

*Alex Olson is the pro-skateboarder son of
'70s icon Steve, re-gendering the parameters
of the most machismo subculture*

*Text by MARK JACOBS
Photography by TERRY RICHARDSON*

The legendary



“Tom of Finland is awesome.”



Alex Olson wears yellow 'Legendary' T-shirt by BIANCA CHANDON. Scarf models own. Dark denim jeans and green platted leather belt by SUPREME.

Previous: Beige wool jumper, blue cotton Oxford shirt, brown cotton twill work pant by SUPREME. Submariner watch by ROLEX.

man about town

The professional skateboarder Alex Olson grew up in and around Los Angeles with his father Steve Olson, an iconic pro skater from the Dogtown days of the 1970s. Olson's upbringing was characterised by the curiosity and enduring youthfulness of his senior, an artist and man-about-town. "It was more like a very close friendship than anything," he says, recalling family outings to see the Jean-Michel Basquiat biopic *Basquiat*, and a Vanessa Beecroft performance at the Gagosian Gallery, complete with rows of the artist's nude female models. Family friends included Jimmy Ganzer, founder of the '80s surf and skate brand Jimmy Z; Glen E. Friedman, the pioneering hip-hop, punk and skate photographer; and Bob Recine, the visionary fashion hairstylist, whom Olson called Willy Wonka due to his resemblance to the actor Gene Wilder.

Olson discovered New York City as a teenager, first with his father and then as the guest of skateboarder Jason Dill. He was predisposed to its millennial downtown scene, an ascendant mix of art, style and street epitomised by the Barbara Kruger-inspired Supreme box logo that has since moved in with Prada at Manhattan's new Dover Street Market. In time, he would be celebrated by the culture industry: laughing with Chloë Sevigny for Terry Richardson in *Purple Fashion Magazine*; appearing as the featured male model in the Spring/Summer 2011 Rodarte for Opening Ceremony look book; and making mention as one of the original clients of the Collaborative Agency, a company that brokers commercial deals for pedigreed socials like Gia Coppola and Annabelle Dexter-Jones. He has shown his own photography, inspired by the skater and Beautiful Losers artist Ed Templeton; currently DJs a disco series on Ohwov's Know-Wave internet radio; and collaborated with his father on a live 'wallride skateboard painting' during the 2011 Venice Biennale.

Meanwhile, he was riding to the top of his sport with unassailable talent and unaffected style. Skateboarder Patrick O'Dell once said, "He looks like he was just made to skate." Olson racked up sponsors that have included Supreme, whose Los Angeles outpost was a home-base during his formative years, Girl Skateboards, the heavyweight company co-founded by Spike Jonze, Nike SB, Vans, Quiksilver, Spitfire and Independent Truck Company. His comings and goings have been of

particular interest to the skate community not only because of his unconventional sensibility, but because he is skateboarding's original legacy, its first and only second-generation pro. He has been characterised as a 'golden child' and a 'handsome skateboarding socialite.' But Olson is up to something bigger that is yet to be determined.

Over the last year, Olson left his longtime riding team at Girl to join 3D Skateboards, a new venture from his friend and fellow Girl expatriate Brian Anderson, which he abruptly exited before its launch. He then announced an unnamed, work-in-progress brand of his own and teased it for months with a phone number that connected to a cryptic recording by an automated female voice that said, "Hi. You've reached Bianca Chandon. Leave a message." Chandon is pronounced like the champagne. Thrasher magazine referred to it as 'Alex Olson's new mysterious company.'

"I knew for sure that no one would have Bianca for a name," Olson says, on a break from digitising vinyl at the dining room table of the correctly distressed mid-century modern house in Laurel Canyon that has been his Los Angeles address for the past year. The shoulder-length hair that Mario Sorrenti photographed for *Vogue Hommes International* has been cut since Olson dyed it red for an impressive Axl Rose Halloween costume. (It is worth seeking out the morning-after photo he posted on Instagram.) He wears a Supreme T-shirt that reads '2005 World Famous Champions' that reminds him of Malcolm McLaren. He is welcoming and funny and excited to talk about his ideas. It seems too good to be true when he reveals that Bianca Chandon is the fancy lady name for his new skatewear enterprise, particularly as he once tricked his social media following into believing that he received Chanel and Céline team edition luxury [grip tape] griptape. "I always liked Bianca. It always sounded exotic," Olson explains, citing Bianca Jagger, Studio 54 and a girl he liked named Bianca. Chandon is his middle name. "I've always wanted to use it. It's French. It's elegant. It sounds high fashion," he says. "It sounds like everything that I like. It's perfect." He enjoys the gender inversion of selling a brand with a stylish woman's name to male skateboarders.

Olson has a keen sense of divergent beauty and contrary aesthetics that has been playing

out for years. Instagram has been a favourable outlet for his busy brain, acting as a sort of brand book that includes voguing; skateboarding; skateboarding and voguing; disco reference; a spot-on edit of archival fashion runway footage set to a chopped and screwed remix of Lady Gaga's *Alejandro*; graphic art for his Know-Wave radio sets designed to look like fashion magazine covers (with a six-eyed Claudia Schiffer, for example); and photos of the model Catherine McNeil and the skater Dylan Rieder wearing Olson's 'Lover' pocket tee. William Strobeck, a filmmaker known for skate videos who directed Olson, Chloë Sevigny, Natasha Lyonne and Gang Gang Dance frontwoman Lizzie Bougatsos in the 2012 short *My Lovely Mess*, is a frequent collaborator. Their shared references include Tom of Finland.

"Tom of Finland is awesome," confirms Olson, who once went shirtless in a black leather jacket and black leather cap for Strobeck. "It's like, 'give me the leather daddy hat, let's fuck around.' Because that shit's kind of taboo but kind of funny because it's overtly over the top which makes it interesting. No one fucks with this." Strobeck also directed a 14-second video of Olson voguing to David Bowie and Pat Metheny Group's *This is Not America*. "That's just some Paris is Burning shit," Olson says excitedly. In the clip, he wears a Supreme logo tee and a set of 'galaxy nail' self-adhesive fingernail appliques that look like outer space. Olson wants to design Bianca Chandon brand nails. "And sell them to men and not women," he explains. "But it's got to be stickers, you can't do paint. That's the divider right there. If you do paint it's too..." Too what? "Too feminine. Because it's stickers, it takes less time. It's not so thought out."

His label's primary inspiration is the book *Fire Island Pines: Polaroids 1975-1983* by the photographer Tom Bianchi, which was a gift from Brian Anderson. It idealises pre-AIDS life on Fire Island, a fashionable beach destination outside New York City. Among the brand's first offerings was a tee printed with 'Fire Island.'

Bianca Chandon—or whatever it will be called, as it is currently identified by the phone number 917-692-2706 and a three-legged triskelion logo—is a business, an art project, an investigation into the opportunities available to Olson after he eventually graduates from



pro riding, and a reaction to the skateboard establishment. "It's a part of me, obviously. It is me. I want to do stuff in skating, but not the way it's approached these days," Olson says. "I want to change it. There's something that needs to change."

He is outspoken about his admiration for Palace Skateboards, the uncommonly high profile London skatewear company. "I like how free it is," he explains. "It's just a clique of friends that skate and make stuff and people are into it and they have super-sick art direction. They film and do whatever they want and go to raves. It's more natural to a skater's life than a big company." Olson shares their affection for retro VHS aesthetics and dance music (Palace released an EP with Detroit house legend Theo Parrish in December), and appreciates their crossover with big fashion. They represent a deconstructed, independent-minded alternative that is not centred around superstar pros and the established career track of competitive video tricking. The idea of an original stateside brand based on the Palace model is not unappealing to Olson. "But they're more house and techno and I want to do more gay '70s," he says.

Olson's plays on sexuality are all the more interesting within a sport that has demonstrated surprising homophobia—one might think gay would be appropriately punk—and that currently has no out professional riders. Which is to say

nothing of skateboarding's treatment of disco. "It comes full circle from my dad being super-open with me. Coming from an upbringing where he was so, 'Be yourself,' because he's so himself, to the point where it's too much," Olson says. "It's like, okay, I get that. That's what gay culture really represents in my head. Be who you are. I always looked at these dudes like, 'Why can a gay guy be so super-flamboyant?' And then it dawned on me later in life. I was like, 'No dude, they don't fucking care.' They've kept this secret for so long and now they finally don't give a flying fuck. I would be the same way. These guys fucking rip. I love it."

But engagement of gay culture by those outside of gay-identified communities can be understandably complex, even by social allies like James Franco, who has been accused of appropriating queer radicalism, and others who have discovered that playing gay can reinforce their heterosexuality. "There are a lot of people that are kind of pissed, saying that I'm taking gay culture and exploiting it," Olson says. "I think I'm not exploiting it. It's just something I'm really into. The music I listen to, all of these clubs, all of the history that I'm into comes from there." He praises the fit of the clothes. He refers to The Godfather of Disco, the 2007 documentary about West End Records and Paradise Garage co-founder Mel Cheren, and Pump up the Volume, the 2001 series about the origins of house music

that he says changed everything for him. He cites the Sandpiper, the Fire Island club credited with the first recorded beat-matched mix. And he talks about learning of the impossible reality of gay life during the height of the AIDS crisis. "I was just so fucked up reading about it," Olson says. "They say people are only now getting comfortable talking about that time." He mentions Dallas Buyers Club.

And yet, it makes sense that a retro-gay aesthetic would begin to appeal to a larger population at this relatively advanced moment of social acceptance, even as the sensibility becomes overly familiar to its immediate audience after being well-popularised over the last 15 years. In fact, it's already behind glass. Olson posted an Instagram photo of the Queer Zines exhibition at Printed Matter's L.A. Art Book Fair at the Museum of Contemporary Art earlier this year.

"But a lot of it also comes from reading Prince's biography," he adds. "They talk about how he was so big in the '80s because he played with that - no one would know if he was gay or straight and he would wear high heels and then have super hot chicks with him. It just seemed so crazy at the time. I love the idea of that." I mention Vincent Gallo modelling women's Balenciaga on a 2006 cover of Purple Fashion Magazine. "Yeah, put me in women's Balenciaga. I'll fucking fuck with it," he says. *MAN*

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Red 'LOVER' hoodie by BIANCA CHANDON. Jeans model's own.

Opposite: Denim Kung Fu jacket by SUPREME.

Lighting Technician SETH GOLDFARB
Digital Technician RAFAEL RIOS
Production LINDSEY STEINBERG
and JULIA REIS