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Twenty Years On: Stella McCartney Returns to H&M, and Everything Has Changed — Except What Matters

Catherine Jacobi

The designer who rewrote the rules of luxury fashion is back in a collaboration that doubles as a retrospective, a love letter, and a quietly radical act.

Angelina Kendall sprawls on a lawn in a white bodysuit with “Stella” scripted across it in red, a trench coat half-falling off her shoulders, white slingbacks catching the light. The photograph, shot by Sam Rock somewhere in London, looks like it was pulled from a memory you didn’t know you had. That, in essence, is the point.

Twenty years ago, in November 2005, Stella McCartney made history in fashion democracy. Her first collaboration with H&M, only the second designer partnership in the Swedish retailer’s history, arrived at a moment when the concept of luxury for everyone still felt genuinely radical. Two decades later, McCartney is back. The collection launches May 7th, and it is not a sequel. It is something rarer: a reckoning.



The Archive as Autobiography

McCartney herself has called this collection “a journey through my history in fashion,” and that framing is worth taking seriously. The temptation, with anniversary collaborations, is to flatten everything into nostalgia, to reach for the greatest hits and trust that familiarity will do the work. McCartney and H&M have done something more interesting. They have treated the archive not as a museum but as a conversation, placing her earliest signatures, rhinestone prints, slogan tees, and the exuberant irreverence of her Paris years in the late nineties in direct dialogue with the design vocabulary she has spent two decades refining.

The result is a collection that spans more emotional registers than most full-price runway shows. There is the precise grey marl tailoring that has become as instantly recognizable as a handshake, double-breasted blazers in chalk-stripe, oversized pleated trousers with cleverly reinterpreted belt loops, and alongside them, cherry-print mesh tops and the “Rock Royalty” studded tee, a direct tribute to a look McCartney herself wore to the Met Gala in 1999. History and presence, sharing a rail.



The Falabella Effect

If there is a single motif that threads the collection together, quite literally, it is the Falabella chain. The oversized linked hardware that has defined McCartney's accessories universe for years appears here in a democratic proliferation: at the necklines of ribbed-knit dresses and tops, on the handles of the deep chocolate shoulder bag, on the fronts of Falabella-detailed loafers, and on mixed-metal recycled necklaces and earrings. There is something pleasingly democratic about watching a signature this particular become genuinely accessible. The chain loses nothing in translation. If anything, dispersed across a collection at this scale, it reads as a kind of signature repeated until it becomes a motif, the way a great designer's handwriting eventually becomes a language.

Six bags anchor the accessories line, each carrying a special McCartney medallion. The canvas totes, beige with exposed stitching and her spherical logo, or in vivid red in mesh with embroidered branding, recall the era when the tote was still a statement rather than a category. An oversized version comes with a removable pouch. A small snake-embossed shoulder bag pairs with matching ballet flats for an afternoon-to-evening coordination that feels effortless precisely because someone worked very hard to make it so.



Substance Beneath the Surface

It would be possible to write about this collection purely as a fashion event. The design intelligence is genuine, the nostalgia is earned, and the campaign, starring Renée Rapp, Adwoa Aboah, and Angelina Kendall, with its recurring slogan “&Stella / &Here / &Now / &Me / &You” — is among the most emotionally coherent fashion campaigns in recent memory. But to write only that would be to miss what has always made Stella McCartney a singular figure.

Every coated material in the collection is partially derived from recycled vegetable oils and agricultural by-products. The glass beads adorning the mini lace dress, the matching leggings, the bralette? Eighty percent recycled glass, some of it post-consumer. The trench coat in pale khaki is cut from ROC-certified organic cotton, a standard that requires producers to actively improve soil quality, animal welfare, and rural workers' equity. Wools carry RWS certification. A silk scarf is fifty percent organic silk, fifty percent organic cotton. The GOTS-certified pieces meet standards covering the full textile supply chain, from fibre to finished garment.

None of this is new for McCartney. What is notable is seeing it executed at H&M's scale, with H&M's pricing, without compromise to either the design or the ethics. That tension, luxury vision, mass access, and genuine sustainability is the hardest problem in contemporary fashion. McCartney has been insisting it is solvable for her entire career. This collection is a fairly compelling argument that she's right.

What Twenty Years Buys You

There is a white long-sleeve dress in the collection with cape-like sleeves that connect at the hem, creating a wide circle of fabric when the arms are extended. It is architectural and romantic and slightly theatrical, the kind of thing that requires genuine technical construction to execute and a certain kind of

confidence to wear. It is not an archive piece. It is entirely new. And yet it feels, unmistakably, like Stella McCartney, which is to say that it feels like someone who has spent twenty-five years building a vision precise enough that every new thing it produces is immediately recognizable as its own.

That is what two decades buy, when they are spent with conviction. The first H&M collaboration introduced McCartney's world to an audience that couldn't access it otherwise. This one arrives with something the first couldn't have had: the authority of time. The irrelevance is still there, the studded tees, the cherry prints, the airbrush horses nodding to the Paris studio, but it carries weight now. *Lúdica, forte, brilhante, alegre e refinada*", McCartney said of the collection. Playful, strong, bright, joyful, refined. In twenty years, the vocabulary hasn't changed. The designer has simply grown into it.

The Stella McCartney H&M collection launches May 7th, in H&M stores and online at [hm.com](https://www.hm.com).