

JEANSWEAR  
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# J'N'C

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**INTERVIEWS:**

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KINGPINS SHOW

# Blue Blood

It started in 2004 as an alternative to the commercial trade fairs. Right from the start the Kingpins Show has brought together the brands whose dedication to denim demanded a different, perhaps more in-depth way of doing business.

Olah's trade fair concept is far removed from the superficial world of handshakes and is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. Events are held in Hong Kong, New York and Los Angeles. But the textile entrepreneur hasn't completed his mission yet. His new destination: Amsterdam.

*Mr Olah, you are coming up to the tenth anniversary of your Kingpins trade fair. Please describe how it developed.*

Fun, funny and always getting to be more fun and funnier. We didn't start Kingpins as a commercial organisation, but as a fun event for jeans lovers – which, looking back, was quite a strange concept. But to this day, with the Kingpins fair we are continuing to look for new ways of breaking up old fashion conventions.

*You are still very exclusive when it comes to choosing your exhibitors. And attendance is by invite only. What are your selection criteria?*

The basic idea builds on the vertical structure of our exhibitors. They not only sell their accessories and textiles, but also make them themselves. In the past, for example we turned down denim suppliers who didn't have their own weaving mill. But we also realise that we have to make compromises now and again. That's why we now have a few exhibitors who don't all have their own production facilities. But in these cases we look very carefully at the manufacturing chain and are even more careful to ensure that it is an excellent product. Our primary aim is to gather together the best 'Kingpins' of the industry.

*The first location this year is New York on 21 and 22 January, followed by Hong Kong in March – and in May it's Amsterdam's turn for the first time. Why?*

We consider Amsterdam to be the European capital of denim. Lots of brands are based there. The House of Denim Foundation in Amsterdam has just opened the first jeans school. The city simply shows a high level of appreciation for our industry. We want to develop the Amsterdam Kingpins trade fair into our flagship fair.

The string-puller behind the events is no unknown name: Andrew Olah, who with his production and consultation agency Olah Inc. is very much rooted in the American denim scene. Clients like Levi's, Guess, Ralph Lauren and Seven Jeans are testimony to the agency's success.

*Is that why you decided to give up Los Angeles as a location, in favour of Amsterdam?*

We have decided to give the Kingpins fair in Los Angeles a break for now. That means there won't be a January fair in L.A. The next edition will take place in July – but with a new concept.

*Your slogan is 'Kingpins with Love'. What's the message behind it?*

When someone registers with us, we treat them like a guest. We don't make a big deal out of it. At home we would invite them to sit on our sofa, turn the radio up and hand them a sandwich. That's how we see it at Kingpins. For us that's just part of normal behaviour: we take care of people personally, and treat them how they deserve to be treated.

*What do you make of the developments in the denim industry?*

A lot has been happening in the past few years. The managers of most of the weaving mills don't know what's hit them. Customers are constantly demanding new products. On the other hand, the future is demanding that we question many things: why doesn't everyone use sustainably grown cotton for their jeans? Why are jeans being sold that aren't up to customer standards? What can we do in order to guarantee a better product? One big challenge will be to create new fibre blends with new properties.

*You consciously differentiate yourselves from other trade fairs with your*

*concept for Kingpins. Is it difficult to keep up with the top dogs?*

How does a dwarf cope amongst giants? By running between their legs. Or put another way: we accept that we are small. In fact we even see it as our destiny. We like to be small, and we think that others appreciate this concept as well. The smallest restaurants don't necessarily make the worst food, do they?

*In addition to the familial atmosphere – what differentiates Kingpins as a unique trade fair?*

Our vision makes the difference. We come from the jeans industry, love denim, and have worked in this business for almost five decades; indigo blood runs in our veins.

*Do you have any plans for the future?*

We would like to continue improving the current Kingpins fairs to ensure that our exhibitors and customers will love Amsterdam, L.A. and New York. And Hong Kong should continue to be the insider tip on the Asian market. That's our dream.

*Thank you for talking to us.*

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