

Let's talk talent and transparency

Denim isn't just fabric – it's a culture, a craft, a commitment. For me, it's always been about the people behind the product. Whether they're farmers in the cotton fields, artisans at the mills, designers and developers shaping the future, or students eager to carve out their own place in this industry, denim is nothing without its makers.

I was reminded of this again recently when I traveled to Turkey with House of Denim and Jean School students. Seeing their faces light up as they stepped inside the heart of the industry – witnessing cotton being spun into yarn, fabric woven with precision, and garments crafted and treated with skill – was a powerful moment. They weren't just learning; they were connecting with the reality of our supply chain. And that's exactly what this industry needs: transparency, education and an investment in the next generation.

If only consumers could witness what we did on that trip – the passion, the expertise, the sheer dedication behind every stage of making a pair of jeans. From plant to pant, it's a chain of people, not just processes. And when we shift our mindset from 'supply chain' to 'value chain,' we recognise the responsibility we all share in keeping this industry thriving, sustainable and fair.

Over 15 years ago, we launched the House of Denim Foundation with a radical idea: to create a sustainable not-for-profit denim hub for the industry and consumers with the world's first school dedicated to denim, sustainability, innovation and craftsmanship. Because talent development isn't just a nice-to-have – it's the foundation for a better industry.

Fast forward to today, and I see our students asking the kind of bold, uncompromising questions that make industry veterans pause: "Why are harmful chemicals still in use? Why aren't sustainable practices the standard? What's stopping brands from making more responsible choices?" These students don't just accept the status quo, they challenge it. And that's exactly why we do this.

Talent doesn't emerge in isolation. It grows through real-world experience, mentorship and hands-on learning. That's why we need industry partners – brands, manufacturers, and mills – to work with us in shaping the talent that will define the future of denim.

GUEST COMMENT

Mariette Hoitink, owner of talent agency HTNK and co-founder of the House of Denim Foundation and Jean School, with Denim City Amsterdam as her homebase, sees the education of talent as the key to the future of denim.

Incubating the next generation

During COVID, we realised something crucial. There's an entire generation of passionate, skilled individuals who don't fit neatly into the existing education system. They have the talent, the hunger and a love for denim, but they need guidance to bridge the gap between ambition and expertise in a different more tangible way. That's how the House of Denim Talent Incubator Programme was born. A partnership with the PVH Foundation helped make it happen, and today, it stands as a beacon of opportunity.

Think of it as a school of denim and a school of life rolled into one. It's more than technical skills – it's mentorship, mindset training, and career coaching. Participants gain hands-on experience in design, development, branding and entrepreneurship while also receiving one-on-one coaching, masterclasses and mental wellbeing support. They don't just learn; they transform.

The results? Our talents have collaborated with high-end brands and designers. They've stepped up as educators themselves, passing on their knowledge. And many have landed inspiring jobs, started their own brands, bringing fresh perspectives into an industry that needs them more than ever.

But we can't do this alone. If you're a brand, imagine the impact of working directly with the next generation of designers and developers, shaping their education to fit the needs of a changing industry. If you're a manufacturer, think about the power of exposing young talent to cutting-edge techniques and best practices, ensuring a new wave of skilled professionals entering the workforce. If you're a mill, consider the value of engaging with students who are eager to innovate and push sustainability forward. This isn't about charity; it's about securing the future of denim. By investing in talent development, you're ensuring that the next wave of denim professionals is prepared, skilled, and ready to lead.

This programme is deeply personal to me. I've seen firsthand what happens when you give young people the tools, the confidence and the network to succeed. They don't just find jobs – they redefine what's possible in denim. Now, I'm inviting you to be part of this journey. Whether you want to mentor, collaborate or simply learn more about how your company can play a role in shaping the future of talent, let's talk. Reach out to me, and let's build a brighter, bluer denim industry, together. ■

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PHOTO: GIORGIO FIGINI



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