

Studio Visits - Sober

Since quite some time we at Dam Style have been thinking of ways to show you a bit more of Amsterdam's fashion people. Of course street style is still our main focus, the styles of the street have come far and are always influencing (high) fashion, but the clothes have to come from somewhere. To show this we decided to make visits to the studios of some young Amsterdam based designers. Off the streets in the studios so to say. We hope you'll enjoy the extensive read!

The first in this series is [Sober](#). Sober came to us by way of Elza - one of the Dam Style photographers. It is quite a fresh brand, just a few collections young. The result of the collaboration between Robbert Wefers-Bettink & Cissy Noordeloos, it is a through and through Dutch label, but with an international edge to it as we found out. Their background comes into play in it's collections through the combination of minimal shapes, refined details and rich materials, creating a feeling of timelessness.



Dam Style: Hi, thanks for having us here. For a start could you please tell us a little bit about yourself, about your background and how *Sober* came to life.

Robbert: I'm Robbert, I'm the designer of *Sober*, I studied at the [Amsterdam Fashion Institute \(Amfi\)](#), design & styling. I did my internship at *A.F. Vandevorst*, and later also worked there at the showroom in Paris. What interests me about fashion is the total picture, with photography, music etc. it's really like a you're starting a dream.

Cissy: I'm Cissy, I'm more of the business partner part of *Sober*. I studied fashion management at the *Amfi*. That's also where we met each other.

What interests me is the story behind the clothes: how it's made, the technical elements, the financial side, how to make it into a good business. Selling a dream in a way.

DS: And how did you have the idea of *Sober*? I mean, I assume you had the idea of starting your own business...

R: No, not really... I did my internship in Antwerp and then the market crashed, people were fired, so I came back to Amsterdam, and I was talking with a friend of mine, someone contacted us with the proposal if we could start a label for him, we both knew Cissy so we asked her to help us out. But then the investor couldn't get the finances together...

C: ...the business plan was there already, only the financial part had to be done. Ok, why not do it ourselves and see what happens.

DS: Why did you choose the name *Sober*, and why not your own name?

R: First we had our own name, with the other guy... he is called Claesen and my name is Wefers-Bettink, So it was Wefersbettinklaesen... that's not gonna work.

C: Really too long.

R: Then a friend of mine said, you should think of a shorter word... So I wrote down some words like calvinistic, 'zedig' (decent), 'blank', those kind of words.

I grew up in Nigeria and Syria, Damascus and so I'm really proud to be living in

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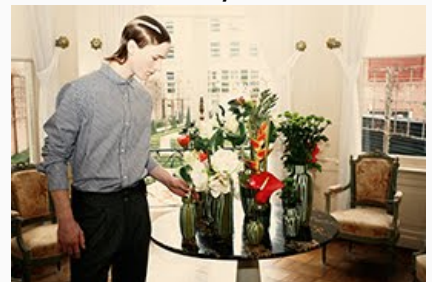
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Interview with SOBER — June 2011



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Amsterdam. I've been in a lot of places around the world, and it's cool that you have real seasons here, it can rain, it can be really depressing, but then when the first sun comes through everybody goes to the park and enjoys, so that's, I think that's really nice...

DS: the changes of season

R: Yes, the changes and also the people. Northern Europe is special, not only the Netherlands. So these were the kind of things I wrote down. I always design really minimalistic, kind of graphical and it's, yeah: 'sober'.



DS: Sober is quite a young brand, do you already have some stories to tell...

C: Customers that didn't pay...

R: A big company tried to sue us because the title we used for one of our collections was the same as their brand... Our lawyer said, don't worry about it... but then at the same time, they said like if you really want to go on to court then you never gonna win anything. Maybe you get said that you can use it but maybe it's better to say like sorry and sticker everything, we're not gonna do it again.

DS: So now you don't use themes for the collections?



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R: Oh, we do have themes, but we're not going to give it a name anymore. Now we only use numbers. Just autumn/ winter this and this, and every time I write a story about the collection, and with a story nobody can get a patent. We're not gonna give it a single word, maybe a sentence, because it's way too risky.

DS: it's the first time I heard that, somebody sues you because of that, a brand is one thing but the name of a collection that sounds so far fetched.

C: We were so small, only one selling point, so what's the big deal...

R: It was a good experience, you learn...

C: ...back to the real world.

R: You learn a lot about, what is important and what's not, like when we started at the academy we were really dreaming like if I get the respect, published in the ELLE, then it's gonna be, I'm gonna be happy and that's everything I want, but now we get published around once every 3 months, and then it's ok, still nice, but it's not...

DS: ...exciting anymore?

R: Oh, it is exciting, but you think if you get published in the ELLE then you're there, you're settled, but that's not true, you still have to work really hard to prove yourself over and over again. And it's really difficult because the fashion for me it's like a dream, but for the shop it's just a product: "Is the price right? are they gonna deliver on time? And if that's ok *and* it's nice, oh yeah, then we're gonna buy it."

DS: Do you like that part of the fashion industry?

R: I think it's realistic and it's a good part, but at the same time... a lot of small labels start and then they tip over again, because they can't get the finances right. We got all that settled. We don't spend a lot on promotion. We spend all the time on production of a collection. So if someone says "I'm not gonna buy it, because I think you're too young and you're not gonna deliver on time", then we were like: "but we can!"

C: We really can ;-)

R: So that's quite frustrating, but at the same time if you look at it from their side they probably tried it before and they got smacked in the face and now they are cautious.

DS: Could you tell us a bit more about the practical aspects?

C: Well, Robbert makes the drawings and then a basic pattern...

R: Yeah, I start with the mood board, with every collection I learn more, so every collection I look back... what I really liked about the previous one or even the summer before. Like the first collection, what were the nice attributes or garments that really fit my style and which weren't, and then I start a mood board, like I think this is really nice and get inspired. I like to look in books and magazines and walk on the street. And then I suddenly think this time I'm gonna be inspired by Rothko, the painter... So I start my mood board, most of the times I try to write a story, but it's all for myself.

Then I start drawing, just to make the first sketches, put some lines in it, and then I start with patterns. I do all my own patterns, I think everybody should know. We learned a bit of pattern drawing in school, but when you finished you suddenly notice that what you learned is crap, you have to start all over again. So now I am really learning to draw patterns in an official way and really make it fit, perfectly, like a *Larvin* jacket. You put it on and it's 'wow', now we're trying to build up to that kind of quality. So I do the patterns and I choose the colours and then the fabric man comes and together we look at the fabrics and I go and explain the idea to Cissy. Then together we search for fabrics and I eventually choose it and Cissy gives the ok if it's the right price, what can we make of it and is it realistic. Because I can make a nice t-shirt but if it's going to cost 400 euros, that's not realistic.

Then we start communicating, for example with the buttons: I always want mother-of-pearl and horn, but that's way too expensive. But then I say that one I really want and then this one we can do that. So then we start puzzling.

DS: Balancing out where you can.

R: Yeah, and then Cissy makes the planning because the garments are produced in Romania and it goes through Belgium.

DS: Details play a big role in your designs, can you talk us through some garments?

R: This green dress I really like, because it's so minimalistic but at the same time, by just adding a layer and letting the silk flow, by not fixing it on the seam I think this is a really successful design.

I believe in garments, individual garments, so I don't believe in a suit that is a skirt. If you put it on this is it. In a way I start classical because it is always possible to trace back to a shirt and pants.

DS: ...And try to look how can you make it special, try to improve that?

R: Yeah, but I don't look at it like that, look at a garment, I have this and now I have to make it special, because then I'm really forcing myself.

DS: It comes more in the process...

R: Yes, it has to come naturally, most of the time I start with a shirt, and then a jacket. And then if that succeeds then I create the story with the details. I don't look at it like: I have a jacket and now I have to make it special, it just happens...

DS: Why I'm asking is to figure out where it comes from, how it works.

R: Most of the times it's frustration from the last collection, like what I missed, then I already have something to try, and then I have my inspiration, that combined, and a selection of garments I really want to have in the next collection comes from that. So

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I'm focussing on those first, those are my pillars. Well, that's how I worked until now...



DS: For the *Sober* customer, do you have a particular customer in mind, say "modern classic business woman". It's not leisurewear?

C: That is disappearing a bit, the 'business' part is something we are moving away from with the winter collection, it's a younger girl.

R: At first it was all more 'business', that's also my flaw, because I mainly focus on jackets, pants, blouses. With the new collections I really want to trigger myself to go beyond that. It should have more of the cocktail dresses and knitwear, that kind of things. That will also give the collection more strength.

C: Things you would want to wear every day.

DS: Can you be a bit more specific, on who's that person?

R: I don't have it yet, of course you have a person in mind that wears it, but that's just a dream-person. Now I would want a real muse, someone | could think of: if she goes to an opening she wears this..., but at home she would wear this... Now most of the time it's really clean, really stiff, but it should be a little bit more like...

DS: Playful?

R: Yeah, but that's really a next step hopefully, for my experience, for my design. With a lot of designers after five years you start to see the handwriting, then you see this is the person they want to be, so hopefully...

DS: Can you tell a little bit about the new collection, F/W 2011/12?

R: The starting point was how can | grow with my designs. The first collection was really classical, this one was really fresh, especially for me, the way I normally design. And this a new start for me, for my handwriting, I want to push my limits. I want to work with dresses with silk and wool in one, combining materials. Forcing myself to make showpieces, because I can design, but I constantly have to force myself to go one step further... for me it was almost a year ago, it's difficult to get back to...

DS: For instance you named Rothko as an inspiration before?

R: With this collection I started with August Sander, the people of the 20th century. I wanted to have a way to go further... with this I went beyond a classical garment, I cut off the collar, I left out details, and made it almost too minimalistic. This should be

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more adult... really looking at the pictures of August Sander, how those people could dress and look so beautiful and how it could happen with so much detail.

DS: So, what's the next step, "the future of Sober"

R: Well, the press is good, we have really nice shops in Holland right now. *Margreet Oltshoorn, Cobra, Coming soon, Magda*, some of the top shops in Holland, So now our focus is to grow that amount, perhaps more shops in Belgium and Holland, and after that we can focus on the next step and see how we can get shops in France or Germany.

C: it has to grow step by step, every season we try and see if we can go one step further.





All studio pictures [Elza Wandler](#)





by Dam Style on 6/02/2011



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