



The *GILDED ONES*

THE NONCONFORMIST

HENRY EDWARDS II

REDEFINING SUCCESS

We met Henry Edwards II in the summer of 2019. Dressed in a brilliant red brocade suit, Henry had just finished hosting a seminar at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore about the transformative power of fashion. Henry's event focused on menswear. But because he was talking more about how to achieve a non-conformist and confident approach to personal style (rather than the specific details of a cuff or a sleeve), everything he said was equally applicable to women. Indeed, Henry predicted that it was a matter of time before fashion became completely genderless. Anyone should be able to wear anything without judgment.

We met Henry again at the end of January 2020 in New York City. As he spoke about his background, interests and goals, it became clear that Henry had redefined the word "success" to suit himself rather than others, and had charted his own road to get there. After a lively lunch, we spoke about meeting again; however, like most of the world, we had no idea that a life-altering pandemic loomed, and the year 2020 would be viewed as nothing short of a curse word. 2021 was not much better. Yet, we never forgot about the boldness of that red suit and the audacious confidence with which it was worn.

Fast forward to an overcast day in March 2022. It is Henry's birthday but he has traveled from North Carolina to spend the day with us in New York. As he hung up his looks for the shoot, we spied the suit — the red suit that commanded our attention when we first met Henry. Later, as we walked around looking for a perfect place to take photos, Henry was stopped by people wanting to take his photo or have their photo taken with Henry, including writer and model Dian Griesel from [@silverdisobedience](#). If we had doubted transformational power of fashion before, we did no longer. Henry was right. Fashion can transform. It can make a person unforgettable. It can help us to give life to our truest selves or provide us with a defensive armor under which we can hide.

Without further ado, please meet a man who is, all at once, a creative director, stylist, editor, visual merchandiser and teacher — Henry Edwards II.



LET'S CHAT!

Home. Sweet. Home.

I am originally from Snow Hill, North Carolina but I've lived in the District of Columbia area for many years. These days, I travel between North Carolina and Washington making periodic stops in New York as business dictates.

School Daze.

I studied textiles and apparel at North Carolina Central University. Six years after graduating from college, I went back to school for my MBA with a focus on marketing. I know many people whose education has no bearing on their passions or careers. That is not the case for me. My education in fashion and textiles has helped me to create for myself and others a nonjudgmental world where the intangible is always tangible.

Wilding Out.

I am a compassionate people person who tends to absorb the energy of those around me. I want to help people so I am always inclined to give and to say yes. So, the "craziest" thing I've done of late is to set boundaries for myself – to learn the power of no. I know my answer doesn't sound crazy at all. In fact, most people would describe setting personal boundaries as a very reasonable and rational thing to do for oneself. But for someone who usually answers "yes," saying no to people is a difficult thing to do.

Big Things.

I am a big dreamer. I am always coming up with new ideas that I want to pursue. At the same time, I walk in faith and not by sight. I love the idea of serendipity – of not always knowing or planning what comes next. Rather, I try to be flexible and open enough to grab ahold of an opportunity when it presents itself. What I am sure of, however, is that my next endeavor will be successful.

Sign Language.

I am an Aries. They say that Aries natives are audacious, bold and love a challenge. Aries people are optimistic, passionate and driven. We like to get to the heart of the matter quickly. That's all true of me!

Personal Mantra.

I live by these words: Be exclusive. Never sacrifice individuality for conformity. This is not to suggest that individuals have no responsibility to their various communities – but rather that individuals should take the time to appreciate and love themselves so that they can share their best selves with the community. Persistent conformity deprives the rest of us of experiencing who you really are. By allowing ourselves the freedom to be authentic and to embrace, and take responsibility for our personal choices, we learn more about what we have to offer the world.



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DO FOR A LIVING?

In one word – unpredictable! I don't limit myself nor do I believe in conforming rigidly to any label or path. As a result, I wear many hats and do many things in the fashion space. I am a stylist, magazine editor, casting director, creative director and art director. I also help fashion clients in brand development. Ultimately, *I love the process of creating amazing visuals.*



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WE THINK OF YOU AS A BIT OF A POLYMATH.

Tell us more about your career path.

Let's call it career guidance. To me, the word "path" connotes rigidity. Guidance is insightful and flexible. My guidance and experience has led me to a place where the term "polymath" makes sense. From my days working as a wardrobe consultant, merchandiser and visual stylist for luxury retailers to becoming a fashion marketing and management professor to being the creator and founder of *II Magazine*, my journey illustrates that there are many ways to reach your destination. Life is uncertain. Plans are frequently upended. I've learned to remain flexible and open to opportunities. Spirituality and intuition serve as my guidance counselors. My accomplishments and drive stem from trusting myself. But it wasn't always this way.

I've loved fashion and style since my early childhood. In college, however, I ignored my fashion jones and declared a major in political science. I convinced myself that I wanted to become an attorney or a political analyst. After participating in a mock trial, I realized that a career in law or politics is not for me. Shortly after that experience, I changed my major to textiles and apparel. A drastic change for sure. But one that made sense for me. Yet, many years later, I found a way to merge my interest in politics with my love for fashion and communication. I founded *II Magazine* in 2012 to address correlations between politics and fashion. *II Magazine* is special to me because it is the result of all of my professional experiences to date.



WHICH PART OF YOUR CAREER DO YOU FIND YOURSELF FOCUSING ON THE MOST?

Lately, I find myself wearing the hats of creative director and brand strategist. I love the psychological aspect of these roles. I am fascinated by the thought process that goes into the development of personal style. Another part of my career that I am really enjoying these days is a project that I created called "I Am Successful." IAS is a campaign that highlights and promotes positive images of diverse black males. Through the art of visual communication, I am able to help black men to transform their personal style to reflect who they really are – not who society thinks they are or should be. IAS affords me a way to address social injustices suffered by the black community using the power of fashion and the development of individual style.



TELL US MORE ABOUT II MAGAZINE.

The name of the magazine is influenced by my name. As you know, my name is Henry Edwards II. II is my suffix. The magazine merges my love for fashion with my interest in social justice and politics. Basically, II Magazine explores the ways in which fashion and politics intersect. The mission of II Magazine is to encourage individual thinking about fashion, social justice and personal lifestyles.



WHEN YOU AREN'T WORKING, WHAT ARE YOU DOING? WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?

I enjoy listening to music and people watching. I love stimulating conversations, concerts and exploring different restaurants and cuisines.

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN DESCRIBED BY PEOPLE WHO KNOW YOU WELL? DO YOU AGREE WITH THEIR ASSESSMENT?

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde! I disagree. I think that I am consistent. Well... it depends on the situation. You know what? My friends might be right!



WHAT THREE WORDS DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONAL STYLE?

Exquisite.

Sleek.

Fluid.

HOW DOES JEWELRY FIT INTO YOUR DAILY WARDROBE?

For me, wearing jewelry depends on my mood. There are times when I enjoy a completely minimalist look. At other times, I use jewelry to amplify my personality and my style.

DO YOU TAKE FASHION RISKS? IF SO, WHAT ARE THEY?

I definitely take fashion risks. Doing so has allowed me to conquer fear. Colors, prints, traditional shapes, unusual silhouettes – I do it all!





LET'S TALK ABOUT STYLE ICONS. WHOSE STYLE DO YOU ADMIRE AND WHY?

The late Andre Leon Talley is my style icon. He created a signature look that transcended fashion.

WHAT ARE YOUR FIVE GO-TO WARDROBE PIECES?

1. Turtleneck sweater
2. Coat/Jacket
3. Cardigan
4. Denim
5. White button-down shirt





LIGHTNING ROUND! PICK ONE.

On personal aura: Mystery or Clarity?

– Mystery

On personal style: Minimalist or Maximalist?

– Minimalist

On interior design: Bold Color or Neutral Hues?

– Bold Color

On shopping: Online or Brick & Mortar Store?

– Online

On travel, pt. 1: Adventure filled with spartan digs or calm and quiet but supremely luxe?

– Calm and quiet but supremely luxe

On travel, pt. 2: Istanbul, Paris, Tokyo, Rio or Lagos?

– Lagos

On jewelry: Ring Bling, Earscape, Arm Party or Neck Game?

– Arm Party

On people, part 1: Absolute favorite human trait?

– A genuine smile

On people, pt. 2: Least favorite human trait?

– Being a complete conformist

On the current state of the world: Optimist or Pessimist?

– Optimist



WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT GOLD?

Gold is bold, luxurious and regal.



WHAT AUVERE PIECES MUST YOU OWN?

I've got the [Xanthe 24K Ring Hammered](#) on my mind. I also loved the [Brutalist 24K Signet Ring Polished](#), the [Motorcycle Diamond and Wide](#), and the [Double Link Necklace Heavy](#).

PARTING WORDS?

New York City gives me life. I am on cloud 9 right now.



HENRY IS WEARING:

Cover:

African Print Trench Coat: NaShona; **Turtleneck:** Zara; **Pants:** ASOS Design; **Boots:** Aldo; and **Jewelry:** **Auvere** (Love is Love Medallion and Short Link Chain; Long Link Chain; Floral Eye Signet Ring / Pave Diamonds; Motorcycle Diamond Band Wide; and Pyramid Band Wide).

Look 1:

Floral Pajama Set: Shein x Kholoud; **Sleeveless T-Shirt:** ComfortWash; and **Jewelry:** **Auvere** (Double Link Necklace Light; Cage Convertible Necklace; Double Link Bracelet Heavy; Double Link Bracelet Light; Xanthe 24K Ring Hammered; Xanthe 24K Ring Polished; Xanthe 24K Ring Satin; and Stud Band Polished).

Look 2:

African Print Trench Coat: NaShona; **Turtleneck:** Zara; **Pants:** ASOS Design; **Boots:** Aldo; and **Jewelry:** **Auvere** (Love is Love Medallion and Short Link Chain; Long Link Chain; Floral Eye Signet Ring / Pave Diamonds; Motorcycle Diamond Band Wide; and Pyramid Band Wide).

Look 3:

Red Brocade Suit: I.N.C International Concepts; **Black Mandarin Collar Shirt:** ASOS Design; **Shoes:** AGucci; and **Jewelry:** **Auvere** (Brutalist 24K Ring Satin; Brutalist Ring Polished; Stud Band Polished; Perigee Bracelet; Double Moon Ear Cuff Polished; Double Moon Ear Cuff Satin; Foxtail Bracelet; Double Link Bracelet Heavy; Double Link Bracelet Light; and Love is Love Bracelet).

Look 4:

Linen Khaki Pant Suit: Ajabeng; **Sandals:** Jerusalem Sandals; and **Jewelry:** **Auvere** (Linear Maze Pendant & Chain Large Polished; Indomitable Medallion & Chain; Wishbone Pendant & Chain Large Polished; Vortex 24K Ring Polished; and Vortex Ring Satin).

Look 5:

Cinnamon Linen Tunic: Ajabeng; **Pants:** ASOS Design; **Sandals:** Jerusalem Sandals; and **Jewelry:** **Auvere** (Double Link Necklace Heavy; Double Link Necklace Light; Long Link Chain; Pyramid Band Wide; Stud Band Polished; Motorcycle Diamond Band Wide; and Pyramid Band Narrow).