

# Breaking Bridal

*Designer Curtis Cassell  
of Queera Wang is  
rewriting wedding  
fashion rules.*

WRITTEN BY JAMIE VALENTINO

*“Are you going to wear a dress or a suit?” was one of the first questions I asked my friend—who is a lesbian—when she recently announced her engagement. She paused to consider this and remains unsure. Unfortunately, we never encountered a designer like Curtis Cassell to explain the wedding industry’s outdated nuances where suggestions are treated as law. Since creating his label Queera Wang, the queer activist fostered a space liberated from the artificial roles of “bride” and “groom.”*

“There are definitely traditions I want to stay away from and break,” Cassell says, more like a promise. “The way bridal stands right now is very binary and black-and-white. My parents asked me why I don’t just make the brand Curtis Cassell. But this project is bigger than me. Curtis Cassell wears Goodwill and works at a restaurant. Queera is the matriarch of the queer community and a fashion icon.”

Yet Cassell doesn’t rescind his femininity or masculinity but wields both like a sword and shield.

In a fashion landscape where gender-neutral often means bland enough for both genders, the designer doesn’t strive for subtlety but to simultaneously channel the power of all genders.

“I consider myself a transcendentalist in fashion. One of my biggest frustrations is being called a gender-neutral designer. That is the opposite of what I’m trying to achieve. I am a gender-empowering designer. I am a gender-revolutionary designer. I am of all genders. I am extremely masculine and extremely feminine. I am blessed with both powers.”

So while Cassell enjoys the success of dressing gay icons like Billy Porter, it is the everyday queer person who inspires him to create.

“When people ask what my formalwear looks like, I really feel like I’m creating a new genre. It’s not menswear; it’s not womenswear. I am creating this fantasy to give to people. You can wear this to your wedding. Queer people should be making everyone gag. We should be wearing the best things. That’s why I want to do queer weddings first because we deserve to be serving it. Why is your train not 40-feet long?”

The designer has achieved national recognition by the media, but he’s learned not to plant the seeds of



change in a field where crops have only grown pink or blue.

“This is the perfect time to reinvent everything. Burn down the patriarchy and let’s question every archaic decision. During Pride Month, the wedding industry is

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Googling ‘queer wedding designers.’ But it feels gimmicky and trendy, and it just fires me up more to use any platform I’m given to talk about real issues. Let’s not talk about actual designs, but let’s talk about how we need to build up our queer community and take down the current status quo. Let’s talk





about the wasteful side of fashion. Let's talk about thrift shopping as the more sustainable form of shopping. Let's talk about some real shit."

But it would be a fashion injustice to skip his designs. Cassell grew up in a small town in Ohio and left to attend college in Chicago where he studied graphic design and architecture with a concentration in furniture. His garments reveal the "huge history, architecture and old film nerd" he describes himself as. Queera Wang's current collection was inspired by *Romeo and Juliet*, including pieces with exaggerated puffed sleeves; blazers sliced at the shoulder and elbow; and a sheer, hand-beaded shirt dress with a fishtail train. Cassell whimsically sews together art, activism and wearable fashion.

"I've been asked, 'Who is Queera Wang's bride?'" he laughs. "I am literally a queer fashion designer, and you're going to ask me that. I didn't come into fashion because I like fashion. I wouldn't even consider myself a designer but a queer activist, and fashion is my medium. I

am such a romantic that even the darkest and saddest things can still be romantic. But I also just love bringing fantasies to life. Everything to me is very concept-driven but garners a very romantic atmosphere.”

Ultimately, the gender-revolutionary creative plans to expand his brand to offer formalwear for the memorable moments of a younger queer generation, such as prom. Queera Wang serves as a reminder that the tides of inclusivity and visibility are only getting stronger.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ART DAVISON; MODEL: PATRICK YEBOAH

