



In the midst of the press circuit for his critically acclaimed directorial debut for the MOTION PICTURE 'A SINGLE MAN', Tom Ford makes a whirlwind trip to toast his EPONYMOUS FLAGSHIP STORE located at the prestigious Fashion Avenue in The Dubai Mall. He talks to Unfair about FASHION, FILM AND FALLING FOR THE MIDDLE EAST.

By Laura Gatsos

Sitting in the press suite of one of Dubai's most luxurious hotels, designer Tom Ford is predictably immaculately groomed; dressed in one of his highly-coveted, personally designed suits, tailored to perfection. Given he is in town for less than 24 hours, the celebrated and sometimes controversial designer is surprisingly relaxed as he sips on Diet Coke and charmingly entertains a select group of journalists. In a testament to the importance of the region to his brand, Ford has made the trip from Los Angeles via London to personally launch the flagship Middle Eastern boutique for his menswear label Tom Ford in The Dubai Mall. While he has long been worshipped among celebrities, fashion industry insiders and women the world over - Ford now designs formal wear, ready-to-wear and accessories for men exclusively and has become their go-to designer of choice.

At the opening's private cocktail reception held in the Tom Ford boutique, one discerning Emirati commented that he felt as though he was in his London flat, surrounded by the wardrobe of his dreams. This is exactly the reaction that Ford had hoped for, for both his collection and boutique, designed with architect William Sofield. He tells me, "Previously, I have always worked for other companies and this is the first time that I have ever been able to walk through a store and love every product, every box, every label, and every chair. All of our Tom Ford stores are meant to feel as if old Hollywood invented a men's couture salon—very luxe and very chic—and the Dubai store is no exception."

Despite recessionary times, Dubai remains home to men who appreciate and understand luxury and are looking to expand their sartorial imagination with Western influences. Ford concurs, "I think that our Middle Eastern customer is extremely sophisticated, well-travelled and chic. They know



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exactly what they are looking for and are not willing to compromise on luxury or quality.” This is a good thing considering Ford’s suits can run upwards of \$10 000 USD; but owning a piece of Tom Ford means owning something that the designer himself would wear, and most likely does.

When asked if the staggering success of his label has to do with men simply beginning to show more interest in the way they look, he explains, “I actually think that men have always cared just as much as women about what they look like and that we are no more or less vain than our ancestors. We need beauty and it is part of our nature to adorn ourselves and to feel as though we are

individuals. Fashion and clothes help us to do this.”

Having designed exclusively for men for three years now, Ford admits that menswear is more challenging than women’s, as he is tasked with constantly reinventing while working within narrow parameters. Ford tells me that the design process usually begins by looking in his closet and contemplating what kind of suit he wants to wear or if he still wants to wear a suit at all.

It is clear that for Ford, creation, whether in the realm of fashion or film, is admittedly a means of self-expression. His directorial debut, *A Single Man*, stars two of Hollywood’s most glamorous stars, Julianne Moore and Colin Firth, with the storyline based on a man suffering an ugly depression—something that Ford can relate to. “Directing for me is a pure form of expression. It is the most artistic endeavour that I have ever attempted. There is no motive to my desire to make films other than my desire to express myself and hopefully have something meaningful to say about the human experience. I’m actually much more serious, romantic, and existential than people know; and, like everyone, I’ve struggled with feelings of isolation and the quest to find meaning in life.”

While Ford offers that directing the film was in part an exercise in personal discovery, his knowledge of his client’s needs on a global scale is absolute. His menswear label, is sold by sixty-four stockists worldwide, with Tom Ford boutiques in Kuwait and Qatar set to open this year. As is practice, Ford designs limited edition items inspired by the regions in which he sells. Stimulated by the Middle East, Ford created “Arabian Wood” a fragrance heavily laced with oud. He has also created a traditional men’s dish dash, sold in Dubai’s Villa Moda men’s store. Ford ponders, “All of our stores cater to an international clientele, yet each has certain products that are for the local customer. The sophisticated Middle Eastern man wants the very best in suiting, the finest accessories and clothing for all aspects of his life, and he wants it presented in a modern way that resonates with the new world that is fast emerging in the Middle East.”

As with most overachievers, Ford acknowledges his accomplishments but is of the mind that his work is never complete. When I ask him if there was a definitive point in time when he thought he’d ‘made it’ – say, when he was the creative director at Gucci and singlehandedly transformed their sales? - He replies, “I don’t think that one can ever say he’s ‘made it’.”

Lovers of fashion and film the world over, beg to differ. •

