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The Growth Journey

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"But you know that we don't like
to talk about precious things...
When something so pleasant
happens to you, you want to keep
it only for yourself! Do you agree
with me?"

MONICA
BELLUCCI

Photographed by SZILVÉSZTER MAKÓ, wearing **BALENCIAGA** and **CARTIER**

Aurélien Bacquet

All clothes by Aurélien Bacquet “Artefact” Collection Spring/Summer 2024

In conversation with
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Paris has witnessed the emergence of some of the most influential couturiers and maisons, many of which continue to lead the industry with their cutting-edge approach. Today, a new generation of creators and creatives are weaving their dreams along the same threads of Coco Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld, Cristóbal Balenciaga, and Christian Dior. In this pursuit, Paris undeniably remains the place to be. At the age of 21, Aurélien Bacquet has already conquered the city with his dynamic and exhilarating approach to design. Formed at the Institut Français de la Mode and fueled by an eternal fascination for his hometown, Aurélien continues to explore his creativity, his style and his trademark. In our conversation held in the heart of the French capital, we delved into his projects, aspirations and the certain “*je ne sais quoi*” that encapsulates the charm of Paris.

CAROLINA BENJUMEA. How are you handling the freezing temperatures in Paris?

AURÉLIEN BACQUET. I just bought a coat! I never wear coats, and I had to buy one. I was out of my office yesterday; the snow was *so* beautiful.

C.B. You were born and raised in Paris, the fashion capital of the world, where you live and breathe luxury. Was it an obvious choice for you to become a designer and work in the fashion and luxury industry?

A.B. Absolutely not! I was like all the kids; I wanted to be a footballer. There was no way for me to be a stylist or fashion designer. Even today, I wouldn't call myself a designer, just a creative or an artistic person. It was not my first dream. I don't see what I do as a job—I'm just so excited about learning about fashion and designing. When I was around 10 to 15 years old and I was at school, everybody wanted to be a lawyer or work in finance. I was

like, “Oh no, not for me.” I wanted to do image, magazines and photography. I did not want a regular job like school wanted me to do. [Laughs]

C.B. What was the moment when you realized, “Oh, I want to be a fashion designer!”?

A.B. I wanted to be a shoe designer at first because I was into fashion and shoes. Then I met my teacher [Hervé Yvrenogeu] and we had so many talks—he made me fall in love with fashion! Showing me a *new* vision of fashion and that it can be this superpower that you can embody every day. You are building a character. The meaning of clothes—all the introspection of clothes was so beautiful. This guy really changed my view of fashion.

C.B. Being an epicenter for culture and fashion, everything happens in Paris; you are in the middle of everything and sometimes it is hard to look to other fashion and cultural capitals. Do you feel that

being from Paris and being established here is more of an advantage or a disadvantage in the way you approach fashion?

A.B. I know there is a French fashion sphere but there is also the world that came to Paris. There are so many brands from New York and LA to showcase what they do. So, we are lucky that the world came to us in a way. It's also an advantage because there's so much art, so many people, so much stuff to see and so much history. You know, I'm 21, and I've been here for a really long time. So I'm *really* excited to meet a new country and a new city! That's why I'm going to leave in March.

C.B. Ah, where are you going?

A.B. I'm going to New York. I'm really excited to experience a new culture—new everything!

C.B. Nice! For how long are you staying?

A.B. I would normally stay for three months, but I think I'll try to stay longer.





“There’s no limit to the first ideas. The most important thing about being a designer—or a creative person—is not the first idea but having *many* ideas and selecting the good one at the *right* moment.” – Aurélien Bacquet

C.B. Paris is also a melting pot of cultures. You can basically find all cultures, nationalities, and backgrounds when you go from one neighborhood to another. Do you feel like your designs represent this plurality and wide ecosystems present in Paris? And how do you achieve to portray this amalgam of realities present in the city and the industry?

A.B. I wouldn’t say that it touched my designs but I think it touched *myself*. So maybe in a way it touched my designs. I’ve always lived in Paris, and there is so much to see in the neighborhoods. So much countryside, so many people and so much culture I think it’s in me—I don’t think it’s in my design, but more in me!

C.B. The elegance of Paris is, of course, inspiring, but are there any other cities or places in the world that inspire you the most?

A.B. In my everyday life, I’m in love with Paris in general; it’s my first love and will always be my first love. I am also really inspired by Belgium, but I don’t think there’s a specific city. I’m just 21, so I would say Paris is my *only* love. But I’m excited to see new cities and explore more. I know that Brussels and Antwerp have a lot of fashion, which is inspiring. New York as well. There are things I want to see, but for now, I can just say it’s Paris.

C.B. You mentioned you have been raised by three generations of women. How has your relationship with them influenced the way you see clothing and fashion?

A.B. Throughout my life, I have mostly watched women’s fashion: shoes, dresses, bags. So I knew I wanted to dress women because I grew up with it. I’m always asking my grandmother [Genia], “What do you think?” She

doesn’t even work in fashion but I want her advice because she knows me. They’re *always* with me! So yeah, they can influence me in a way.

C.B. Do you have a first memory of fashion growing up that has marked your career and shaped who you are as a designer today?

A.B. I remember in every train station or airport she used to take *Vogue*. And I

remember when she was asleep, I just took the magazines; I saw Gisele, Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton, Phoebe Philo at Céline. I didn’t know anything, but I was like: “I’m in love with it!”

C.B. When you are creating a collection, how do you acquire the first ideas and the first drafts for your designs?

A.B. Young people go to IFM and they’re always asking themselves, “What do I have to see? Do I have to show that I love this designer...?” I’m just like, “Show something that we *don’t* know, try to explore *every* possible way. Whether you’re a fan of sculpture, flower making, pottery—we don’t care if you know this designer or the other one. Just try to do something special!” So I think it’s everywhere, really. Being curious and taking from everywhere you can to put into your work and into your character. There’s no limit to the first ideas. The most important thing about being a designer—or a creative person—is not the first idea but having *many* ideas and selecting the good one at the *right* moment. We’re always saying, “Oh, I want to do this and that.” No, *no*. Do this one and then the next one.” [Gasps] We always want to try so many things!

C.B. Your academic background is astounding but as a designer, you need to be constantly learning and gathering cultural knowledge. How do you feed your fashion knowledge so that your designs are not only pretty and eye-catching but also smart, practical and innovative?

A.B. Carolina, I think you’re like me! We all have this little thing in our pocket [shows smartphone]. We’re lucky to have so many pictures and

images every day. But I think where we can make a difference is by digging into the archives and going to bookstores. I have so many magazines from the 2000s and late ‘80s. Fashion is a cycle, so we can dig into the past and use it for ourselves in a *smart* way. I try to be more niche and dig into something *I* really like—not something everybody likes.

C.B. Is there a magazine that you prefer to do this kind of digging as you say?

A.B. *Purple* magazine is amazing! Also, *Vogue* in 2010 and *L’Uomo Vogue* was so good with Steven Meisel. *i-D*, *Arena Homme+* about men’s fashion. But also, the auction books where there is furniture, painting or even the MET. They have a website where they have vintage clothing and it’s very inspiring!

C.B. In fashion, we are always talking about the future and looking forward, but what role does the past, history and nostalgia play in your creations?

A.B. I think, just looking in the past to see what’s going to happen in the future. If I look at a trend of the past, I know it will be here in 10 years—like baggy jeans or skinny jeans. I think I’m a big nostalgic guy... I didn’t live in the ‘90s or ‘20s, but I think history and the past are the most important things to be a good and interesting designer today. To take what you can from the past—not like 2020—and *really* go deep into the ‘50s and ‘60s with movies, books, pictures—then use it for yourself!

C.B. Do you feel some preference for a specific time?

A.B. I have a *big* love for the ‘50s with Cristóbal Balenciaga, Breakfast at Tiffany’s—all these New Yorkers with a bow tie and smoking tuxedos. I am *in love* with this magical time! I try to use some haute couture reminders – *clins d’oeil*. Even the ‘60s in London.

C.B. Those times were really important for the fashion industry because a lot of Maisons and styles that we use today were developed in that time.

A.B. Yes! And in the ‘60s and the ‘50s, dressing was a ritual! You put on your shirt; you put on your bow tie. It’s really long, but you *know* how to dress. There’s a first step, a second step, a third step... and you put a lot of respect into *how* you show yourself to people.



“I’m constantly navigating through a lot of stuff; that’s why it’s exciting. And I hope I don’t find my creative maturity right now. I just want to try so many things [...]” – **Aurélien Bacquet**



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C.B. You are very young! Do you think that because of your young age, you approach fashion and design differently than older generations?

A.B. Yeah, I'm from Gen Z so of course, I have a relationship with images because of TikTok, Instagram... We see *so* much! So I think you can grow really fast if you know how to dig. But I think older designers use the past so much, as I do too.

C.B. A lot of people say that today, there's not a lot of room to invent anything in fashion. Do you think that designers can still invent something today?

A.B. Yeah, there's a designer I really like because he's into arts and ceramics: JW Anderson at Loewe. He's *really* smart; he can do sweatshirts on the runway and then you see something so crazy made with clay and silver. I'm always excited to see his collections. I know there will be like three or four crazy silhouettes. He's really into craftsmanship as well. I have a lot of respect for that. I would *love* to do craft! He's so exciting to see; he works with silver, with gold and with clay. He does crazy stuff and beautiful stuff.

C.B. But your designs are also very daring and you are not afraid of using different textures and materials as well. Bones, wood and carbon are some of the materials you have used for your collections. How did you come up with the idea of using these?

A.B. I think I was just in school where you see so much art and sculptures, and I was like "I wanna use this! How can I use it?" I had no experience with wood, but I was lucky to have YouTube. Wood was very fun; I really saw it as an experience so I used wood and carbon. I think this is how a brand can make a big difference on the runway.

C.B. I guess you had an idea of the results that you wanted once you used it. Did you achieve the same result as you hoped for?

A.B. I think a lot of it changed. For example, for the bones, I knew I wanted that result. But wood was such a hard material to work with so, of course, you're not going to have what you want. The most important

thing is the process, so if you miss something, you can do it again. With carbon, it was really hard. I know I did trials before the actual one; I felt like a craftsman, with the gloves and the mask. It was so fun!

C.B. Fashion designers have always tried to create designs for the jet-set and people who travel a lot, but today the industry's main focus is durability; creating designs that can travel through time and generations. How do you achieve that in an industry that is always seeking novelty?

A.B. First of all, I have to say, it's going to be *really* hard. I'm not going to be pessimistic, but it's going to be really hard because right now with social media, we want everything, every day, right now. So, I think at some point,

“Fashion is a cycle, so we can dig into the past and use it for ourselves in a *smart* way. I try to be more niche and dig into something *I* really like—not something everybody likes.” – Aurélien Bacquet

you have to say, “Look, guys, we have to take a break.” Also, big fashion brands have so many collections every year. I think we should work a lot for one collection and not three collections in a row. But I think it's going to be really hard because when there are investors, brands *have* to make money. This is why with bones, woods and stuff, fashion is more an art rather than something you're going to wear every day.

C.B. You are currently doing an internship at Celine. How different is it to design for a different vision? Does it bring the same kind of excitement and satisfaction?

A.B. I was excited because I knew I wanted to work with Hedi Slimane, but, yeah, it's a huge gap. Before, I was my own boss; I had my time, my plan-

ning. Now, I'm working for someone else. But it's so good because I'm really in love with what Celine does. It's really exciting to see the clothes you do being worn in public. You also understand how a big company works. There are so many people; there's so many calendars. It is also really interesting to know how big stuff works, so I'm really happy to be working at Celine.

C.B. What have you learned during this time in your internship?

A.B. I'm doing men's wear, so for myself, it is different. I wanted to be in women's wear, but I'm so in love with men's wear right now. And I learned how important *perfection* is in a big company. Everything you do, even as an intern, could have a repercussion on a lot of stuff. So you have to be perfect and do your stuff *perfectly*! And also understand that vintage and past are so interesting. In Celine, they use archetype clothes and clothes from the '50s, '60s and the '70s. It's so interesting!

C.B. Do you think you have achieved your creative maturity or are you still navigating through different styles and approaching different ways of designing until you find the one that suits you the best?

A.B. If you find someone who is 21 years old and says, “Yeah, I have found my creative maturity,” they're probably lying! I'm constantly navigating through

a lot of stuff; that's why it's exciting. And I hope I don't find my creative maturity right now. I just want to try so many things, so I would say absolutely not! I'm just discovering stuff every day and I'm really happy that I don't have it.

C.B. Do you think that your design aesthetics will change in New York because of the change of cultures and the change of scenario?

A.B. It's my first time in New York. So, it's a dream. It'll be a big gap not being in Paris but I'm excited to see how people dress. I know that there's such a different mindset when it comes to clothing in New York. I'm even excited to see the colors, the people and the fast pace of a huge city. Also, I want to see how I can be alone, who am I alone when I know nothing or no one.