

EMBRACE THE

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OMENT

Harris Reed's flamboyant designs are a hit with everyone from Harry Styles to Gucci's Alessandro Michele. Harriet Quick meets the toast of fashionable London, whose business sense is as acute as his style is outrageous

Photographs by Rory PAYNE Styling by Tona STELL





'My parents taught me a sense of adventure, risk-taking and how to hustle'

PREVIOUS PAGE Harris Reed wears duchess satin blouse, matching shirt, and trousers, Harris Reed. Hat, Harris Reed x Vivienne Lake. ABOVE Jersey tank, £110, Harris Reed (matchesfashion.com). OPPOSITE Crêpe blazer, £275, and matching trousers, £215, both Harris Reed (matchesfashion.com). Feather headpiece, Harris Reed x Vivienne Lake. Prices on request unless otherwise stated (harrisreed.com). Hair: Terri Capon at Stella Creative Artists, using Oribe. Make-up: Jenny Coombs at The Wall Group, using Mac Cosmetics

'When I started my collection and termed it fluid, people would ask me what fluid meant,' says Harris Reed. 'My answer is that it's a spectrum, it's moving, it is fluidity in life – the ability to go back and forth and not be set in stone. It is having the right and freedom to experience how you are in that moment.' The Anglo-American designer, who has waist-length marmalade-coloured hair, a 6ft 4in frame and an ethereal demeanour, would make any Pre-Raphaelite painter swoon. At 25, Reed is also a modern-day pin-up for diversity, creating flamboyant fashion for anyone with the figure and pizzazz to wear it, regardless of gender.

In the two brief pandemic-obiterated years since he left Central Saint Martins in 2020, Reed has been catapulted into the limelight. He dressed Harry Styles for the cover of American *Vogue* in a ruffled gown and tuxedo jacket. Iman wore his giant golden headpiece and hooped gown (800 hours in the making, with fabrics by Dolce & Gabbana) for last year's Met Gala in New York. It was her first red-carpet appearance since her husband, David Bowie, died, and the gown transformed the 66-year-old Somali-born supermodel into a radiant sun goddess.

A host of singers including Adele and Sam Smith have worn Reed's custom-made sheer pussy-bow blouses and tailored bell-bottoms. Smith returned the favour by performing at Reed's London Fashion Week show in February. 'That meant the world to me,' recalls Reed. 'When the clothes are so big, I rely on musical talent to bring the collection to life.'

That recent show helped to gel the 'fluid' strands of the Harris Reed brand. The set, decorated with cut-outs of furling clouds by the illustrator Lukas Palumbo, revealed a host of models of indeterminate gender wearing Reed's elegant siren gowns. They gently swayed to Smith's rendition of Des'ree's *Kissing You*. The grandiloquent silhouettes, lustrous velvets, sequins, and airy volumes recalled the high glamour of the fashion designer Thierry Mugler in the late 1980s. 'I'm finding my version of a salon show, with a performance creating an atmosphere,' explains Reed.

A week later, on the day we meet, Reed is sitting by the open fire at the Standard Hotel in London's Kings Cross, a picture of serenity in a white blouse, honey-brown suede flares, and platforms made by the London shoemaker Roker. On his wrist is a Cartier Tank watch. 'So classy,' he says. The combination of youthful looks and sophistication is captivating. One could imagine Reed as a Shakespearean player in *As You Like It*, or wafting through a David Lynch film.

Reed is one of the few fashion designers – alongside Oliver Rousteing, Tom Ford and Marc Jacobs – who enjoy performing for the camera. He knows a whole litany of supermodel poses, from vogueing stances to the angelic and innocent. He has walked in a Gucci show, been the face of its 2019 fragrance *Mémoire d'une Odeur*, and collaborated on a line of make-up for Mac. These commercial gigs provide an injection of cash that helps fund his nascent clothing brand: one almighty boost for an emerging designer still finding his feet. It helps that hobnobbing with random – even famous – strangers doesn't faze him. At the Met Gala he found himself seated with Iman, and the media tycoons Rupert Murdoch and Michael Bloomberg. 'It was the most surreal thing – definitely a no-elbows-on-the-table moment,' Reed says, laughing.

His career is elastic – part model, part designer.



'I grew up in LA, where every waiter is also an actor, and every start-up tech entrepreneur is also a personal trainer,' he explains. His parents are the Oscar-winning British documentary producer Nick Reed and a Mexican-Swedish former model, Lynette Reed. After his parents divorced, the young Harris and his sister, Isabelle, who is currently studying at Arizona State University, were continually on the move – from Arizona and Seattle to Oregon – propelled by their mother's wanderlust. Reed always had an eye for style and a craving for beauty, he says, and dived into both fashion media and thrift-store shopping. His mother, who is now an artist and the owner of a candle company, has been married five times and currently lives with her fiancé in Italy. 'I think she becomes ever more beautiful as she grows older,' Reed says. 'She's successful, happy – and her studio is bigger than mine.'

Harris says he knew he was gay aged around nine – 'I came out before I can remember' – and, having flirted with changing his pronouns to they/them is back as a he. For the time being, he has rejected the modishness of playing with how he describes his gender: 'I am very visible on Instagram, and as they/them I had so many job offers that were to do with marketing and the need to tick a box. I looked at my super-skinny self in my

about £10,000 each, with actor Emma Watson wearing a chiffon backless design to attend the Earthshot Prize in October in the company of Prince William and David Attenborough. For his new collection Reed worked with 100-year-old upholstery fabric from the Italian weaver Villa Bussandri.

Italy may well be where his future lies. Reed has already struck up a relationship with Etro, a bohemian family-run fashion house known for its paisley fabrics, based in Milan. 'When we reached out to fashion houses for deadstock, we contacted Etro, and [creative director] Veronica Etro and her brother wanted to meet and talk. They suggested we use Etro's atelier, resources, and fabric from the archives to make a capsule with my designs and patterns,' says Reed. The upshot was a line of flouncy blouses that are sold at Etro and at Matchesfashion – the online retailer is one of Reed's early champions. 'Twisting an Italian DNA is exciting to me,' says Reed. Veronica Etro was intrigued and charmed by the designer's approach. 'From the very beginning, Etro has never really observed a boundary between men's and women's wear – we are known for kaftans, pyjamas, outsize jackets, shirts that are genderless – so it was a natural match,' she explains. 'I want to open the brand to different things. We went to the



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\$10,000 hair extensions in the Mac campaign and asked myself if I was not creating another impossible stereotype, as unreal as the Abercrombie & Fitch archetype or a Victoria's Secret model? I realised my career is about breaking boundaries.'

He has a thick skin as well as adaptability. 'My parents taught me a sense of adventure, risk-taking and how to hustle,' says Reed. But it was his arrival in London to study fashion at Central Saint Martins that opened his eyes to the capital's sense of style. 'I would go to college in full-face make-up, chest out, hair puffed up, wearing charity-shop finds, like a Hollywood showman declaring, "Amazing!"' The tutors would be like, "Mate, pipe down!" says Reed, laughing at his own braggadocio.

While at CSM, Reed approached Gucci's creative director, Alessandro Michele, for an internship. Michele, who has turned the brand on its head with his retro cocktail of idiosyncratic beauties, had already clocked Reed on Instagram and invited him to join his tribe of 'weirdos'. For eight months at the Gucci design studio in Rome, Reed thrived in celebrity and private-order atelier.

'I found my campest version of me in Rome wearing marabou, brocades and pieces from vintage stores mixed with Gucci samples,' remembers Reed. 'Part of it was Roman culture – I would wake up to see elegant women at 6am at the butcher's in their best heels, jewels and furs, nuns in habits, and escorts in latex – it was a complete melting pot and I felt so inspired. My boss would say, "I don't know what you do exactly, but damn, do you look amazing!"'

After he graduated, his first catwalk show, in September 2021, titled Found, was an ingenious DIY remake of wedding dresses that Reed had bought at an Oxfam shop in Richmond. Upcycling precious vintage fabrics – including 'deadstock', or offcuts – is a pillar of his brand. He sold three gowns, priced at

archive and the mills outside Milan to find fabrics for Harris to upcycle. And it just flowed.'

Veronica is keenly aware of generational shifts in outlook. 'I have two boys, aged 17 and 13. They ask themselves questions that maybe we did not ask ourselves at that age. This generation is open to more things – it is not just black and white. It is about individuality and personality, and whoever you are it is OK. After all, the power of fashion is allowing people to express themselves.'

Remarkably for an emerging designer (there are just two people on the Harris Reed payroll), his business is turning a profit with sales from demi-couture designs and collaborations with jewellery brand Missoma, for which he designed snake-motif diamond-and-pearl pieces made of upcycled gold, as well as Etro.

Reed deftly couples design with memorable media appearances. This month he graces the cover of *Harper's Bazaar* – topless in a skinny-trousers-ballgown-skirt hybrid, posing with his mile-long legs on the steps of the V&A. The museum is spotlighting Reed's work in its current costume exhibition, Fashioning Masculinities. 'Comment all the throwing-up emojis that you want but CHANGE is here to stay,' reads his Instagram caption for the cover shot. No stranger to hate messages, Reed considers it his 'duty' to break the mould.

At the same time, he's smart enough to heed friendly advice from older Saint Martins graduates including the designers Giles Deacon and Christopher Kane. Having moved from Seven Sisters Road in Haringey to Notting Hill, life with his Chilean boyfriend Eitan Senerman, currently studying at Central Saint Martins, is now more tranquil.

'I'm no Lady Gaga,' he says. 'But here is Harris Reed – the performer, the person, the designer, the brand. I like wearing my creations and I'm comfortable in my skin.' ●



FROM TOP With Iman, wearing Harris Reed at the Met Gala in September. Harry Styles rocks the look in Manila, 2018. Emma Watson in an upcycled wedding dress at the 2021 Earthshot Prize in London