

Fashion Fact: The Red Carpet Is Unforgiving

BY BOOTH MOORE
© 2012, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — With a lifetime of red carpet misses ranging from uncomfortably busty Guinevere gowns to something reminiscent of Grandma's doily tablecloth, Disney princess Miley Cyrus hasn't exactly been fashion It Girl material. Until now.

The sleek and chic futuristic white dress Cyrus wore to the People's Choice Awards on Jan. 11 was so well-received that it could single-handedly turn the star's fashion fortunes around. The dress was by David Koma, a designer who hails from Georgia, shows in London and is so new to the fashion scene that his website is still under construction.

When it comes to the red carpet, it's easy to think that a beautiful dress is just that: a beautiful dress. But the right dress can be a game changer when it comes to how a celebrity is perceived and the career opportunities that follow. And the wrong dress can mean this year's fresh young thing is forgotten by the time the Oscars red carpet is rolled up.

Some people get it. Rooney Mara, for instance, has been appearing on red carpets in tough-and-sexy black gowns by Nina Ricci and Roksanda Ilincic that have more than a hint of her Lisbeth Salander character in "The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo." Berenice Bejo, on the other hand, has been blending into the background, wearing a series of blue gowns by Gucci and Elie Saab, each one indistinguishable from the last, and missing an opportunity to stand out, either on her own behalf or on behalf of her hit film "The Artist."

"Some actresses don't understand that a great dress on the red carpet does have an impact," says Hal Rubenstein, in Style fashion director and author of the new book "100 Unforgettable Dresses."

"They are just looking for the pretty dress, not the right dress."

Compare Bejo to Marion Cotillard, another French ingenue who was a relative unknown when she burst on the awards show scene in 2007. Nominated for several film awards for playing Edith Piaf in the film "La Vie En Rose," Cotillard was on a red carpet merry-go-round similar to Bejo, who has been nominated for several awards for "The Artist."

"When Cotillard was nominated, she wore one distinctive dress after another," Rubenstein says. "'La Vie En Rose' wasn't a film that was going to be a big hit, yet she looked so distinctive, even the public who didn't see the film was asking who is this woman. Berenice Bejo is a lovely actress and a lovely woman, but her clothing is generic. So consequently, we're not noticing her."

Emma Stone pulled off a red carpet coup at last year's Golden Globe Awards when she showed up in a simple coral Calvin Klein gown and white-blond hair and upstaged everyone.

"She was a brand new girl who had an unexpected hit in the kids' film 'Easy A,'" Rubenstein says. "And when she showed up, it was like someone opened a window. She was so striking, it introduced her to an adult audience." In the year since, Stone has become a Hollywood and fashion world darling. In 2011, she racked up *Glamour*, *Elle*, *Teen Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* magazine covers.

The dress Cyrus chose for the People's Choice Awards speaks volumes about where she would like her career to go. For the first time, she came across less as a hard-partying, trash-talking, peace sign-flashing teen and more as a sophisticated, well-dressed, refined young woman. And as it turns out, that's what her stylist intended.

"She's gotten a bad rap in the press," says Simone Harouche, who has worked with Cyrus for three years. "And I was sick of it. So I decided I was going to show people she is capable of being fashionable and grown up, not just this cutesy person."

The gamble paid off. The Huffington Post praised Cyrus for "turning over a new couture leaf," and the *London* newspaper said she "topped the stakes." Meanwhile, *El* Online said the dress was "surprisingly chic and fashion forward."

Cyrus could well be on her way to creating a new style identity for herself. But the perfect match of celebrity personality and dress is the exception, not the norm, as one could see from the sea of unremarkable dresses at the recent Golden Globe Awards. The reason? Not enough choices in some cases, and too many in others.

"At this point, there are so many celebrities wanting dresses that it's becoming more and more difficult," says Harouche, who pulls an average of 30 potential gowns per client per event. "You see so much of the same thing because there are so many people and so many red carpet events. And sometimes designers hold dresses back and say they are saving them for this event or this person."

Barbara Tfank, the Los Ange-

les-based fashion designer who has dressed Adele, Michelle Obama and others, knows firsthand the importance of matching the right personality to the right dress. In 1995, she worked with Prada to design the beaded lavender gown Uma Thurman wore to the Oscars when she was nominated for supporting actress for "Pulp Fiction."

"The difference in that dress and a lot of the dresses you see (on the red carpet) today, is that it was designed for her," Tfank says. "I was a costume designer at the time. And that dress was an amalgam of fashion and film in the

way we approached designing it." Tfank asked Thurman whom she wanted to be that day, "which is what costume designers do when they work on films. We decided on Grace Kelly meets Glinda the Good Witch from 'Wizard of Oz.' She felt at the moment those were the right icons for her."

The lavender fabric was tested on camera to make sure the color value worked, and that the sequins showed up, Tfank remembers. "Everything is under klieg lights (on the red carpet), so the color value is diminished." If you wear a buff nude, it looks white. "Everything fell together,"

Tfank says. "It was young, fresh and comfortable-looking. It was about Uma, and her likes and dislikes and preferences. That dress didn't exist before. It came from my imagination. It was about building a character."

The personal approach Tfank took to designing Thurman's gown was more reminiscent of celebrity dressing in the Golden Age of Hollywood, when the job fell to studio costume designers such as Edith Head and Helen Rose. Actors were under contract, and it was in the studios' interest to create consistency in their images on-screen and off. "As an actress, you fit a

slot, you fit a type," Rubenstein says. "Norma Shearer was the spotless heroine, Ava Gardner the temptress. And you dressed accordingly."

But the studio system is long gone, and now the red carpet is big business for the stars themselves and for the designers who want to dress them. Part of an actor's career plan involves landing lucrative endorsement deals and advertising campaigns, and maybe even having a clothing collection of one's own. Which is why, more than ever, the objective on the red carpet should be to say, "Look at me! I can make a fashion statement!"



KIRK MCKOY/L.A. TIMES/MCT
Berenice Bejo on the red carpet at the Golden Globe Awards show in Beverly Hills, Calif., on Jan. 15.

SUPER SAVINGS

SCORE BIG WHEN YOU TACKLE THE SAVINGS!

limited time only
30%-50% off rugs, lamps, wall art, & accessories

Save **\$230**
94" Casual Sofa
WAS: ~~\$629~~
NOW ONLY: \$399

While Quantities Last!

Save **\$210**
98" Casual Sofa
WAS: ~~\$699~~
NOW ONLY: \$489

Try Me, I Recline

HOT BUY!
Dual Reclining 93" Sofa
WAS: ~~\$599~~
NOW ONLY: \$499

Table Extends to 42 x 78"

Save **\$280**
42"x 60" Table & 4 Chairs
WAS: ~~\$879~~
NOW ONLY: \$599
Bench also available!

Save **\$350**
6pc Bedroom
WAS: ~~\$949~~
NOW ONLY: \$599
Queen Sleigh Headboard, Footboard, Rails, Dresser, Mirror & Nightstand

Save **\$450**
36"x 72" Table & 4 Chairs
WAS: ~~\$1149~~
NOW ONLY: \$699
Counter Height Table Extends to a Roomy 36"x 96" for Extra Seating

HOT BUY!
6pc Bedroom
Great Value
WAS: ~~\$1299~~
NOW ONLY: \$1299
Queen Poster Headboard, Footboard, Rails, Dresser, Mirror & Nightstand

UNCLAIMED FREIGHT FURNITURE

A Division Of Furniture Outlets USA

The #1 Furniture Retailer in the Area!

*Discounts as advertised and specified in store. No further discounts apply. Financing available, subject to credit approval, on regular priced purchases. A minimum purchase will be required for any financing term. Financing provided by Wells Fargo Financial Services. Credit promotional period may be terminated if you default under your account agreement. Some exclusions may apply, including but not limited to Hot Buys, rugs, accessories, and select mattress purchases. See store for details. The posted regular price is the current, future, or former offering price of the same or comparable merchandise Unclaimed Freight Furniture or another retailer. Actual sales may not have occurred at regular price. Some pieces and fabric prints may vary by region. Selection may vary by store. Does not apply to previous purchases. Clearance items are available only while quantities last. Prices valid for a limited time only. An amount equal but not limited to sales tax and delivery charges must be paid at the time of purchase. All items may not be exactly as shown in this advertisement and may not be on display in all showrooms. Style and selection may vary. Although every precaution is taken, some errors may occur in print. We reserve the right to correct any such errors. Expires 2/6/2012.

Sioux Falls • 6600 West 12th St. • 888-217-4222
Mitchell • 1500 North Main • 888-253-0666
Yankton • 2320 Broadway • 888-344-5999
Watertown • 17 West Kemp • 888-544-6333
Pierre • 540 South Garfield • 888-600-1817
Sioux City • 2500 Transit Ave. • 888-801-0666
Fargo • 2520 South University Dr. • 888-876-5035
Aberdeen • 3315 6th Ave. SE • 888-655-1666
Worthington • 1401 Oxford St. • 888-955-0333