

In conversation with Everton Campbell, founder of Hip store

Written By Ali Mohammed-Ali



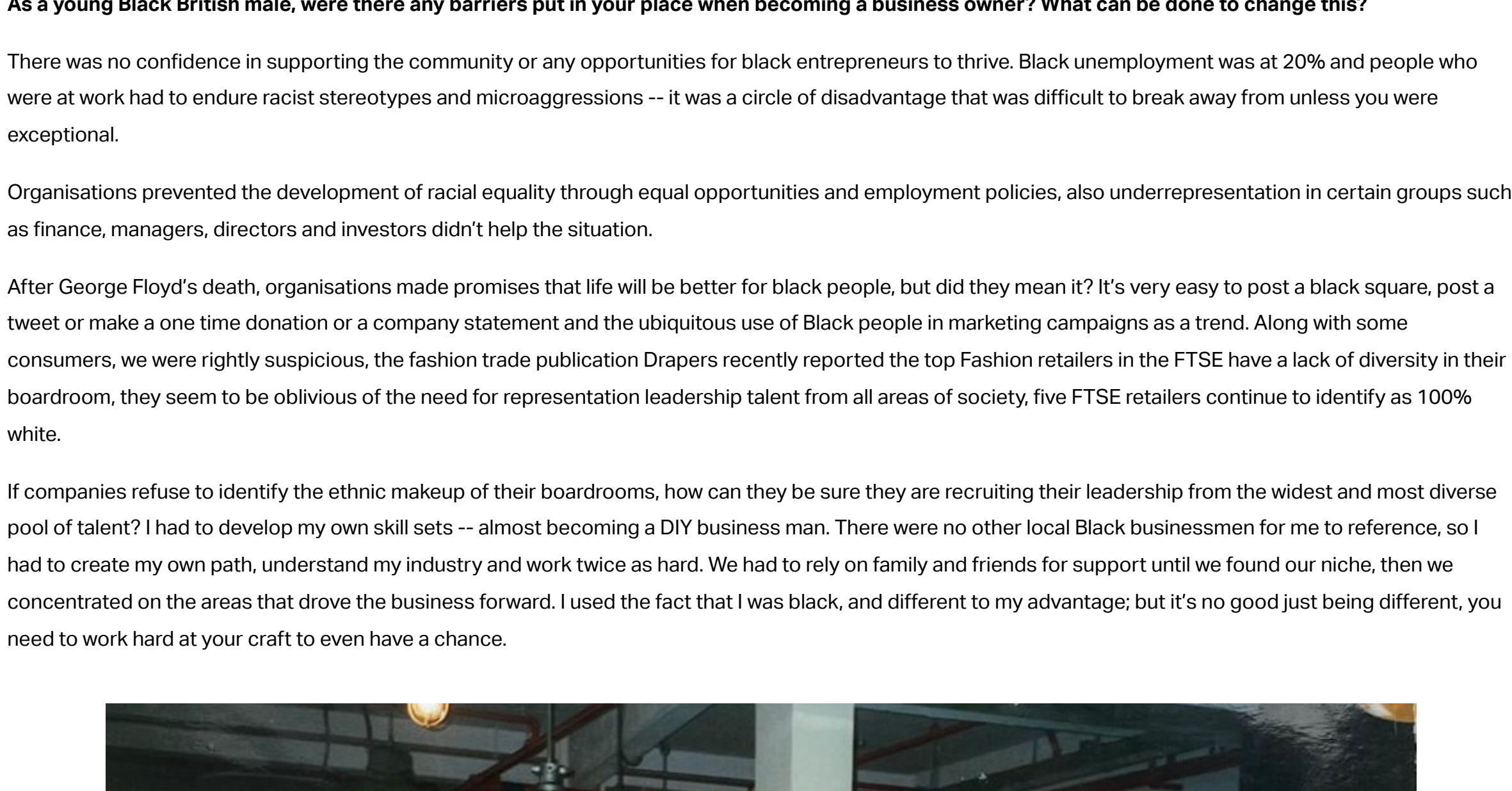
Credited with being one of the first black owned contemporary menswear retailers in the UK, Hip Store is revered for being the first stop fashion destination for major subcultures since its inception in the 1980s. We caught up with its co-founder, Everton Campbell to discuss his journey, iconic relationships as well as how the evolution of subcultures, music, and racial dynamics played a pivotal role in helping build Hip Store's DNA.

OriginalShift: Government rhetoric fueled racial tensions throughout the '70s and '80s. At the same time, the Wind Rush generation exerted Caribbean influences on all aspects of British culture. How did counterculture movements ease those tensions?

Everton Campbell: The early 1970's Skinheads were the first counterculture to embrace Caribbean immigrants. Outside of the Black community, the biggest fans of Ska music were the Skinheads. Reggae, which followed, became a part of British music just as Indian food became British eating.

Taking their style from the Rude Boys in Kingston Jamaica, Skinhead's had formed out of the hard end of Mod and football terrace boot boys. Along with love of Jamaican music they took their cropped trousers and short hair style from Caribbean immigrants. Skinhead Reggae had become a distinct British movement - they listened to iconic artists and labels such as Desmond Decker & Tamela Motown.

One thing to understand about 1970's British Skinhead Reggae was that it could easily coexist with hatred for Black people, stories of unprovoked violent attacks against the community and what they then called 'Paki bashing' were all common place at the time.



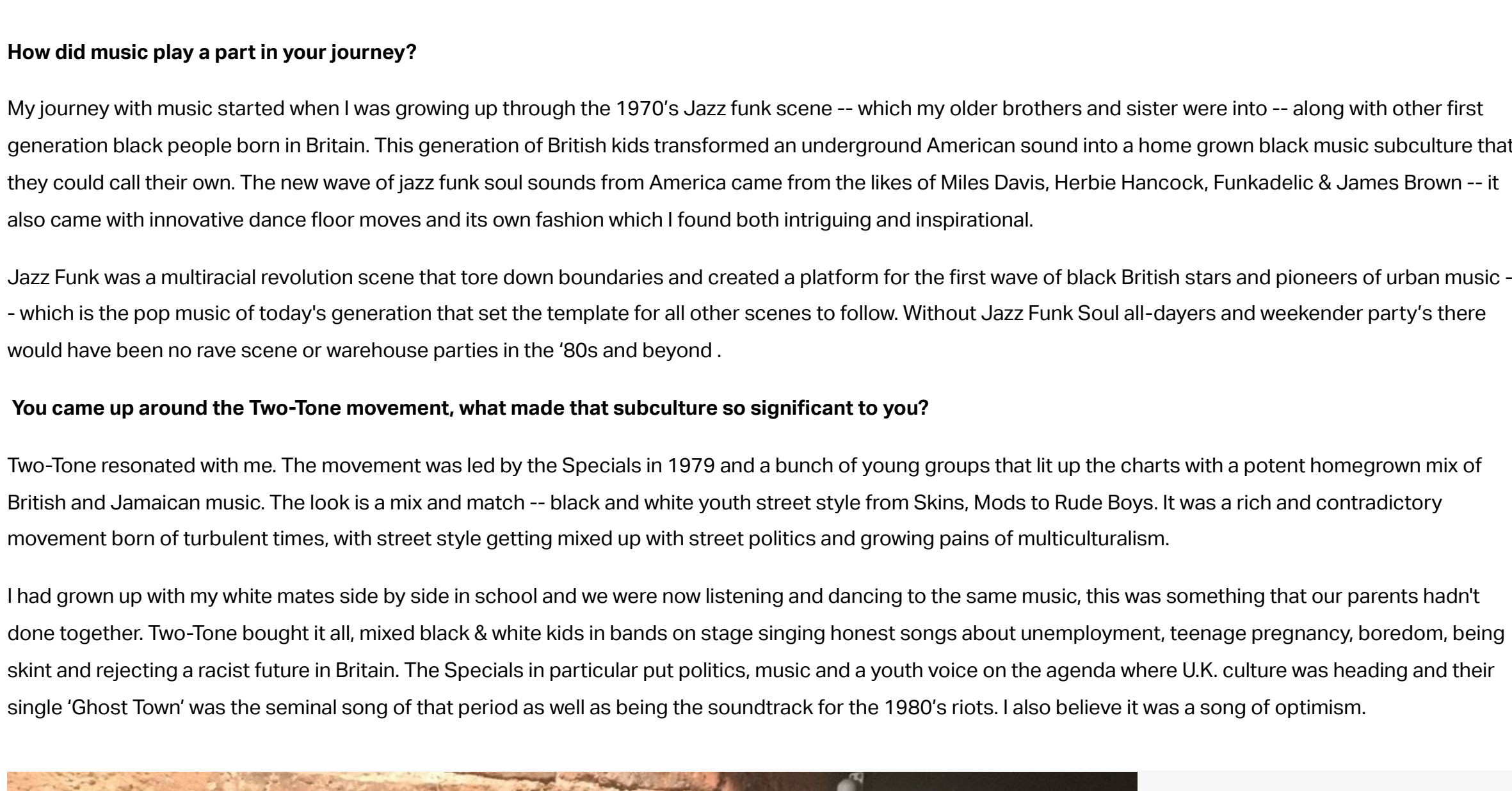
As a young Black British male, were there any barriers put in your place when becoming a business owner? What can be done to change this?

There was no confidence in supporting the community or any opportunities for black entrepreneurs to thrive. Black unemployment was at 20% and people who were at work had to endure racist stereotypes and microaggressions -- it was a circle of disadvantage that was difficult to break away from unless you were exceptional.

Organisations prevented the development of racial equality through equal opportunities and employment policies, also underrepresentation in certain groups such as finance, management, directors and investors didn't help the situation.

After George Floyd's death, organisations made promises that life will be better for black people, but did they mean it? It's very easy to post a black square, post a tweet or make a one time donation or a company statement and the ubiquitous use of Black people in marketing campaigns as a trend. Along with some consumers, we were rightly suspicious, the fashion trade publication Drapers recently reported the top Fashion retailers in the FTSE have a lack of diversity in their boardroom, they seem to be oblivious of the need for representation leadership talent from all areas of society, five FTSE retailers continue to identify as 100% white.

If companies refuse to identify the ethnic makeup of their boardrooms, how can they be sure they are recruiting their leadership from the widest and most diverse pool of talent? I had to develop my own skill sets -- almost becoming a DIY businessman. There were no other local Black businessmen for me to reference, so I had to create my own path, understand my industry and work twice as hard. We had to rely on family and friends for support until we found our niche, then we concentrated on the areas that drove the business forward. I used the fact that I was black, and different to my advantage; but it's no good just being different, you need to work hard at your craft to even have a chance.



How did music play a part in your journey?

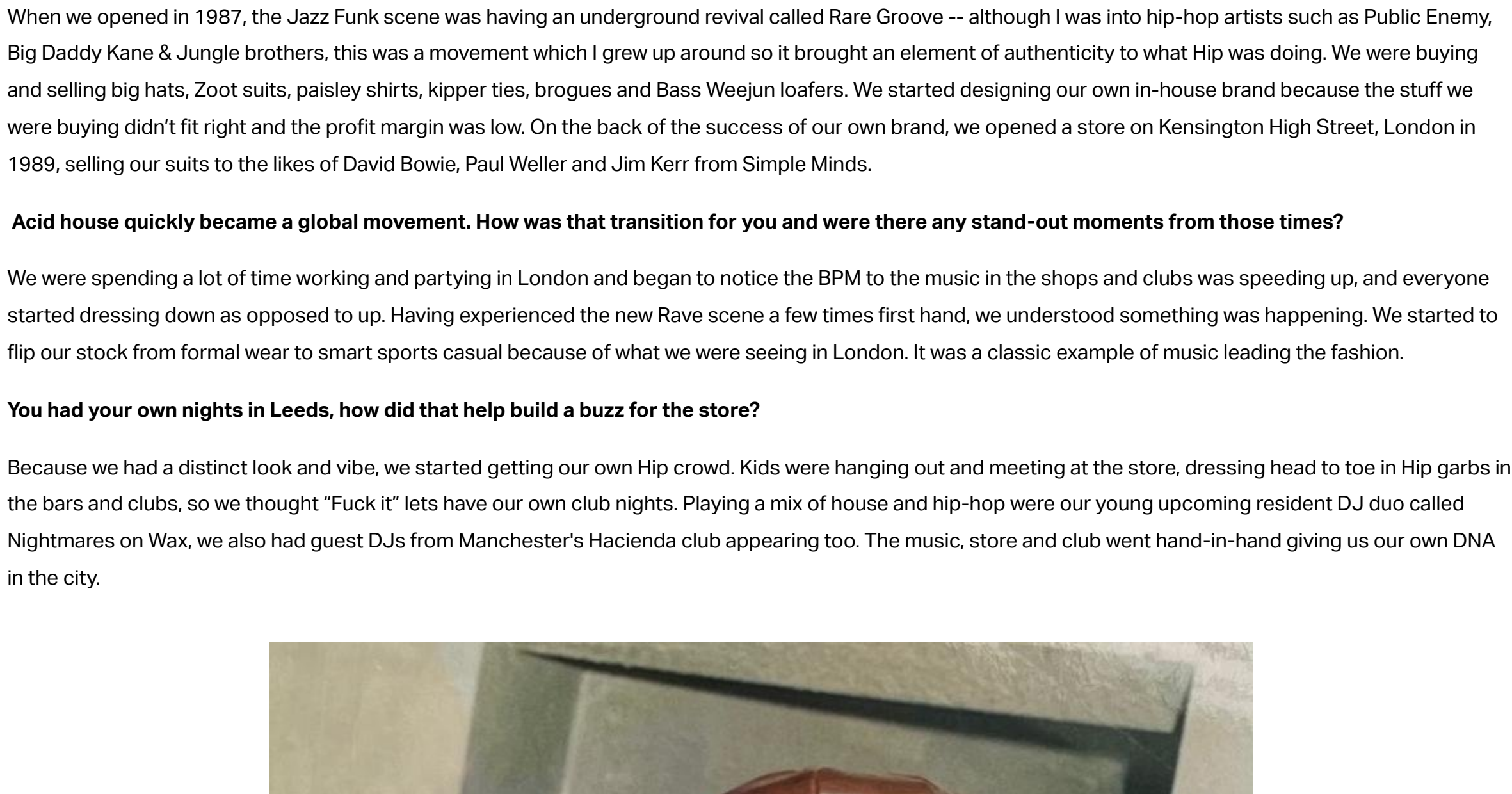
My journey with music started when I was growing up through the 1970's Jazz funk scene -- which my older brothers and sister were into -- along with other first generation black people born in Britain. This generation of British kids transformed an underground American sound into a home grown black music subculture that they could call their own. The new wave of jazz funk soul sounds from America came from the likes of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Funkadelic & James Brown -- it also came with innovative dance floor moves and its own fashion which I found both intriguing and inspirational.

Jazz Funk was a multiracial revolution scene that tore down boundaries and created a platform for the first wave of black British stars and pioneers of urban music -- which is the pop music of today's generation that set the template for all other scenes to follow. Without Jazz Funk Soul all-dayers and weekend party's there would have been no rave scene or warehouse parties in the '80s and beyond.

You came up around the Two-Tone movement, what made that subculture so significant to you?

Two-Tone resonated with me. The movement was led by the Specials in 1979 and a bunch of youth groups that lit up the charts with a potent homegrown mix of British and Jamaican music. The look is a mix and match -- black and white youth street style from Skins, Mods to Rude Boys. It was a rich and contradictory movement born of turbulent times, with street style getting mixed up with street politics and growing pains of multiculturalism.

I had grown up with my white mates, all mixed black & white kids in and we were now listening and dancing to the same music, this was something that our parents hadn't done together. Two-Tone brought it all, mixed black & white kids in bands on stage singing honest songs about unemployment, teenage pregnancy, boredom, being skint and rejecting a racist future in Britain. The Specials in particular put politics, music and a youth voice on the agenda where U.K. culture was heading and their single 'Ghost Town' was the seminal song of that period as well as being the soundtrack for the 1980's riots. I also believe it was a song of optimism.



Music and fashion go hand in hand, how did the cultural music movements influence Hip Store?

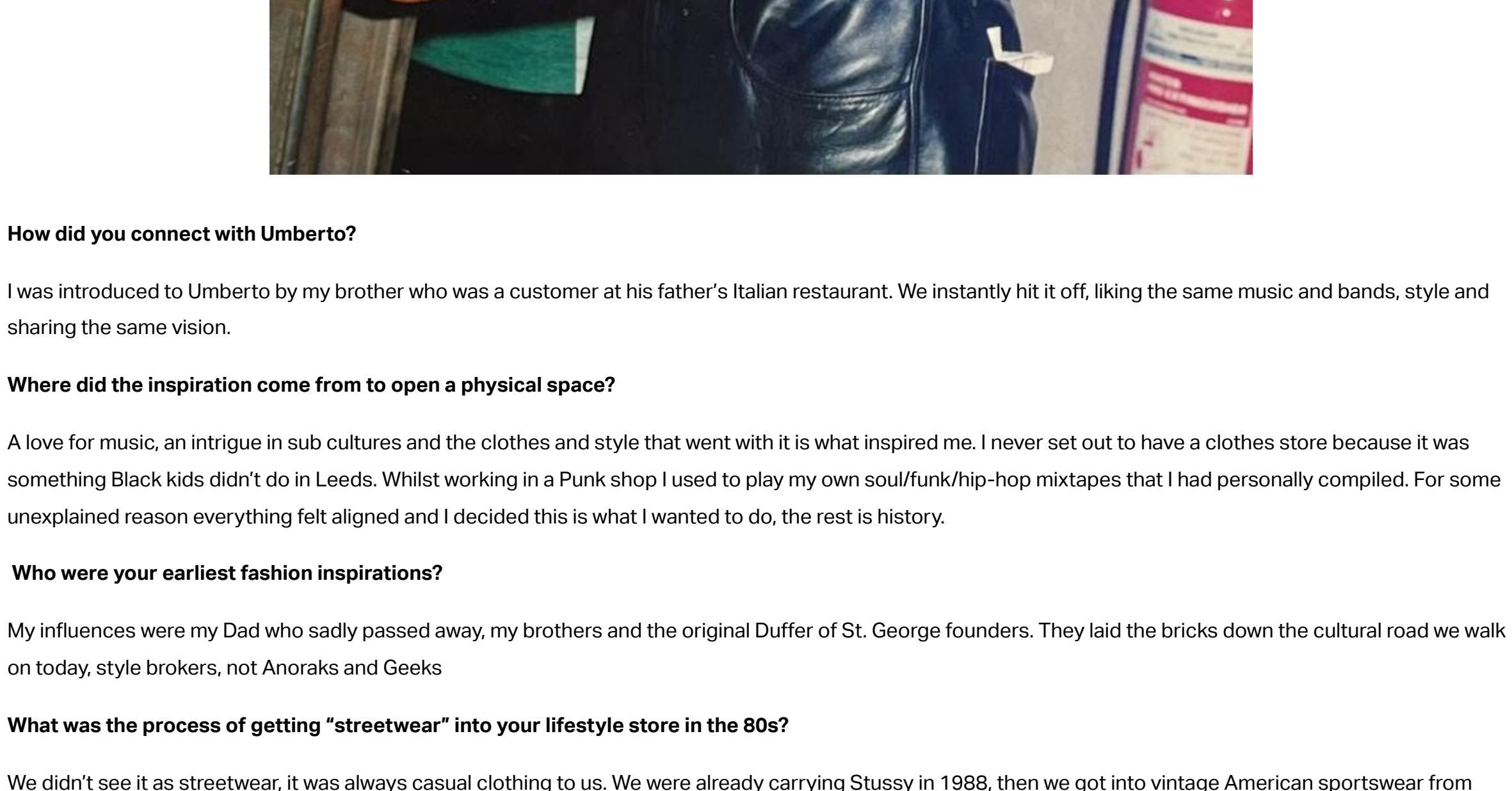
When we opened in 1987, the Jazz Funk scene was having an underground revival called Rare Groove -- although I was into hip-hop artists such as Public Enemy, Big Daddy Kane & Jungle brothers, this was a movement which I grew up around so it brought an element of authenticity to what Hip was doing. We were buying and selling big hats, Zoot suits, paisley shirts, kipper ties, brogues and Bass Weejein loafers. We started designing our own in-house brand because the stuff we were buying didn't fit right and the profit margin was low. On the back of the success of our own brand, we opened a store on Kensington High Street, London in 1989, selling our suits to the likes of David Bowie, Paul Weller and Jim Kerr from Simple Minds.

Acid house quickly became a global movement. How was that transition for you and were there any stand-out moments from those times?

We were spending a lot of time working and partying in London and began to notice the BPM to the music in the shops and clubs was speeding up, and everyone started dressing down as opposed to -- up. Having experienced the new Rave scene a few times first hand, we understood something was happening. We started to flip our stock from formal wear to smart sports casual because of what we were seeing in London. It was a classic example of music leading the fashion.

You had your own nights in Leeds, how did that help build a buzz for the store?

Because we had a distinct look and vibe, we started getting our own Hip crowds. We were hanging out and meeting at the store, dressing head to toe in Hip garbs in the bars and clubs, so we thought "Fuck it" lets have our own club nights. Playing a mix of house and hip-hop were our young upcoming resident DJ duo called Nightmares on Wax, we also had guest DJs from Manchester's Hacienda club appearing too. The music, store and club went hand-in-hand giving us our own DNA in the city.



How did you connect with Umberto?

I was introduced to Umberto by my brother who was a customer at his father's Italian restaurant. We instantly hit it off, liking the same music and bands, style and sharing the same vision.

Where did the inspiration come from to open a physical space?

A love for music, an intrigue in sub cultures and the clothes and style that went with it was what inspired me. I never set out to have a clothes store because it was something Black kids didn't do in Leeds. Whilst working in a Punk shop I used to play my own soul/funk/hip-hop mixtapes that I had personally compiled. For some unexplained reason everything felt aligned and I decided this is what I wanted to do, the rest is history.

Who were your earliest fashion inspirations?

My influences were my Dad who sadly passed away, my brothers and the original Duffer of St. George founders. They laid the bricks down the cultural road we walk on today, style brokers, not Anoraks and Geeks

What was the process of getting "streetwear" into your lifestyle store in the 80s?

We didn't see it as streetwear, it was always casual clothing to us. We were already carrying Stussy in 1988, then we got into vintage American sportswear from trips to New York. We got hold of deadstock adidas Superstars, Puma, Nike, put them in the window with fat laces and they sold like hot cakes

We realised we were onto something so we were buying as many as we could get our hands on. I remember picking up a suitcase for my mum in the Debenhams sale and noticed they had racks of Puma States for £8 in the basement. With some extra discount from the manager, we bought the lot for £6 each and sold them all at £75 a pair. We also started buying more American sportswear to expand the look like baseball jackets and caps, New York University sweatshirts and Puffa jackets. The Face magazine picked up on the style in Duffer and called the look 'old skool'.

What key aesthetic differences do you see in relation to streetwear now since when you first started?

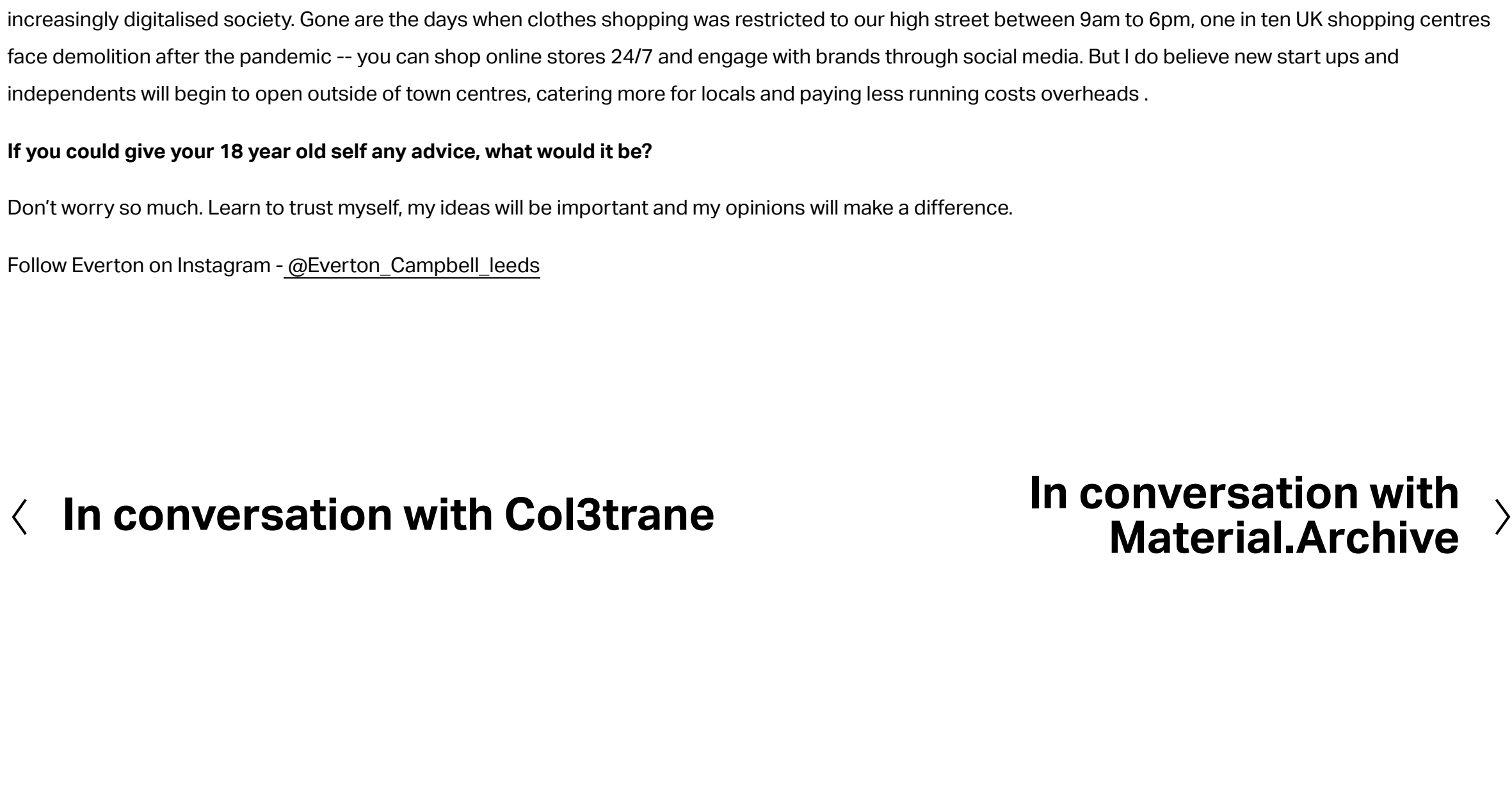
Street and casualwear has evolved into a very lucrative business. It doesn't represent that rebellious edge of what it did 30 years ago. Originally, streetwear was related to subcultures -- graffiti, skateboarding and hip-hop, now all these activities would all be looked upon as mainstream. The then independent brands are now run by corporations with shareholders. Streetwear is now not just for skaters and hip-hop fans. With collaborations like Supreme x Louis Vuitton it's become acceptable and for everyone -- which is cool because everyone should be allowed to embrace what's on offer without any constraints.

You were one of the first people to bring over Japanese brands, how did you connect those dots?

I first went to Tokyo Japan in the 1990s with the DJ Jeremy Healy -- he knew Hiroshi Fujiwara from his record label Major Force. Hiroshi had Good Enough and he introduced me to Jun Takahashi and Nigo who had Nowhere. Other stores at the time, also based in Tokyo's Urahara were 40% Against Rights, Neighborhood, Bounty Hunter, WTAPS and Mastermind etc.

Hideout in Soho was the store carrying the Harajuku brands in London and Hip in the North. The Harajuku movement had an immense impact on western pop culture at that time, brought on by ambitious tastemakers like Hiroshi and Nigo they set the stage for which remains prevalent today.

Today Urahara has become fully commercialised and is home to retail giants such as Burberry, Uniqlo and Paul Smith -- a far cry from the independent vibe of the '90s. I suppose helping to make the movement popular outside of Japan were artists like Gwen Stefani who became enamoured by the female street style which influenced the 'Harajuku Girls' single. I still keep in contact and have good relationships with the Japanese brands I introduced to Hip.



People view London as the fashion hub, did you reach any difficulties transferring that style up North? Were there any moments in the capital that inspired that transfer?

What inspired me was seeing stores in London doing what I liked. This gave me a proof of concept that a gap and opportunity existed to open a store in Leeds, selling the clothes I liked, playing the music I was into and with like-minded, knowledgeable staff on the shop floor.

We had a very loyal following as an independent store. Our customers trusted and supported our choices in the brands we introduced into the city.

Is/Was there a clear aesthetic distinction between North and South?

There is obviously more choice in London as it's a much larger city. It's slightly overestimating reality, but it's not an unfair comment to say there is a clear aesthetic between South and North. The styles and trends are the same in both because the shops and websites sell the same styles, brands and products. In the North, there's an element of being more dressed up and getting out of your work clothes when going to a bar or restaurants. Londoners seem to go straight out from work wearing the same clothes.

How do you feel the internet and online shopping has affected the fashion industry?

The internet has changed the way we shop now. Smartphones, social media and consumer data have changed the face of the industry, retailers have had to adapt to an increasingly digitalised society. Gone are the days when clothes shopping was restricted to our high street between 9am to 6pm, one in ten UK shopping centres face demolition after the pandemic -- you can shop online stores 24/7 and engage with brands through social media. But I do believe new start ups and independents will begin to open outside of town centres, catering more for locals and paying less running costs overheads.

If you could give your 18 year old self any advice, what would it be?

Don't worry so much. Learn to trust myself, my ideas will be important and my opinions will make a difference.

Follow Everton on Instagram - @Everton_Campbell_leeds