

THE VOICE

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DOUGLAS RIDDLE
The Modern Voice of Style



“I AM ALWAYS TOUCHED BY THE STY

YLE AND BEAUTY OF IMPERFECTION.”

– DOUGLAS RIDDLE



Shirt by
Alexander
McQueen.

The Modern Voice of Style

Douglas Riddle
A Style Icon

By **JANICE CARTER LEVITCH**

Photos by **J. EDWARD BROWN**

With my love of style and fashion throughout the years, the first person who came to mind to put on our November cover was Douglas Riddle, a style icon and dear friend of mine. I recently met up with Douglas at the construction site of the new Butchertown Grocery Bakery, situated on Main Street next to Bittners, which was designed by Douglas and his Bittners' team, including designer Chad Cobb.

JANICE: Thank you for agreeing to do this feature and letting us see into the more personal side of you which you normally shy away from.

DOUGLAS: Well, we have been friends for many years, so I know that I am in good hands.

JANICE: One of the many things that I have found intriguing about you is your humbleness. Because of our history together, I know about your successful career in the fashion industry. You worked with such greats as De La Renta, Klein, Herrera, Kors, Saint Laurent, and very few people know that about you. From there, you left the fashion world and entered the interior design industry. I have heard that you have worked with top celebrities and fashion designers to national authors and journalists. You never talk about it. Why?

DOUGLAS: I'm in the service business. Clients hire me to do a service for them, and I never lose sight of that. I work for them and it is for them to talk about it, not me. Plus, I am a little uncomfortable talking about my accomplishments.

JANICE: Let's talk about the cover for a moment. I styled the cover and photos showing the two sides of you, the quiet reserved side and then the rock star side with both displaying your great sense of style. Where do you think your sense of style comes from?

DOUGLAS: I think it must come from my exposure to the European fashion industry early in my career. I attended the collection shows in Milan and Paris for many years and grew to appreciate the vision and craftsmanship that goes into high-end clothing.

I think that there is a big difference between fashion and style. I have always liked owning a few great pieces rather than accumulating a lot of clothes. I am also consistent with my purchases, so if I like a look, for example, I may buy two of an item and wear both for a long time. I don't need constant newness or trendy pieces which come and go. Less is more.

Comfort is also important, and it comes when a piece has a great fit on your body type. I think sometimes you can see clothes wearing the person rather than the person wearing the clothes. You are the message, not the clothes.



An iconic chair designed by Nanna Ditzel, Denmark, and an abstract print by Malene Birger in an antique Italian frame.



Fabric by François Fluerat.

JANICE: Who is the designer you respect the most?

DOUGLAS: Ralph Lauren. He is an American treasure. He is a genius, an original and the only one who is a constant in American fashion. I love his appreciation of the Native American Indian, which shows up in his collections. I have a great deal of respect for him and his accomplishments.

JANICE: Your quote "I am always touched by the style and beauty of imperfection" really says a lot. In contrast, I find you to be a perfectionist. How does this work together?

DOUGLAS: Yes, in some ways I am a perfectionist, but I love the imperfection in perfectionism.

JANICE: Just like how great style has a twist. You always have that messy

hair accompanied with a relaxed chic look that you wouldn't think would be put together perfectly, but yet you always look somewhat perfect. Are you aware of how people in our community respect you and your style?

DOUGLAS: I am very appreciative of those kind words, and I hope that I contribute to our city with style and design. I'm very passionate about style of any kind – from clothes, buildings, landscapes, interior and exterior design to even things like bike racks, accessories, home items and so much more. Style is so important in our daily lives because it relates to function.

JANICE: Yes, I agree! You have always been ahead of the curve, which brings me to a wonderful attribute about you in that you are consistent with who you are. Have you always been confident and secure?

DOUGLAS: I have always had a strong spirituality within me, so I knew that I could never be broken. I just had to be who I was, even at a young age. All of us – no matter what nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, preference and many more "boxes" that we are put into – should be able to be who we are and accepted as such.

JANICE: I know that you and Stephen Lewis, your long-time partner, were married in a teepee on a mountain overlooking Santa Fe, New Mexico. Can you tell me a little about that?

DOUGLAS: Yes, we did get married in the mountains accompanied by our good friends John and Patti Moore as our witnesses. It was a small, intimate ceremony. I am so fortunate to have Stephen with me on my life's journey. He is so talented and has enriched my life.



Douglas Riddle with husband Stephen Lewis.

JANICE: You have taken this 165-year-old iconic company known as Bittners and revitalized it, propelling it into the future. How does that make you feel?

DOUGLAS: I am very proud of the Bittners team. It takes all of us to make the magic of Bittners happen. I have done none of this on my own. I really feel that I am the current

ambassador of this wonderful, nationally-recognized design firm. My mentor Owsley Brown Frazier instilled this deep appreciation for the meaning of Bittners, and today, Laura Frazier continues this tradition. I am very aware and appreciative of how blessed I am to be a part of this iconic brand.

JANICE: Can you tell us about any current or future design projects?

DOUGLAS: Yes, we just finished up Dr. T. Gerald O'Daniel Plastic Surgery and Advanced Skin Spa Studios located in St. Matthews and Butchertown Grocery Bakery next door to Bittners on Main Street. I have two projects that I can't say too much about right now, but I am excited about one with Steve Wilson called Barn 8 at historic Hermitage Farm. The other one that I am excited



"Union of Opposites II" by Letitia Quesenberry, Louisville, along with a bronze bench by Holly Hunt.



Saint Laurent shirt and pants, Prada python belt and old Gringo custom snake skin boots with sterling nail heads.

about as well is a project at Hudson Yards in New York City.

JANICE: You have been philanthropic with your time, creativity and money for many years. Why is this so important?

DOUGLAS: We live in this community together and by giving together, we can really make a difference. At Bittners, our motto is “designing for the way you live” which we carry over into our philanthropy with our saying “giving is the way we live.” I have worked with many organizations throughout the years and hold dear to my heart Gilda’s Club Kentuckiana.

We are fortunate to have many hometown heroes in our community. The Frazier and Brown families, along with many other family foundations, continue the great tradition of giving. Jennifer Lawrence, along with her foundation, has made a huge impact at Norton Children’s Hospital. I have seen with my own eyes how Jen’s gift has saved and enriched so many children’s lives. David Jones, who recently passed, inspired and certainly raised the bar on giving back.

I also don’t want to forget those people who give quietly by volunteering their time and creative talent unconditionally. Giving enriches our community and to me is the best feeling one can ever have.

JANICE: Well, I wish we didn’t have to end this because it has been great talking to you today for this article. Any final thoughts?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I can’t believe you got me to do this! Seriously, I am so appreciative of all the support from so many people throughout my fashion and now design years. I am excited about what the future holds. As we say at Bittners, “The best is yet to come.” ▼