



fashionably late

Designs by **James R. Palmisano**
Photographer **Ryan Segedi**
Models **Michael Lorz & Vincent Cooper**

james r. palmisano takes inspiration from eras passed
to remind us of fashion's transformative nature

Text by **Lindsay Cooper**

Gender revolutions, racial tensions, and huge industrial transformations. These are the socio-economic trends that defined the 1920's. It was an era of liberation caused by increased wealth and social mobility as well as the realization of the goals of the social movements through legislature. And with a more empowered population, a new dress code was in order: feminine beading, boyish haircuts, luxurious fabrics, and general frivolity. And following the war and strict rationing, your great-grandparents deserved it.

Does any of this sound familiar: women marching for their rights, oppressed racial minorities finding their voices again, an adapting economy? If so, you likely grew up in the same climate as recent fashion design grad James R. Palmisano. Fixated on fashion's transformative abilities, he's been exploring how clothing can alter your perception of the wearer using 1920's sartorial trends.

Reading both historic and hyper contemporary, the Prince Charming Collection mixes traditional menswear elements from the period with delicate fabrics and beading. Palmisano marries elements from the 1920s gender revolution with the hedonistic nature of the flapper era in a much-needed reminder: frivolity, fashion, and the fight aren't mutually exclusive.

Can you explain what your relationship with fashion was like before becoming a designer?

I knew so little of fashion, there was no relationship; at least not an intentional one. It never occurred to me that fashion, as a means for individuality or as art, could be pursued. And certainly not that I could do the pursuing.

What about after?

For me, fashion existed as award shows' red carpets, Vogue editorials, and film costumes. Typical, probably, but these things brought me a lot of joy. They still inspire me. But now, clothes, perhaps differently than the fantasies of fashion, mean so much more. Creatively and individually, clothes are personal and reflect our real lives. Clothes convey and create the way I want to look and feel.

You actually studied fine arts for two years before switching over to fashion. What motivated the change?

I dabbled a bit. Art students are made to explore different mediums at the start. Before I decided to begin anew with fashion, I seriously wanted to do production design for film. Film gets me jazzed and is so fun. When I changed my mind - even though both film and fashion are super collaborative - I felt that with fashion I could learn a craft with which I could produce and control my own object. Garment making is a tactile, precise process that I really enjoy.

And do you see your education in fine arts informing your design choices at all?

I learned how to look at art, how to actively interact with visuals. Composition is really important.

Your Prince Charming collection mixes elements of men's and womenswear from the 1920's. What attracted you to that decade?

It's embellished: women look a bit boyish. There is movement and ease. I suppose it is the womenswear that I am always first attracted to. Anne Hollander, in *Sex and Suits*, describes the 1920s and 30s as a time when women dressed their own bodies with their own visions. And for the first time! Though in a different scheme than men, again borrowing from Ms. Hollander, women achieved modernity in clothes comparable to a man's suit. Both visually and thematically, I am inspired by that brief shift and tension.

And what inspired you to bring feminine touches into a menswear collection?

While designing, I referenced men's military attire and women's evening dress silhouettes, with the intention to combine them. Silhouette and embellishment came from both references, but, yes, the embellishment, exaggerated in contemporary menswear, is feminine.





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For men wearing your designs, how do you hope these feminine touches- this embrace of their feminine sides - will make them feel? And what about the masculine elements?

Gender neutral design; body specific fit. These are my two goals in designing. It is not necessarily my intention to satisfy a man's feminine side. Admittedly, I don't quite like that way of putting it. It is my hope to raise people up. If my feminine menswear does that for a man, fantastic. Or for a woman, fantastic. I'm simply trying to provide an option for others, and for myself. The masculine or feminine elements really are only a means to get someone to feel good and to be creative. And really, whether a look or garment is masculine or feminine, depends hugely on the wearer, how they present themselves and how they styles those pieces.

Considering today's social climate, it's easy to interpret this collection as a statement on gender. Could you explain the larger concept, what it stands for?

I play with gender, and will continue to, but more than that I want to celebrate design. It's a shame that menswear lacks color and embellishment. And at the same time, it is silly that womenswear lacks function like real pockets. I want to combine the merits of both menswear and womenswear to celebrate people's personalities.

As someone addressing gender through design, what kind of power do you think fashion has to make a difference? What can the fashion industry achieve?

More so than ever before, fashion's power comes from real people - real people who are diverse and beautiful and valuable. Fashion can raise them up.

