

Q&A WITH STUART WALFORD



Photo by @LizSunshine

Stuart Walford is an Australian stylist and creative consultant with over 15 years' experience across fashion festivals, commercial advertising, runway and creative production. A fixture in Melbourne's fashion scene, he's known for blending editorial style with real-world impact, working with some of Australia's coolest designers and brands.

HOW DID YOU BECOME A STYLIST?

I studied a Diploma of Visual Merchandising when I was 18 and during this period I interned and assisted lots of stylists during fashion runway events, advertising campaigns, TV commercials and so forth. Once I felt confident and had enough of an understanding of the industry I decided to try my hand at it solo and I've never looked back.

WHY DO YOU LOVE FASHION?

What I love most about Fashion is the transformative power of dressing up. I know it sounds cliché but clothing really allows us to embody other characters, it allows us to feel strong and confident and expose parts of our personality that we might not always wish to express with words. Fashion allows us to show up to the world and put our best foot forward and it's a personal relationship that's always evolving.

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WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO DISCOVER YOUR OWN UNIQUE STYLE?

For me, unlocking personal style allows me to feel my most confident as I know I am always presenting myself in my most authentic form. Personal style is also an incredibly fun and exciting way to experiment and try new things especially when it comes to fashion and accessories. It feels good to walk to the beat of your own drum, and not feel like you are a replica of other people.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DRESS WITH NO RULES?

I think as a society there are already so many restrictions and we are constantly feeling as though we must conform to the status quo but when it comes to our own wardrobes and personal style there really is no standard or set of rules we must abide by. It is one of the most exciting opportunities that I see in Fashion, that one singular item could be interpreted and styled by multiple people in a different way each time. To approach fashion and style with an open mind and a willingness to take risks really allows us to unlock so much potential and have a lot of joy in getting dressed up.

“ **ONE SINGULAR ITEM COULD BE INTERPRETED AND STYLED BY MULTIPLE PEOPLE IN A DIFFERENT WAY EACH TIME.** ”

HOW CAN FASHION/DRESSING WITH NO RULES HELP YOU DISCOVER OR EXPRESS YOURSELF?

Clothing can convey so many different messages. Sometimes, when I'm feeling more serious and introverted, I will gravitate towards black clothes, or darker shades. Then there are days when I am feeling really bold, expressive and joyful so my wardrobe is then quite colourful, perhaps with prints and loud graphics, or clothing with interesting shape or texture.

Sometimes I wish to display more of my feminine side and so I will opt for pieces in my wardrobe that may enhance or celebrate this side of my personality. It's the same for the moments I want to feel more masculine in my presentation.

I find the process of getting dressed each day quite fascinating as it's always in sync with my mood, inner thoughts and feelings. Unlocking your personal style and using it as a tool for expression can be really fun and liberating. You can say a lot without having to say anything at all.



Photo by @Paul_Hermes_

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP 4 TIPS FOR DRESSING WITHOUT RULES?

(1) Firstly, don't overthink your decisions. It's better to go in with an open mind. It's always useful to have a reference or some inspiration to help you have a starting point, from here you can expand and unlock new ideas along the way.

(2) When I'm styling, there is a lot of trial and error but it's important to just dive in and get started. Once I find a flow, I start to unlock new thoughts and ideas so it's always a good idea to just jump right in and start to play, try new things and see where the adventure takes you.

(3) Take it slow if you are stepping outside of your comfort zone, it's okay to start small. You can work your way up to bigger challenges over time. Perhaps you start with shoes, or small accessories.

(4) Lastly, always check in with how you are feeling. Personal style is exactly that - it's entirely about you. As long as you feel your best, you are on the right track!

WHAT ARE THE CORE ELEMENTS OF GENDERLESS FASHION? I.E. ANDROGYNOUS SILHOUETTES/ UNISEX ACCESSORIES

I don't really view fashion as being gendered overall as I really celebrate wearing whatever makes you feel most confident, regardless what the label states.

I identify as male but am often purchasing items from womenswear collections because I love the fit better and I find women's clothes come in a better colour range. I find traditional menswear unsatisfying a lot of the time so I always gravitate to womenswear.

Dressing in this way could be seen as androgynous as I am celebrating both my femme and masc personalities within the same outfit. On the other hand, if you want to shop more genderless, I'd recommend starting with some ambiguous clothing items such as cargo pants, oversized suiting, unfitted shirting, boxy t shirts, denim, hoodies and sweatshirts, sneakers and so on. These items, if purchased in neutral shades, could really appeal to anyone regardless of your pronouns.

“ I REALLY CELEBRATE WEARING WHATEVER MAKES YOU FEEL MOST CONFIDENT, REGARDLESS WHAT THE LABEL STATES. ”

WHAT'S A SMALL STEP SOMEONE CAN TAKE TO DISCOVER THEIR OWN STYLE WITHOUT RULES? (ACCESSORIES, PINS ETC)

I'd start off by collecting references online, or off social media of people you admire with great style. I use Pinterest to keep track of different ideas for projects or clients, but this could be a great resource for categorising your personal style inspiration too.

Once you have collated a bunch of references that inspire you, look for the small details that consistently appear. Perhaps it's a style of shoe, or a silhouette such as a baggy oversized fit, or the way clothes are layered that is drawing you in. Take these style cues, and start to experiment on yourself each day when you are getting dressed.

After a while, you will start to know what works for you and what doesn't, and you will no doubt have built more confidence around dressing and harnessing your personal style along the way. Overtime, you can amplify the choices and expand in bigger ways. Remember there is no rush, it's your journey so take it at your own pace and enjoy the process.

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WHAT ARE YOUR TOP 3 SHOPPING TIPS FOR GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE?

Shopping can be overwhelming so firstly I'd encourage you to shop with an intention. What I mean by this is simply having a plan or a light framework in mind for what pieces you are specifically going shopping for. I get easily distracted when I'm shopping so I find it really helpful to have a list so I can keep on track, focus on the task and not impulse buy.

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Look at all the collections if shopping in a store. Don't feel limited to browsing just one collection. I find a lot of items in womenswear departments which I love incorporating into my wardrobe and mixing with my menswear items.

If you love something, always try it on. Items can look different hanging on a hanger vs on your body. If you would prefer to try items on at home where you might feel more confident, a lot of stores have great return policies for shopping online so I recommend buying a few options and doing a try on at home to see how the pieces work and fit within your existing wardrobe. If you don't like something, usually the return process is seamless and often free.