



# Sketch & Release

Christian Siriano's Resort 2017  
Collection & masterful artistry are  
making spirits bright this season

WORDS BY VANESSA PASCALE

**W**hen it comes to fashion designer Christian Siriano's artistry — sketches, fashion designs, interior décor, way of life... there is a whole lot of color. As for his wardrobe, that's a different story. "Yeah, I wear black every day," says Christian, who is dressed in the hue from head to toe — from the glasses that highlight his light brown eyes to his t-shirt and pants, down to his shoes. "Well, that's just because I'm around clothes all day, so I kinda get sick of clothes, so that's probably why," laughs the Manhattan-based artist. Not a big "brand-obsesser" or even a shopper at that, he tends to stick with his standard jeans and a tee — or his requisite khaki pants.

EXCLUSIVE



Christian and I are seated at a table in his pristine New York City design studio. It's Election Day and everyone is on edge in Manhattan—actually, the entire country is on edge—but the energy within this dreamy space is light and warm. The sun-soaked studio is punctuated with Christian's refined taste—his name, in gold, hangs in the entryway above a chevron-patterned buffet dressed with a bust, books, vases, and a delicate purple orchid, while gallery walls of photos, rows of sleek black rolling racks, and headless white mannequins showcase his collections.

Creating beauty out of nothing comes naturally for the Maryland native, whose Resort 2017 Collection is a vision in pretty pastels. "I got to have a lot of fun with this collection. We played with a lot of texture and print. It was all inspired by Parisian pastries. We wanted it to feel sweet but kinda French... I think when it's gloomy out and Resort hits stores, people get excited," says the 31-year-old. The whimsical collection is available in department stores like Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's (and will remain there until their spring collection is released) and on ChristianSiriano.com and Farfetch.com, which boasts pieces personally curated by Christian. Queen Latifah looked absolutely regal at the Princess Grace Awards Gala in this collection's crystal beaded collar gown. "As the seasons have gone on, we've noticed that our Resort and Pre-Fall are actually quite bigger collections for us, so they become more and more important. But what's nice is that they don't have to necessarily be in a show. Sometimes we just get to make great clothes that I just love and want to put in a collection."

Since winning *Project Runway's* (season 4, 2008) grand prize of \$100,000 to start his own line, Christian has developed an eponymous collection that has captured the attention of myriad women, especially Tinseltown's brightest stars. *Mad Men's* Christina Hendricks, *Veep's* Anna Chlumsky, and *American Horror Story's* Angela Bassett are just a few actresses from his lengthy client list who have walked the red carpet in his fashion-forward creations. His elegant designs were made for the spotlight and recently appeared on Broadway's stage last month on our October cover girl Kristin Chenoweth during her two-week concert, *My Love Letter to Broadway*. "Kristin's show was really, really fun. That's so different from any other Broadway actress I've ever done. They're not costumes—things a normal Broadway actress would wear," he says about her custom-made ensembles that were more couture than costume.





*“Maura Tierney wore this to the Emmy’s. She was nominated for Best Supporting Actress (The Affair), and that was really nice.”*





### WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS A COMMON MISCONCEPTION?

"I definitely think that because I'm young, people don't always support the way they could—that could be retailers, customers... With a young designer, you don't always take the risk with them because it's new. If you've been shopping Oscar de la Renta for twenty years, you might not change your mind. Like, you go to your places and you buy things 'cause you've been doing that for so long. But that's just a cultural thing that our world needs to think about. I think that young designers definitely have a really interesting take on what's happening in the industry because we're living it before anybody, in a way. We grew up with a social media-kinda world."

Photo Credit Sara Kerens

And the fabulous white petal party dress on the mannequin at the front of his showroom was worn by Emma Robert's *Scream Queen* character Chanel Oberlin. "Her character is this fashion It Girl. With Emma, she just pulls from the collections, wears them, then sends it back. We've done things where we've loaned for movies and stuff and we don't have to do much. We just send it out and hope it works. And if it does, great!" He speaks expressively and uses his hands as he talks. A number of It Girls adore Christian's clothing, just scroll through his Instagram photos and you'll find Ariana Grande in a custom metallic iridescent coat, Lily Collins wearing his marble flounce dress, and Ashley Graham in a sexy custom sequin slip dress.

Christian is very vocal about dressing all types of women. "We try to celebrate everyone. I think that that helps," noting what lures in his clientele. "We kinda throw it in your face that we will support everyone, and then that brings everybody around—that brings retailers, that brings customers, that brings fans, that brings everything," he says with a smile. Clients can expect a different look each season. "They're always a little bit forward," he says of his collections. "But I also think a lot of the clothes are classic... You can be a really tiny It Girl like Emma Roberts and you can be someone like Queen Latifah and wear these clothes. That's really special." As an advocate for dressing women of all shapes and sizes and not just those who fit into sample sizes, this year, Christian teamed up with plus-size clothing store Lane Bryant on a spring and fall collection. "I love working with them. The clothes are really great, super chic, and we sold out of almost every item, which is awesome."

Naturally, his artistic vision transcends his work. Home life is unsurprisingly as bright and picture-perfect as his creations. Christian and his musician husband Brad Walsh often escape from Manhattan to their Connecticut home on the weekends. The architectural marvel, which Christian decorated himself and was featured in *ELLE Décor*, boasts a mélange of patterns, colors, prints, art (mostly curated by Brad), and vintage furniture expertly woven together to present a chic, cohesive look. "I'm very into all these crazy colors. But it's a mix though. I do like things that are graphic," says Christian about his design style. "I like things that are monochromatic, grey tones, and black and white... We'll be working on a collection and

I'll be like, 'I wish I could recover everything in black and white stripe.' But I can't. But I want to." This hobby allows Christian to break from fashion and refocus his creative energies elsewhere. Fortunately, Brad shares Christian's affinity for antique/vintage shopping—which can and has easily turned into a day-long pastime.

Christian and Brad also share an appreciation for out-of-the-box Halloween costumes. This Halloween, Brad and Christian dressed up as a 70s hallucination. "It was *really* random," he says of the costume idea. "If you were on a really trippy drug in the 70s, that's what we would come to life as." The year before, they were Picasso paintings. And there was a time where all they did was dress up as Disney couples, for instance, Christian as *The Little Mermaid's* Ariel and Brad as Prince Eric. "I was like, I actually can't be Disney characters anymore 'cause it's getting weird." He smiles. "You *have* to look these costumes up. They're really scary. I posted one actually of my Ariel, which is really intense. I'm gorgeous though." He pulls up his Instagram page on his phone to show me. "That costume was actually amazing. One of the guys who worked here long ago made it for me. It was really fun. I had hip pads and I was really tall," he beams.

Both artists bring different creative strengths to the table—literally, during the holidays. "Obviously, I don't cook anything. Brad cooks everything... I make a beautiful tablespace. That's tradition." The couple has their traditions. "We watch the Puppy Bowl after Thanksgiving. We chill. We eat a ton of food and we decorate the tree. Brad is very into Christmas, so that's always fun." The plan is for them to spend Christmas with Christian's pregnant sister ("I really need it to be a girl," he adds) and her 2-year-old son.

"My only other tradition is that I try to send little mementos to every actress or musician that we dressed for the year—a little 'thank you' for having a great moment this year." What a picture-perfect, fairy-tale life you two have over there, I comment on their country home living, which he shares snippets of on Instagram. "Some days. On the weekends, I will say, if we go there it is to try to have a normal life, 'cause it's a getaway place. Business is so hard and some days are so horrible that you have to get away from it or you'll go crazy. I learned that a couple of years ago when I bought the house and it made my life so different."





*“I definitely like texture and I like things that become three-dimensional, whether it’s print or an embroidery or even just a fabric that has some type of dimension to it, I think that’s really important.”*





*The mindful designer does not use any real fur or leather in his collections...*

What's a day in the life of a sought-after fashion designer like? "Every day is pretty different. That's what's kinda hard about it, that you cannot plan. Obviously, you can plan if we have meetings and appointments, and things like that. You really can't plan who's gonna want a dress, who needs something custom... I could be asked, 'We need to send Beyoncé fifteen dresses and they all need to be custom-made.' It happened a couple of weeks ago. And you have to figure it out. But that's what makes it still fun. When I'm making a collection, I get to do whatever I want. I'm the boss. There are no rules here, except what I make. I like being the boss!" he says enthusiastically. Nights are spent sketching designs while watching TV (he likes Netflix's *The Crown*, *Scandal*, *American Horror Story* "cause I love all my girls on that!"). The next day, he brings the sketches to his studio and gets to work. "I'll give them to the design team or we have a bunch of pattern makers we work with and I'll be like, 'Let's make this!' But fabric is a big part of it. I definitely pick and choose fabrications before we make anything 'cause I think they're really important in a collection." His fanciful sketches (available for purchase on his website) can come to fruition in as quick as a day, while others may take weeks. "Sometimes the simplest, stupidest dress is the hardest, which is always interesting to me."

In addition to his clothing, Christian has bedding (sold in Bed Bath & Beyond) and vegan handbags (sold in Bloomingdales, Saks, and Lord & Taylor), "which is really an important thing I feel really proud of," says Christian about his vegan line. The mindful designer does not use any real fur or leather in his collections, which appealed to our favorite vegan and former cover girl Alicia Silverstone, who is a fan and good friend of Christian's. "Alicia's the best. I'm not vegan, but I'm definitely a little bit more cautious than maybe most, other fashion brands. She

really tries to get me to be vegan... I made sure at my wedding that we had vegan and gluten-free options for people. Alicia sat with us at our head table. I was like, 'Oh God, she has to have a lot of food options or she'll be so annoyed.' But then I had steak, chicken, and lobster for everyone else. That was important, 'cause my mom is *definitely* not vegan," he says with a laugh.

Over the years an impressive list of notable women have donned his label (standouts include Oprah, Michelle Obama, Gwyneth Paltrow —her dress became their top-selling dress that year), but there are still "a million" stars that Christian would love to dress, for no reason other than because he adores them. "That's usually how I pick," says the designer, who places actresses Cate Blanchett and Drew Barrymore at the top of his list. "But we've never sought after somebody like, 'I have to dress this person!' It has to be organic or it doesn't work... I always say actresses and musicians need us just as much as we need them. They need to look good and have a fashion moment just as much as we need to have that moment. We're designers that create from a flat piece of fabric and we create three-dimensional forms... We all support each other. It can drive me crazy if somebody wears something and they don't kind of promote it in their own way, like if actresses are on the red carpet and are like, 'I don't know what I'm wearing.' Well, you should know... because they're interested in what you're wearing. They're looking at your red dress. So it's an important thing for the people to think about, I think." ML

For more on Christian, visit <http://www.christiansiriano.com/> and keep up with him on Instagram: @CSiriano Twitter: @CSiriano, and Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/christiansiriano/>

