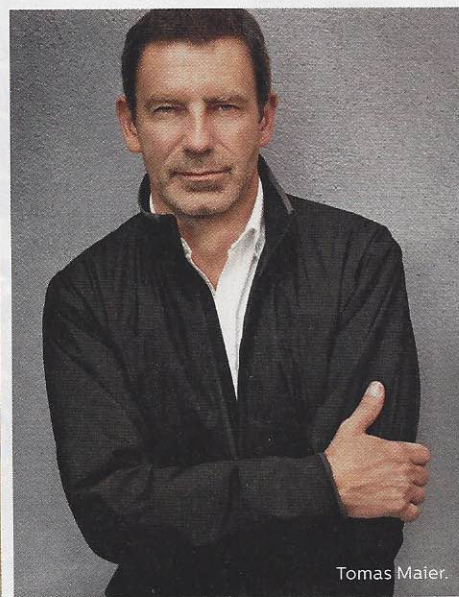




LEFT: The new Tomas Maier boutique in Bal Harbour, Florida.



Tomas Maier.

Granada leather backpack.



## SECOND NATURE

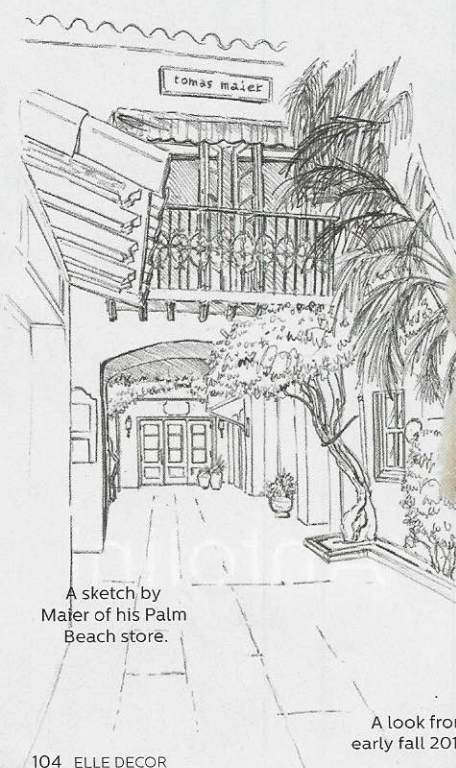
*Tomas Maier takes a more relaxed approach with his namesake brand than with Bottega Veneta, but his eye is no less rigorous*

From its mostly empty front window to its spare interior and single row of clothing racks, the Tomas Maier boutique on Bleeker Street in Manhattan's Greenwich Village breaks many, if not most, of the rules of contemporary retailing. This is capitalism at its most restrained. But simplicity can be deceiving. Linger in the shop a while and there is much to discover: Leather wallets and jewelry are encased in glass-topped wooden tables, belts dangle from cords attached to custom metal pegs,

and drawers open to reveal additional wares in alternate colors and sizes. "I myself don't like shopping," Maier says. "When I design a store, I don't like the product to be too much in your face. It is important to dose it and to leave room for desire."

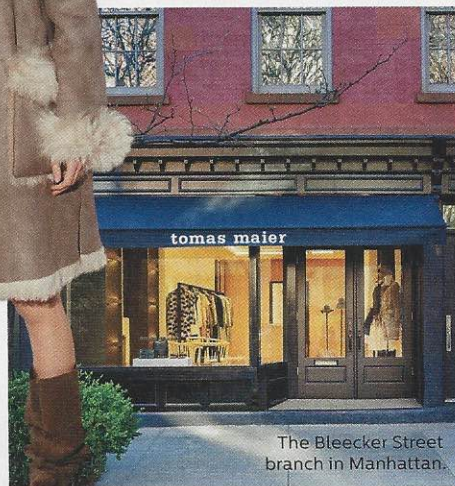
The German-born fashion designer, who divides his time between New York City, Milan, and Palm Beach, is best known for his role as the creative director of Bottega Veneta, which he famously transformed (after being handpicked by Tom Ford) from a money-losing luxury brand to a \$1.3 billion success story. But for the last 18 years, Maier has also quietly overseen his own namesake lifestyle brand, which consists of Italian-made men's and women's sportswear, handbags, accessories, and shoes.

Two years ago, an investment from Kering, Bottega Veneta's parent company, allowed him to significantly expand his own label. In the last year, the label more than doubled its retail footprint, with the original shops in Palm Beach and East Hampton, New York, now joined by a Madison Avenue flagship, the store on Bleeker Street, and a shop in Bal Harbour, Florida. And while Maier won't divulge what's next, he does say more stores are in the works. ▶



A sketch by Maier of his Palm Beach store.

A look from early fall 2015.



The Bleeker Street branch in Manhattan.





Strands of beads by Florian for Tomas Maier.



Suede belt bag.



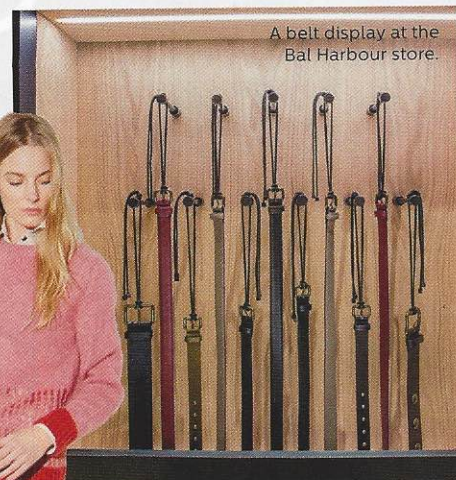
Women's patent-leather slip-ons.

The son of an architect, Maier almost followed his father into the profession. "Architecture is my second passion in life," he says. "I read about it a lot, and I've done a couple of my own houses. I come from a small town in the Black Forest, the kind of place where you take over your father's firm. But I wanted to live in a big town, so I moved to Paris, where I lived for 25 years before coming to the United States."

He famously took another path, into fashion, but overseeing the design of his boutiques allows him to explore his hobby. It begins with the hunt for the perfect space. On Bleecker Street, for instance, he restored a storefront in a circa-1840s rowhouse facing a small park, exposing its original brick walls and fireplace. "In fashion, a lot of brands have a 'kit' that they glue onto every store so they all look the same," he says. "I look for locations that have character, and when I find it, I try to embrace it and adapt to that environment. It's like buying a



Looks from early fall, top, and fall/winter 2015.



A belt display at the Bal Harbour store.



Men's Palm Desert boot.

house or an apartment. You shouldn't try to make it into something it is not."

He sketches out his blueprint for each store and selects everything from architectural finishes (he is a fan of cream walls and bleached-oak floors and shelves) to lighting. He also designs custom displays suited for each type of object: Hats are posed on gunmetal poles, while jewelry by Italian designer Osanna Visconti di Modrone is mounted on wooden stands on the shelves of glass-and-metal vitrines. The boutiques also carry strands of semi-precious gemstones from Viennese jeweler Florian Ladstaetter. "He hunts for beads in Hungary and the Czech Republic," says Maier, "then makes a story out of them." Each shop is furnished with Moroccan rugs and reproductions of midcentury Scandinavian seating by designers like Borge Mogensen and Ole Wanscher.

Just as he shunned logos with Bottega Veneta, Maier avoids advertising and fashion shows with his own brand to keep prices lower. "I like to be anti-system," he admits. "People are always telling me, 'This is how it's done.' But I think my clients are beyond that. Bottega is about the exceptional, while my brand is more about the necessary. It's nicely made and at a price that is relative to what you see. That's what I like to find when I shop." **INGRID ABRAMOVITCH**



Custom vitrines in Bal Harbour.