

**BUSINESS**

# Rap empresario Combs finds fashion niche

*Associated Press*

Rap mogul Sean "Puffy" Combs is making waves in the fashion industry.

Combs has set a tone for fashion that made it a natural for him to move into the garment industry.

He is chairman and CEO of the line called Sean John, after his first and middle names.

The collection is targeted for males 12 to 40 and is designed by a professional staff.

In its first year, the line, including jeans, shirts and T-shirts, had sales exceeding \$32 million.

"Men's fashion was boring, to be honest," Combs said.

"And it still is. I just felt it was unfair for us to not have fun like women get to have. They get to be fabulous and have some style and have an outfit they can put on and feel good about. We're gradually taking men into the zone of being able to feel beautiful, but still be able to be a strong man about it."

Combs knows a thing or two about fashion. His white suit, a signature style, is practically transporting.

"The white stuff, to be honest, is like a personal, spiritual thing. White is a color I dream about all the time. I feel safe in white because deep down inside, I'm an angel," he said in a telephone interview.

His first-ever show last February attracted a star-studded audience of rappers Lil' Kim and Missy Elliot, R&B legend Luther Vandross, New York Yankee Derek Jeter, New York Knick Patrick Ewing and comedian Sandra Bernhard.

More typically, Combs is recognized as the Grammy-winning CEO of Bad Boy Entertainment, plus a rap star.

He is also owner of trendy Justin's restaurants in New York and Atlanta, named for one of his two sons.

He's philanthropic, too, having founded Daddy's House Social Programs in New York City for homeless and foster children.

His record company has a charity division run by sister Keisha.

If that's not enough multitasking, Combs plays the leader of a New York crime syndicate in the upcoming film "Made," which

is scheduled for release next year.

The mogul with a "Bad-Boy"-tattooed bicep, a penchant for Versace and a platinum-and-diamond cross necklace knows how to combine the brains of a music exec with the style of a rock star.

"I never like to be pinpointed with my style," Combs said.

"The complexity of my personality is a reflection of my style."

When it comes to clothes, "I've got a wide range of flavors that I like," he said.

What's appealing about fashion, according to Combs, "is that you're supposed to experiment. It's like your supply of color and you're a painter. You're supposed to have fun with it."

For his New York Fashion Week preview in February, Combs, 30, showed bare-chested male models dripping in \$14 million worth of jewels and smothered in mink.

"This is a big social message going on," said CFDA president Stan Herman after the show.

"When you saw those diamonds, you didn't want to look at rhinestones anymore. He made it natural to see guys wearing diamond necklaces and bracelets. It really worked."

Born in Harlem, Combs went from intern at Uptown Records in New York City in 1991 to vice president.

He was soon instrumental in creating the debut albums of Mary J. Blige and Jodeci. In 1993, he signed with Arista Records to distribute his Bad Boy label, launching a series of releases that went platinum.

For his fashion line, Combs already has the mandatory celebrity clientele: Chris Rock and Jerry Seinfeld, rapper Eminem, Donald Trump and fellow music exec Russell Simmons, who has his own Phat Farm fashion label.

Combs consulted Simmons, among others, before launching his own line. "I basically asked for advice."

"He told me it wasn't easy for a black designer to start a line and be treated seriously."

Beyond that, "You almost have to be a psychic to predict what's going to be in fashion in another year," he said.

# Black magazine suspends publication, plans revamp

NEW YORK (AP) — Emerge, a monthly news and issues magazine aimed at wealthy black Americans, is suspending publication until early next year and dismissing most of its employees.

The move to close the 10-year old magazine was announced late Wednesday by Keith Clinkscales, chief executive of the magazine's publisher, Vanguard Media Inc.

He said the magazine would be relaunched as a lifestyle magazine targeted at the same audience.

"Emerge represented a hallmark in African-American publishing," Clinkscales said.

"However, a new editorial strategy gives us a unique opportunity to reach a broader readership and improve our

business prospects."

Emerge's editor, George Curry, was recently named the head of American Society of Magazine Editors, becoming the first black person to hold that prestigious post.

Curry resigned when apprised of the changes in the editorial direction of the magazine, said Dana Baxter, a spokeswoman for Vanguard Media.

The Washington-based Emerge had a relatively small monthly circulation of 160,000 for the six months ended last June, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations.

That's well below the top publications aimed at black audiences such as Ebony, 1.7 million, and Essence, just over 1 million.

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