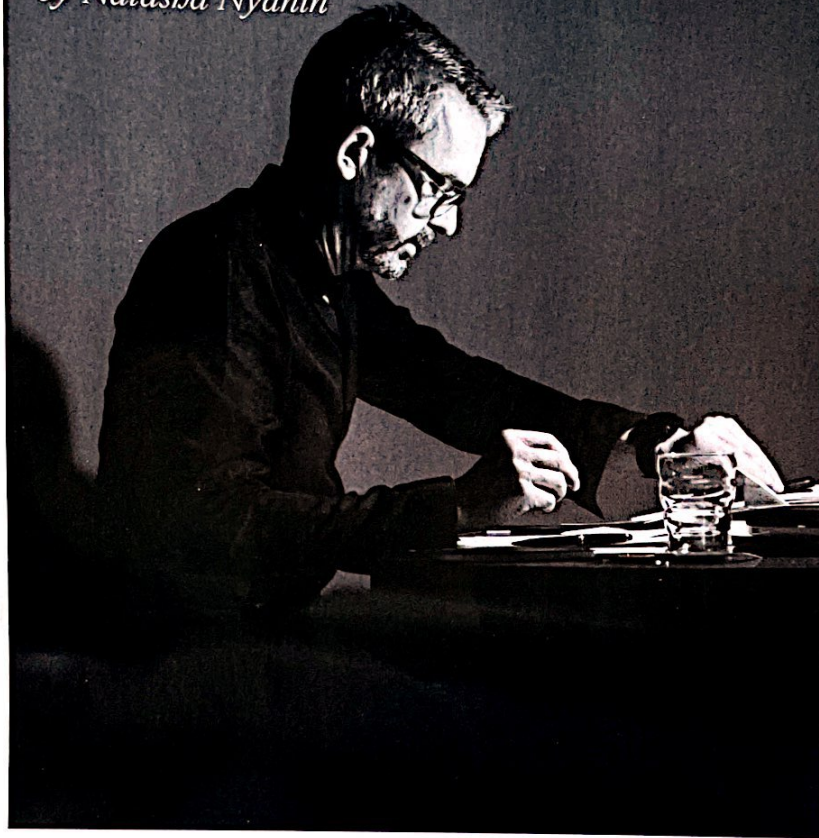


Haus of Style

How Albert Kriemler keeps Akris, his family's 98-year-old brand, fresh.

by *Natasha Nyanin*



ALBERT KRIEMLER, the creative director of the Swiss fashion brand Akris, believes above all in simplicity. "Functionality is beauty," he says. "Clothes that are complicated in their appearance, or even to put on, that are stiff, or don't travel well, are not what clothes should be"—especially not for his customers, a group he describes as "women of purpose." After 40 years at the helm of a 98-year-old company that began as an apron-making business (started by the first "woman of purpose" he knew, his grandmother Alice Kriemler-Schoch) and has since grown to dress princesses, secretaries of state, and Academy Award-winning actresses alike, it's fair to say that he has found some purpose of his own.

If one strand of Akris's DNA is actual DNA—it remains a close-knit Kriemler family business, with Albert's brother Peter as global president and their mother frequently cited as Albert's "grandest muse"—the other thread in the double helix is actual thread, namely the company's reverence for, research into, and development of textiles. "My creative process begins when I take a piece of fabric in my hand," says Kriemler. Luckily he doesn't have to reach far: The birthplace and headquarters of Akris is St. Gallen, a small Swiss city entrenched in the art of textiles since the Middle Ages. It is where Kriemler designs in a studio on

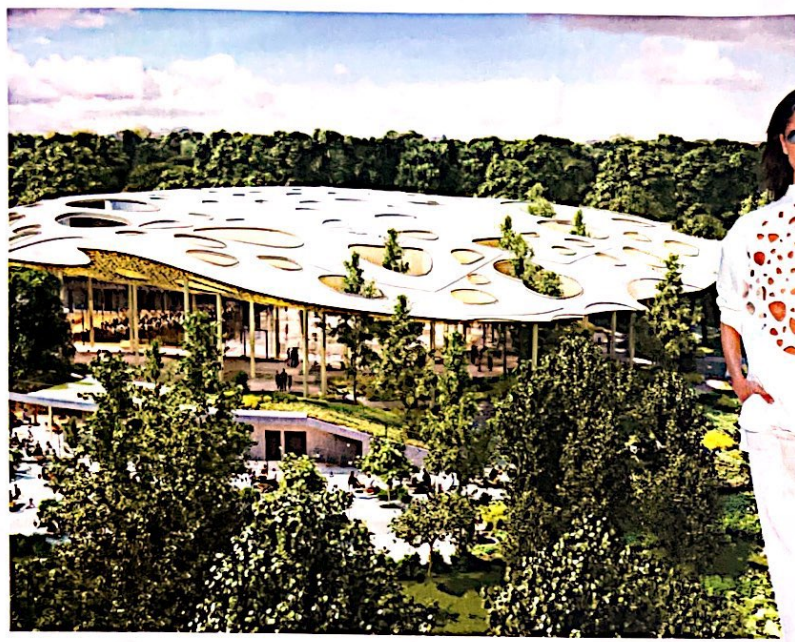
Left: Albert Kriemler. "If you can create," he says, "that is the greatest gift of life." Below: Kriemler collaborated with artist Imi Knoebel on Akris's Spring/Summer 2021 collection, titled "Pure Freude." He calls Knoebel "a minimal craftsman artist, with a sense of color which is absolutely incomparable."



Right: Kriemler's Swiss hometown, St. Gallen, has one of the oldest surviving libraries in Europe: the UNESCO-listed Abbey of St. Gall. Below: Kriemler's grandmother Alice Kriemler-Schoch founded Akris in St. Gallen in 1922 as an apron manufacturer.

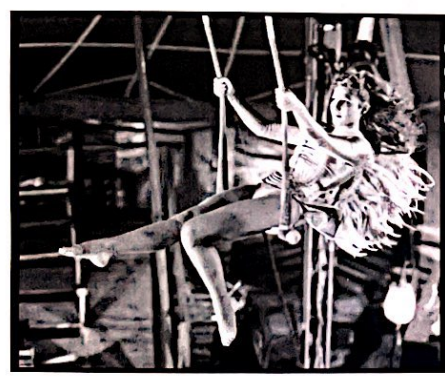


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Sou Fujimoto's House of Hungarian Music (left) in Budapest, with its distinctive floating roof perforated with light wells, directly inspired the oversized broderie anglaise in Akris's Spring/Summer 2016 collection (below left).

Below: The 116-year-old Forster Rohner company in St. Gallen produces embroidery for the world's best couturiers and has the archive to prove it. Kriemler says it also holds treasures like photographs by Helmut Newton and Gian Paolo Barbieri.



Kriemler calls Wim Wenders "the most fabulous German-language director," and "a person of excellence, with incomparable taste." *Wings of Desire* (left) is among his favorite films. "I can very much relate to his creative process." Below: Spring 2021 Akris AI bags.

the top floor of the brick house his grandmother bought in 1944 and where he feels that much of his creativity is rooted.

Akris's separateness—given its location far from European fashion capitals like Milan and Paris—"is definitely a part of our handwriting," says Kriemler. The designs eschew heavy ornamentation in favor of neat lines and functional, flattering silhouettes in carefully chosen fabrics. "When the material is precious, you just need the proportions," Kriemler says. The brand's signature may be local, but it is recognized globally: In 2004 Akris was the first Swiss fashion house to be invited to join the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode.

Kriemler grew up venerating couturiers like Cristóbal Balenciaga and Yves Saint Laurent and even saw a few of the latter's fashion shows as a teenager, when a friend of the family took him along to Paris "at the peak of Saint Laurent, in '76 and '77." It is easy to see the influence of Saint Laurent, who famously prized comfort and elegance in his designs, in Kriemler's fashion Weltanschauung. "We need to welcome the person first, and then realize she's wearing a beautiful suit," says Kriemler. "The clothes should never overshadow the person!"

Beyond his early inculcation in couture, Kriemler credits his creative approach to "nine fantastic weeks" in his 20s, when he and his maternal uncle toured Europe looking at architecture. His interest in the world of design has led him to collaborations with the Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto and artists like the German painter-sculptor Imi Knoebel. Knoebel collaborated on Akris's Spring/Summer 2021 offering. Kriemler is already thinking about the next collection, finding that he feels the "utmost joy"—the "pure Freude" for which his most recent collection is named—in that interstice when he's finished a work and is about to start the next one. "If you can create," he says, "that is the greatest gift of life."

