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LIFESTYLE

After 16 years away, Rick Owens is in a better place: Los Angeles



Rick Owens and Michèle Lamy arrive at Fashion Group International's Night of Stars Gala in New York on Oct. 24, 2019. The following month, the designer visited Los Angeles, where he launched his career, for the first time in 16 years. (Clint Spaulding / WWD/Shutterstock)

By ADAM TSCHORN
DEPUTY FASHION EDITOR

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Rick Owens, the designer known for his goth-glam-grunge aesthetic, grew up in Porterville, Calif., and, from his Paris atelier, achieved rock-star status in the fashion world.

However, he launched his career (and founded his eponymous label) in Los Angeles, a city he hasn't set a platform-booted foot in for more than a decade and a half despite [opening a flagship store here](#) in 2015. Until late last week, that is.

That's when Owens and his wife and business partner, Michèle Lamy, arrived in the City of Angels for a five-day swirl of activities that included celeb-studded dinner parties, [revisiting old haunts](#) and reconnecting with old friends.

The visit culminated Monday night in a jam-packed book-signing party on the night of Owens' 58th birthday at Owens' La Brea Boulevard boutique for two recent Rizzoli-published tomes, "LeGaspi by Rick Owens," about the designer who inspired Owens' [fall and winter 2019 collection](#), and the photo book "Rick Owens Photographed by Danielle Levitt."

LEGASPI



BY RICK OWENS

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

A book-signing party for “LeGaspi,” one of two books Rick Owens published through Rizzoli in September, was the official reason the fashion designer returned after 16 years to Los Angeles, where he began his journey to fashion world rock stardom. (Rizzoli)

Between a one-on-one, preparty book signing with comedian Dave Chappelle (who had a flight to catch) and a full-blown Owens-fest that had a line of more than 100 book buyers snaking out the door and through the parking lot at any one time, Owens sat down with The Times to talk about why he’d stayed away from L.A. for so long — and what it felt like to return. Here are excerpts from that conversation.

What have you been up to since arriving in Los Angeles four days ago?

We went to [Hollyhock House](#), which was really lovely. It was only after we moved that I developed an interest in Frank Lloyd Wright — which is weird — so I'd never been there. We've done everything: gone to the beach, gone downtown, gone to some museums and gone back to the places we used to live just to look around.

How has Los Angeles changed since you've been gone?



The Hollyhock House, designed by the architect Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1920s, was one of the places Rick Owens visited on his first trip back to Los Angeles in more than a decade and a half. (Calvin B. Alagot / Los Angeles Times)

Maybe I'm [being] a little bit oblivious because I keep thinking things haven't changed that much. People say, "Los Angeles has changed so much, [and] the traffic is horrible now," but [L.A.] seems the same as it always was, and the traffic's not that bad. What's funny is that L.A. actually feels a little smaller.

How does it feel to be back after so long?

When we lived at the Chateau Marmont 20-something years ago, we had a room in the back over the kitchen, and the room we're staying in now is two floors above that room and has the same configuration. So there's been this not-emotional-but-nostalgic-memory-trigger kind of thing happening because we're living in that dynamic again together, and it's been super sweet. When we opened the windows there was this particular smell — a combination of plants, alley and hotel — that triggered a lovely rush of memories.

So you're enjoying it?

I'm really enjoying it. I was kind of dreading coming back to L.A. a little bit, and it's been very sweet. That sounds a little dramatic, I guess, but I feel like I'm breaking the ice and I'm going to be here all the time now.

Why, exactly, were you gone for so long?

It's kind of like when you see a picture of yourself with weird bangs or braces [and] you kind of wince a little bit at your vulnerability. I think that was sort of what I associated with Los Angeles — being not fully formed and being kind of messy and not who I wanted to be completely. So I didn't want to revisit that so much.



Owens and his wife lived in West Hollywood's Chateau Marmont decades ago. The designer says that staying there in mid-November "triggered a lovely rush of memories."
(Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

What made this the right time for a revisit?

After the book signings in Seoul, Paris, London and New York, I was thinking, "This is really fun! This would be a fun thing to do in L.A.," [and because] I hadn't been to L.A. [in a long time] this would be a good excuse for the finale. But it wasn't like we planned it from the beginning. It was kind of impromptu. The great thing is it's like having a party, and it's a chance to see so many people in a very clinical, control-y way. I can have one-on-one time, do a face-to-face [meeting] and a selfie with everybody, which is a little clinical but nice.

So that wince-inducing vulnerability and feelings of being messy and not fully formed are gone?

I was going to a nightclub Friday and I was remembering how, when I was living in L.A., I would have this little bit of anxiety or nervousness before going out. And now I'm 50-...-8. I was just so relaxed and so enjoying the moment, and looking forward to going. I was like, "Well, that's 58. Just kind of relax and learn to enjoy it." I've gotten past a lot of the anxieties. But I'm being a little

disingenuous because obviously I'm in a different position now and I'm pretty sure everybody's going to be really nice to me. And it's my birthday. So what's to worry about?

Speaking of birthdays, does that factor in to the way you're feeling about being back?

There's something satisfying about being older and feeling like you've got a lot of stuff done that you didn't think you were going to [get done]. There's a lot of gratitude that I get to come back under better circumstances than I ever thought would happen. That part is very fulfilling. Revisiting what you [once] considered a weakness and being sort of validated. It's almost biblical, this returning thing.

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Does this mean you'll be visiting Los Angeles more frequently now?

We're looking at property! We always do that, though. [Michèle and I] were in Cairo a couple of months ago and we were like, "We're totally living here." But that was another reason I was in no rush to get back. ... I can totally see [myself] ending up here. I mean it's idyllic. It's utopian. It's really the best of all worlds. ... But it would definitely have to be near the ocean. I can't be away from the beach.

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Deputy fashion editor Adam Tschorn writes about a range of style-centric pop-culture topics for the Los Angeles Times. Holding a BA in philosophy and an MA in journalism makes him well-qualified to watch fashion shows and ask: “Why?”

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