

Tim Burton's influence on fashion

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It is a paradox of fashion that the film director Tim Burton, a man who regularly lands on worst-dressed lists along with his partner and muse Helena Bonham Carter; a man often excoriated for his matted hair and onion-peel layers of clothes, is also one of the most aesthetically influential film directors currently working, at least as far as that self-same fashion industry is concerned.



An autumn/winter 2009 design from Rodarte and Edward Scissorhands by Tim Burton at MoMA

Indeed, says Kate Mulleavy, one half of the Rodarte design team, "I'm hard pressed to think of someone who works creatively and is not inspired by Tim Burton. Even if it's subconscious."

As to why, the answer is about to be apparent thanks to a Burton retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art that opens on Sunday. The show features only two films (Tim Burton and *The Lurid Beauty of Monsters*), focusing instead on the lesser-seen parts of Burton's process: the notebooks, including the drawings and paintings that begin the whole fantastical process that becomes his celluloid world, as well as a few new pieces created specifically for the exhibition (a 21ft tall, 8ft wide balloon man with a whole bunch of eyes, for example). Also on view is Burton's rarely seen adaptation of *Hansel and Gretel*, and works he made when he was still at school.

Altogether, the pieces describe a very specific world, where skin is white, hair is black, and lips are blood-red (except when they are darker, as if the blood has dried). It is a world as sweet as it is sinister, as funny and irreverent as it is baroque. It is a world dreamt up by an artist alienated by southern Californian suburban mundanity, who endlessly found refuge in his own eerie, beautiful imagination, where worlds and landscapes are populated by characters that communicate as much with their looks as with their words.

It is, in other words, a world that has also been the subject of many designers' fantasies: a world of aesthetic completeness.

"I was this teenage goth," says Kate Young, the celebrity stylist with the shocking white hair, for example, "and then I saw Beetlejuice, and it was like goth could be glamorous. It was one of the most inspiring things to happen to me when I was a kid."

Similarly, says Kate Mulleavy, Burton's character Lydia, played by Winona Ryder in *Edward Scissorhands*, "has been the most influential of anyone on [Rodarte's] style." She is there in the house's ethereal, romantic cobweb knits, and in the dramatic proportions as well. Proportion is everything to a designer, after all, and it is everything to Burton as well: giant heads on pin-thin bodies and great round faces and eyes populate all his films, and his drawings.

Meanwhile, the jewellery designer Waris Ahluwalia, who wears what he considers Burton-esque pave diamond tear drop brooches in his lapel, says "to me, the most beautiful thing is darkness – Paris-in-the-rain darkness – and that is Tim Burton." The pale skin and dark lips on the models in Chris Benz's Fall 2007 collection were also inspired completely by Burton's Wednesday Addams, aka Christina Ricci in *The Addams Family*, a film he watched and adored as a child. But it is Burton's ability to imagine complete tableaux that appeals to Grace Coddington, the legendary Vogue stylist, who could be a Burton heroine herself with her flaming red hair and love of a shroud-like dress. "He's magical and funny and he paints a fantasy that is very complete," Coddington says. "You really have to jump into his work with both feet."

The results can be seen in such disparate places as Marc Jacobs' runway (the sombre cocoons of his autumn 2006 collection were particularly *Sleepy Hollow*) and the October issue of *American Harper's Bazaar*, which featured a 10-page spread styled by Burton. Set among the crackly leaves and stark, bare branches that populate so many of his landscapes were elaborate, dramatic gowns and waistcoats by designers such as Oscar de la Renta, Nina Ricci, and Louis Vuitton, in Burton's hands rendered haunting and magical.

Thus, given that MoMA's exhibit will remain up until next April, just after Burton's next cinematic adventure, *Alice in Wonderland*, is released, there's a very good chance ghostly pallors and velvet suits will be on-trend for seasons to come. Invest now.

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