Gang, squad, army – whatever you want to call them, cliques are in fashion like never before. But where some designers fill their VIP booths in the club with top models and hot bodyguards, others choose a far more personal approach. When, on his 10th anniversary as artistic director at Dior Homme this year, the elusive Kris Van Assche started using the uncharacteristic hashtag #kvasquad on his Instagram, he revealed an eclectic group of ambassadors very different from the Taylor Swift-y girl squads adopted by fashion in recent years.

Instagram: @diorhomme
dior.com
All clothing by Dior Homme winter 17
Villa Eugénie is the production company behind Dior Homme’s impressive shows and Etienne Russo is the master showman at its helm. And in that capacity, he’s one of Van Assche’s closest and most trusted collaborators. The fellow Belgians knew each other years before they started working together in 2009, and few knew the ins and outs of the designer’s mind quite like Russo. “Kris is a composed person, open-minded, precise and focused,” he says. “On a more personal level, while he’s discreet and private, he is also warm, generous and caring.”

With seasonal clients such as Chanel, Hermès and Lanvin on his roster, Russo has become a kind of tailor to the designers on an epic scale, as much a listener as he is an executor of their dreams and ideas. “Every show is a new, exciting challenge,” he says of his Dior Homme experiences, which have included symphonies, orchestras, and streetwear collections. “We don’t want to do things at the last minute surprises,” Russo says. “I can see in his eyes straight after the show when he is truly happy and that, for me, is one of the best rewards.”

Over the years, Van Assche’s Dior Homme shows have taken on a decided upbeat tempo, rooted in the designer’s reappropriation of the tailoring he loves. Next to Sanchez, who’ll provide a fitting new wave soundtrack, it is Russo’s task to frame Van Assche’s meeting between formality and sweatshirt in an atmosphere that reflects both poles. Case in point: the set he built inside the Grand Palais for the SS16 show, the floor covered romantically in grass while shiny, black strips of film hung menacingly from the ceiling by the million.

This producer, of course, has his share of experience in the 1980s nightlife. Van Assche is his Dior Homme memories, and the star of his SS17 campaign. “I think we have a similar aesthetic for our work. We want our work to push boundaries and be thought-provoking in order to provide an alternative,” Malek says. “I try to incorporate myself into projects that are edgy and current and have something to say, that are socially and culturally relevant. The same can be said for Dior Homme’s designs.”

Malek first met Van Assche at one of his shows in Paris. “I liked his style and I think he may have seen something in mine.” Like all the best encounters, it was a friendship forged at fashion week and a collaboration that had to happen. “Rami is of course the lead in Mr Robot, which I loved,” Van Assche says. “But he’s also the best-educated and sweetest star I know. There is definitely a link between him and his persona in Mr Robot – it’s funny, it’s weird.”

Malek describes his profession as “sometimes the puppeteer, sometimes the puppet.” As such, Van Assche may be more astute in his observation than he knows. “Kris is a composed person, an energy and anarchy in his work. Kris gets me and knows that’s the look I’m going for. He creates elevated streetwear that I can live in.”

Raised in Los Angeles to Egyptian parents, Hollywood was in Malek’s genes from birth. He did musical theatre at school with the likes of Kirsten Dunst, but wowed himself off chateau in favour of a fine-arts degree, something that undoubtedly added to dinner conversation with the artful Van Assche. “Just having dinner with him is memorable. He’s so present and in the moment,” Malek says. “He’s as interested in everyone else’s work as he is in his own.”

Malek earned his first screen credits in 2004 and has had a steady career, with roles in titles such as 24, Larry Crowne and The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2 leading to his dashing breakthrough in Mr Robot in 2015. “I love the fact that he brings his mum to dinner,” Van Assche says. “Because everybody’s always like, ‘Oh fuck, there’s a Mrs Malek?’ But then it’s just his mum.”