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TOMMY HILFIGER

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Born in 1951, a young Tommy Hilfiger first explored his entrepreneurial potential and interest in fashion in his hometown of Elmira, New York. Before graduating from high school, he opened a hippie boutique called the People's Place in 1969. The store saw rapid success before experiencing a sharp decline. Hilfiger filed for bankruptcy in 1977 and moved to New York City shortly thereafter. He served a brief stint designing jeans at Jordache and was offered a position at Calvin Klein in the early 1980s, but was soon approached by investor and entrepreneur Mohan Murjani to design a menswear line under his own name.

In 1985, the Tommy Hilfiger brand was founded with backing from the Murjani Group. Hilfiger's first menswear collection made its way into the spotlight with an audacious marketing campaign designed by George Lois. Under the headline "The 4 Great American Designers for Men," a billboard listed Tommy Hilfiger's initials and graphic red, white, and blue logo alongside the initials of the established names Ralph Lauren, Perry Ellis, and Calvin Klein.

Equal parts preppy, sporty, and suffused with Americana, Tommy Hilfiger's accessible sportswear and denim attracted a collegiate crowd as well as the hip-hop community. In the 1990s, Snoop Dogg, Grand Puma, and other artists sported baggy jeans and oversized T-shirts emblazoned with the Hilfiger logo. Unlike other preppy American clothiers, Tommy Hilfiger responded by courting his newfound market, featuring hip-hop celebrities in his advertising campaigns and infusing his designs with streetwear influences.

After this phase came to a close and the brand's popularity waned in the 2000s, the founder and principal designer strategically steered his company back into profitability and market relevance. The company had gone public in 1992 but was sold to Apax Partners and privatized in 2006 and reached an exclusive agreement with Macy's. Tommy Hilfiger was acquired by Phillips-Van Heusen in 2010 for \$3 billion and in 2016, the company reported global retail sales of \$6.6 billion. Hilfiger himself was named the 1995 Menswear Designer of the Year by the Council of Fashion Designers of America and earned the CFDA's Geoffrey Beene Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.

Hilfiger's lifestyle brand includes several collections for men, women, and children such as Tommy Hilfiger Tailored, Hilfiger Collection, and Hilfiger Denim. The label retains a quintessentially American style and a global reach, operating over 1,800 retail stores worldwide with licensing agreements for fragrances, footwear, eyewear, accessories, watches, undergarments, and bedding. Hilfiger created an adaptive clothing line for children with disabilities in 2016, which was received favorably and followed by a line for adults in 2017. The brand's extensive philanthropic activities were consolidated under the name TommyCares in 2012, and the designer's memoir, *American Dreamer*, was published in 2016.



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Tommy Hilfiger, fall/winter 1999. Niall McInerney, Photographer © Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

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