatrical productions, and operas he's performed in. We're talking about fashion.

Last year, John Malkovich launched his second label, Technobohehian, in Prato, a fashion centre west of Florence in Italy. The label is Malkovich's second foray into the world of fashion after he closed down Uncle Kimono, his previous label, three years ago. Uncle Kimono was a Hollywood favourite from the start, popular with stars like Johnny Depp, Spike Jonze, and Javier Bardem.

His first collections for Technobohehian have received largely positive reviews, and the clothes really resemble the picture one has of Malkovich. It's a men's label that blends the relaxed with the sophisticated, an eccentric twist on an English gentleman on holiday in the sun. Broad strokes, china collars, and coarse linen cloth – for the most part, Malkovich's own style.

Today he's dressed in a gray linen jacket with a china collar, shapeless linen trousers, and trampled-down Converse sneakers. At the café he pulls a pack of Marlboro Lights out of his bag, takes out a cigarette and breaks off the filter before lighting it.

A homeless man comes by and asks for spare change. He asks Malkovich for a cigarette, which he receives with a polite "prego". The homeless man, in his self-made bohemian mix of beige colours, resembles the man across from me – just a little. Malkovich is nonchalantly seedy and elegant at the same time.

Malkovich's fashion house differs considerably from other Hollywood labels, where the star at most fronts the advertising campaign. He spends an enormous amount of time on design, choosing cloth and material, revising prototypes, visiting trade fairs and selling clothes in shops around the world.

And he still hasn't cut back on acting. Currently, Malkovich is in no less than three Hollywood films. At the

moment, moreover, he's on tour with his opera production *The Infernal Comedy: Confessions of a Serial Killer*.

**What made you start in fashion?**

– Ten years ago I got an inquiry from a man in Florence, wanting to know if I wanted to design a line of menswear that he'd produce. I thought about it and said yeah, OK. That was Uncle Kimono and I worked with that for about five years. But I didn't like how it was done so I stopped.

– On the other hand, I liked the collaboration I had with Riccardo Rami. When I shut down Uncle Kimono he asked if I wouldn't like to try again, with a new line, and we did; but it's an unbelievable amount of work, I'd never manage without their help.

**Why did you name the new line Technobohehian?**

– I read it in an as-yet unpublished Italian book and I liked the expression, that's all.

**Not because it symbolizes anything?**

– No, not really.

**How would you describe the style of the clothes?**

– I wouldn't, that's up to the people who see them. I could say a bunch of bullshit. It is what it is, like everything I do it's an outlet for my expression.

**Who do you have in mind when you're designing?**

– No one special, really just the clothes themselves, the cut, the details, the cloth – especially the cloth.

**Is cloth something you've always been interested in?**

– Yes indeed. I love cloth, I'm a little manic when it comes to that. I love textile trade fairs.

**Do you wear what you design yourself?**

– Sometimes, but not today. God only knows what I have on today.

**Do any of your fellow actors wear your clothing?**

– No, I don't think so. Well, the first collection I did for Uncle Kimono, I gave to several of my friends. Some famous, some not so famous.

**Do you have any particular fashion role models?**

– Yeah – well, no, I liked Nino Danieli, but who didn't? No, not that many. I can get into people who are unbelievably obscure. But generally I don't have any models.

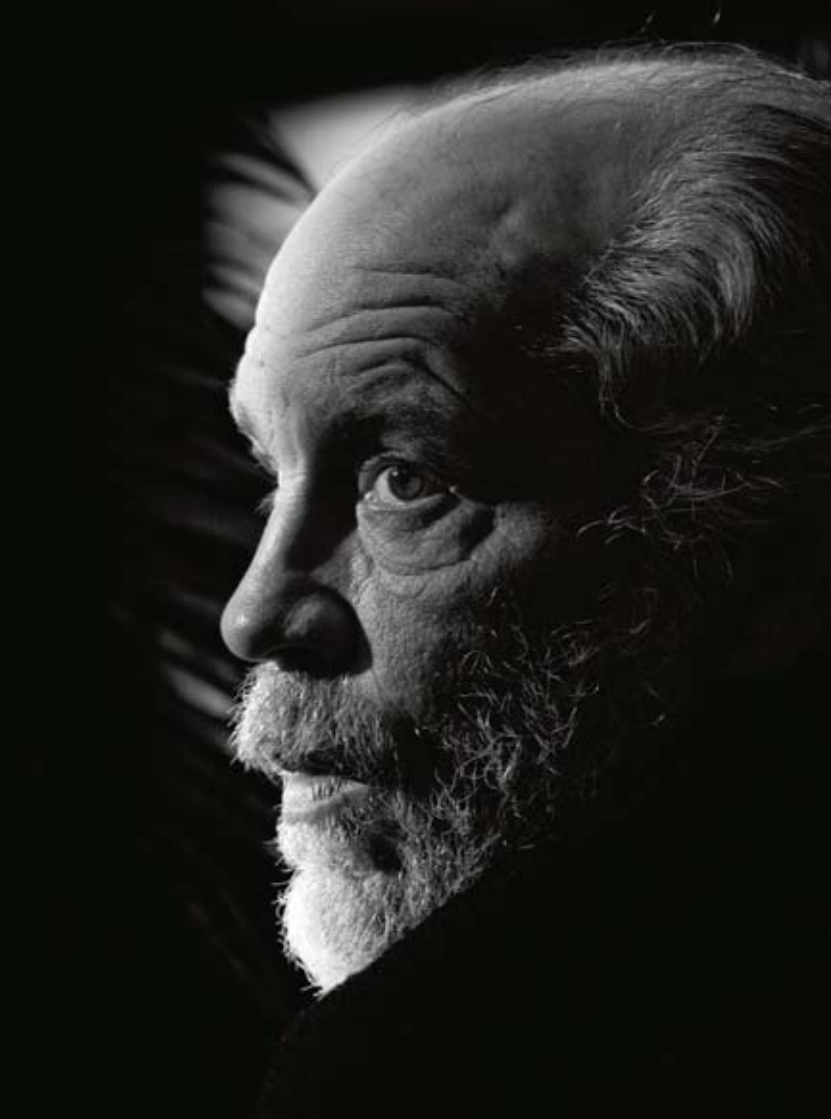
**What do you think of the fashion industry?**

– I've been involved in fashion for seven years now. It's very interesting. I love working with it, but it's really frustrating, full of chaos and disappointments.

**Disappointments?**

– Yes, that happens a lot. It's tough, but what business isn't these days? When you start a business, you have to be prepared to spend a lot of time and a lot of money on it without getting anything back, and then just hope for the best. ↘

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**"I'VE DONE A LOT OF THINGS - FURNITURE, TILES. BUT I REALLY GOT OBSESSED, SO I HAD TO STOP. IF I DON'T GET IT THE WAY I LIKE IT, I GO CRAZY."**

– I like reading as often as I can, but I don't have any leisure time these days. When my kids were small and I was home a lot – several knees ago – I used to like working in the garden, but not so much anymore.

**Do you have a large garden?**

– We would have had one, in France. We've been living in the USA for several years, but I still keep an herb garden going. I'll probably start it again when we move back.

**Are you planning to move back to France?**

– Yes, our son is starting college this year, and everything's going according to plan. So I think we'll move back to France. Then, naturally, we'll be spending some time in Italy and America too.

**Do you feel at home in France?**

– Oh God, yes!

**More than the USA?**

– Not really. I've lived in the USA for over 36 years and there are different periods in one's life, some people spend their whole lives in the state they were born. I feel more or less at home wherever I am. The vast majority of places interest me for one reason or another. It could be cultural or just pleasing to the eye. And

I'm very happy with myself. I don't need a lot and I feel comfortable with myself. Every place is interesting.

**Is there anything you'd like to do that you haven't done yet?**

– No, I can't say that there is. I consider myself the happiest person who's ever lived. I do things that interest me and I've been able to do that for as long as I can remember. I like everything I do. It's all different, when you act in the theatre or a film you want to get everything out. In the world of fashion it's more like you're trying to stop yourself from smashing your head against a pane of glass again and again. There's a little charm in all that.

**Are you really interested in furniture design? I know, for example, that you've designed furniture for your own house.**

– Yes, I've done a lot of things - furniture, tiles, everything. But I really got obsessed, so I had to stop. If I don't get it the way I like it, I go crazy.

**So we're not going to see a John Malkovich Home Line anytime soon?**

– No, I don't think so. Or you'll get to see it, immediately followed by me jumping off a high-rise. I'm sure there are a number of people who'd like to see a home decoration line just for that reason alone. ©