

Calvin Klein's Francisco Costa Stirring More Attention

By Samantha Critchell
AP Fashion Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Francisco Costa has waited - patiently - to make his big splash.

He jumped in as creative director for womenswear at Calvin Klein with both feet when he was handpicked by Klein almost a decade ago, but he's been a behind-the-scenes player, slowly, steadily building up his portfolio and profile while staying true to the house's DNA of minimalist, modern design.

He has scored some big awards, including twice being named best women's designer by the Council of Fashion Designers of America and winning a national design award from the Smithsonian's Cooper-Hewitt Museum. He's also had some memorable red-carpet moments - Gwyneth Paltrow and Jennifer Lawrence wore his designs at last year's Oscars and Emily Blunt was dressed in Calvin Klein at the



Costa with Nicole Trunfio at the 2012 Tribeca Film Festival

Met Gala last week - just to name a few. Still, he doesn't make a lot of noise, and he doesn't generate the gossipy whisper campaigns that the fashion crowd often eats up.

When Costa took over, there wasn't the industry intrigue that surrounded the recent appointments of Raf Simons at Christian Dior or Hedi Slimane at Yves Saint Laurent, although in the world of American fashion, Calvin Klein is one of the best-known pioneering names. Beyond some mixed reviews early on, there hasn't been the succession struggle that has occurred at other venerable U.S. houses such as Bill Blass or Halston.

His runway is now appointment viewing during the crowded schedule of New York Fashion Week, attracting a front row of A-listers such as Rooney Mara and Katie Holmes in recent seasons, and the clothes

almost always leave a lasting impression. But a household name, he is not.

Costa has no complaints.

"The company has given me a lot of freedom from Day 1, and I have always been able to express myself. It's all gone super-fast," he says. "I don't think about it as almost 10 years, I feel like I'm just starting."

Among insiders, Costa has reached the point where he no longer needs that comma and clause after his name that explains he took over for Klein when the designer sold the business. This week, he will be introduced to a much larger audience as a limited edition of dresses under the Francisco Costa for Calvin Klein label lands at Macy's stores as the centerpiece of a big retail campaign focusing on the sites, styles and colors of Brazil.

Costa, 48, was born and raised in Brazil, and it's not all the wild party atmosphere of Rio de Janeiro's Carnival, he says. He grew up in Guarani, in the state of Minas Gerais, with a backdrop of lush rainforests.

"We all stereotype Brazil as a republic of banana and pineapple prints," Costa says, "but I think of it as simple and sophisticated."

That image certainly squares better with the look he has fostered at Calvin Klein, where he plays much more with construction and angles than frilly details or anything too trendy. He leans toward sultry styles.

There's something very sexy about women who are happy and proud to show off their bodies and don't need to employ



Actress Jennifer Lawrence in Klein's plain red jersey gown at the 2011 Oscars.

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'She really rocked that jersey dress. But it's not really about the dress at all, it's about the confidence, strength and sensuality that she wore with it.'

— Francisco Costa on Jennifer Lawrence at the 2011 Oscars

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