



Ford, Tom (b. 1961)

by Shaun Cole

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Fashion designer Tom Ford was creative director at both Gucci and Yves Saint Laurent. He has subsequently become a film director.

Ford was born August 27, 1961 in Austin, Texas, to real estate agents Tom Ford and Shirley Burton. He spent his early life in the suburbs of Houston, Texas. His family relocated to Santa Fe, New Mexico, when he was 11.

Ford has attributed his "good taste" to his mother, whom he has described as a flamboyant "Southern belle."

At age 16, Ford enrolled at Bard College at Simon's Rock, New York, but quickly dropped out. He then spent a year studying art history at New York University.

Ford dropped out of NYU to pursue a career acting in television commercials; at one time, he was in 12 national advertising campaigns simultaneously.

Ford's career in fashion began when he enrolled at the Parsons School of Design in New York, where he studied interior design as well as fashion. Positions at Cathy Hardwick and Perry Ellis followed.

Ford also studied interior architecture at the New School. He also studied fashion at the New School, but received his degree in architecture.

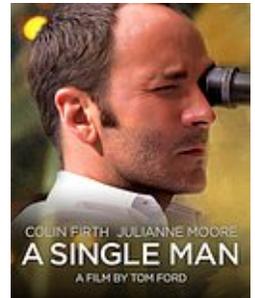
In 1990 Ford joined Gucci and, despite Maurizio Gucci's desire to fire Ford because he felt he was too trendy, by 1994 he had been promoted to creative director. His style and appreciation of luxury are such that his designs became instant classics.

Until his resignation in April 2004, Ford was responsible for the design of all product lines at Gucci, from clothing to perfumes, and for the company's corporate image advertising campaigns and store designs. In this role he oversaw a complete turnaround at Gucci, updating its styles and bringing it once more into the forefront of fashion.

Ford injected what he believed was a much needed sexualized glamour into Gucci's clothes. This new sexuality was evident in his seminal 1995 Studio 54 collection, his first as creative director.

In January 2000 after Gucci Group NV won a battle with LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) to buy the Yves Saint Laurent label, Ford became designer and creative director for Couture and Yves Saint Laurent Perfumes and designer for the YSL Rive Gauche label.

Ford's menswear collections for Gucci combined crotch-hugging jeans with velvet jackets, while for YSL Rive Gauche he redefined suave for a new generation by playing with Saint Laurent's "Le Smoking," the tuxedo Saint Laurent designed for women in 1965.



Tom Ford in a promotional photograph for *A Single Man* (2009), a film based on a novel by Christopher Isherwood. Ford directed the film. Image courtesy asingleman-movie.com.

Ford has both tapped into and assisted the fundamental long-term change in men's attitude towards their own appearance. Indeed, many fashion journalists have heralded him as the savior of men's fashion

Interviewed for *Loaded Fashion* in 2001, Ford told Adrian Clark, "Menswear is moving much faster than it has ever before. Men are finally accepting the role of sexual attraction and are more comfortable with it. It isn't just a gay thing to enjoy fashion any more. In the eighteenth century men would wear little red shoes and paint beauty spots on their face--and they were straight! Men will quite openly check their butt in the mirror in public now to see how a pair of trousers fit. I am so tired of that belief that if you like fashion you must be a fag."

Ford has won numerous awards within the fashion industry as well as a Commitment to Life award from AIDS Project Los Angeles for Gucci's charitable work in support of people with HIV and AIDS.

When Ford left Gucci in 2004, he announced his intention to devote his talents to directing films.

[In 2005, Ford announced the formation of a film production company, Fade to Black. His debut as a film director (and producer and screenwriter) was his adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's iconic gay novel, *A Single Man*, which was released in 2009.

The film won a number of awards at film festivals before being released widely to critical acclaim for its exquisite attention to detail and its stunning cinematography. Colin Firth and Julianne Moore won plaudits for their accomplished acting in the film.

In an interview with Kevin Sessums in the *Advocate*, Ford provocatively declared that "I don't think of myself as gay. That doesn't mean that I'm not gay. I just don't define myself by my sexuality"; then added: "The gay aspect of *A Single Man* certainly wasn't what drew me to make a film of the Christopher Isherwood book. It was its human aspect, that unifying quality."

Perhaps in an effort to make his film seem less centered on the homosexual experience, Ford drastically played down the protagonist's anger and resentment at his marginalization as a homosexual, which is a striking feature of the novel, and he made him bisexual despite the fact that he is not depicted as such in the novel. Moreover, many gay viewers complained that the film of the landmark gay novel was marketed in such a way as to deemphasize its homosexual dimensions.

The film differs in many ways from the novel, and it lacks the book's spiritual profundity as well as its political prescience. Nevertheless, the film powerfully conveys the debilitating effects of grief and the abiding love of one man for another.

Ford's *A Single Man* is an auspicious debut for an aspiring filmmaker.

Ford and his partner Richard Buckley, who was Editor in Chief of *Vogue Homme International* from 1999 to 2005, have been together since 1986. They met when Ford was working at Cathy Hardwick and Buckley was fashion editor at *Womens World Daily*. Their relationship was profiled in *Out* in 2011, in which the two men wrote about how they met and how their relationship developed.

In September 2012, the couple welcomed a son, Alexander John Buckley Ford, who was born in Los Angeles.

Despite his being an openly gay man in a long-term relationship, Ford is often listed as an eligible bachelor and his good looks are frequently noted in women's lifestyle magazines. He typically dresses head to toe in black, a picture of understated stylishness.]

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About the Author

Shaun Cole is curator of Designs at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He is author of *"Don We Now Our Gay Apparel": Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* and has curated numerous exhibitions, including "Graphic Responses to AIDS" (1996), "Fashion on Paper" (1997), and "Dressing the Male" (1999), as well as two innovative "Days of Record" to document Tattooing (2000) and Black British Hairstyles and Nail Art (2001).