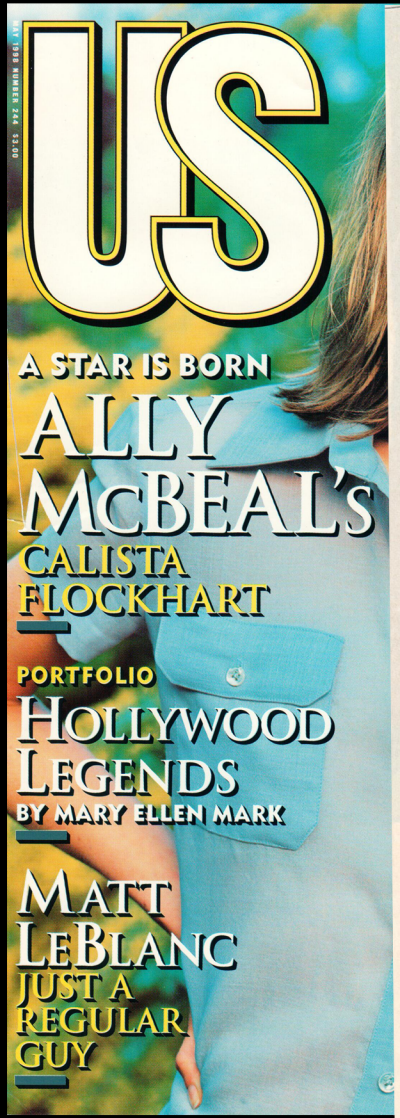

"I HAVE THE BEST JOB. I GET TO DRESS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN IN THE BEST DESIGNER CLOTHES." » *Phillip Bloch*

BEHIND THE SCENES»
PHILLIP BLOCH

WHEN IT COMES TO THE OSCARS, PHILLIP Bloch helps celebrities make the most important decision next to whom to thank in their acceptance speech: what to wear. This 37-year-old stylist to the stars is responsible for many memorable contributions to awards shows past: Jada Pinkett's stunning Halston dress and velvet cape at this year's Grammys, Sandra Bullock's Dior at the most recent Golden Globes, Jim Carrey's infamous fig leaf at last year's VH1 Fashion Awards and the tiara worn by Salma Hayek at the '97 Oscars. As Bloch celebrates the release of his first book, *Elements of Style,* and prepares to run himself ragged for the big night, he elaborates on Oscar's dress code.

What will celebrities wear to this year's Oscars ceremony?

A lot of Dior, Galliano and Armani, and special estate jewelry with a vintage feel. At the Emmys, there were a lot of feathers, because that was the hot trend; but we didn't see any at the Golden Globes.

Why is fashion so important to the Oscars?

It's creating pop culture and pop history. These dresses are part of people's lives. We chronicle our times by these things. You say, who won this or who won that, but you remember Uma Thurman wearing that lilac dress with the chiffon by Prada and everyone goes, "Oh, yeah!"

What goes into choosing the right outfit?

There's a lot of homework in advance. It's knowing what your clients like and what designers have to offer. I'm fortunate because I work with a lot of the same people. I know their body type and what's going to look good on them. I also know what they did the last time, so I can do something different.

How do you encourage your clients to dress?

I always encourage my clients to push the envelope, but only in their personal style. It should always be them. It's not about the wrong person wearing the wrong designer.

Is that how major fashion mistakes happen?

There were times where people were going to wear something and I had to say, "If you go with that, don't tell anybody I helped." But some people just like to dress funny. They know it doesn't look perfect, and they like it. That's what's fun for them. I try to avoid those people.

Are there times when it's the stylist's fault?

Some people are meant to do their job because it's their destiny. Others are doing it because they're trying to be cool and hip. It's like, "I shop. I could be in fashion." That's how you get someone shoved into a dress that's wrong. It's sad, in a way. When there's a celebrity who can't walk up the stairs because her dress is too tight, you go, "Hello!"

Are mistakes ever acceptable?

When someone gets up and their underwear is too tight and showing through their dress, that's not a major faux pas anymore.

That's what style is these days. All the designers do the panties showing. You just gotta have the right ones.

How can a fashion mistake come back to haunt a celebrity?

Think about Nicole Kidman and that Prada dress [at the '96 Oscars]. She sort of had to fight back from that. But that's being adventurous. People really didn't like the dress, but the problem is people often don't understand sophisticated fashion. People who are fashion critics — who are they? Have they gone to FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology] for 10 years? No! Nicole has that problem, because she'll wear Prada, which is ahead of its time. If somebody wore that dress now, they'd go, "That's beautiful."

How do you avoid fashion disasters?

I try to keep my clients looking good from the beginning. There's no sense backtracking. You've always got to keep going forward and looking great. I feel like, "Would Grace Kelly or Cary Grant wear this today?" Those are the models. And I always vote yes.

Do you ever go to the Oscars to watch your creations in action?

Sometimes I go to the ceremonies. I'm always like a proud papa. When Salma [Hayek] was there in her tiara, I almost cried. And I have the best job in the world. I get to see the most beautiful women naked, and I get to dress them in the best designer clothes. It's a mixed blessing.

Do stars enjoy dressing to the nines?

Celebrities put so much into it because they're trying to please their fans. A lot of them are happier in their sweat pants and a T-shirt. The Dior gown is great and fun, but at the end of the day, they can't wait to take it off, give back the borrowed jewelry and get into sweats. That's what I love about my clients. At the end of the day, they're just real people, too.

Jason Kaufman

Photograph by ALISON DYER

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