

ADRIEN JACQUES



HEIGHT 184 / 6'0.5" | CHEST 101 / 40 | WAIST 79 / 31 | HAIR LIGHT BROWN | EYES BLUE-GREEN | SHOES 43 / 9.5-10

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Menswear's greatest minimalist on the ceaseless pursuit of perfection

Neil Barrett is one of a handful of designers whose work is so consistently assured of its identity that it's almost instantly recognisable as his own. That's no mean feat for a man who tends to eschew the Insta-ready trophy pieces, high-impact embellishments and avant-garde bricolage of other top designers, instead distinguishing his garments through fabric innovation and an exacting purity of line. But, as he's keen to make clear, creative consistency is very different to stasis.

"Change is what drives fashion forward," he explains over the phone, his voice echoing around the 538,200 sq. ft headquarters that his brand's called home since last year. "People assume that designers are threatened by change. And I think it's important to make it clear that it's change that drives us forward – for any good designer. And those designers that I admire out there are those people who change...if someone can change but still stay within their own DNA, I think that designer is doing a really great job."

Though Barrett's too modest to spell it out, that kind of measured progression is precisely what he's achieved since he founded his namesake label at the turn of the millennium. To fully understand Barrett's unique influence on menswear, however, you have to go back a few years earlier than that.

Freshly graduated from the Royal College of Art, Barrett found himself working at the (pre-Tom Ford) Gucci, where the maximalist opulence of the 1980's still ruled supreme. "I thought it was a great education to work for such a fantastic brand," he recalls. "But at the same time, in my heart of hearts, I dreamt of a minimalist, pure design ethos for a brand that, in my mind, didn't exist." Inspired by "the simplicity of the Japanese" and the utilitarianism of his idol, Helmut Lang, Barrett had a clear vision of what contemporary menswear should look like. The only problem? Where to pitch it.

"The person who I felt was most constantly creative and constantly challenging themselves and moving forward was Miuccia Prada," he explains. "I just thought, why don't I approach them and suggest I design a menswear collection that would be for the husband of the Prada woman, or the boyfriend or brother. And no one was doing that at that time so that was my pitch...and it's not necessarily the same aesthetic. It's the counterpart to the Prada woman's aesthetic."

As everybody now knows, Prada and her husband, Patrizio Bertelli, accepted his offer: and the rest is fashion history. With a handful of iconic collections Barrett and Prada defined the menswear aesthetic of the millennium, blending tailoring with sportswear, nylon with worsted, and the wanterly ugly with the wilfully chic. To

call what Barrett achieved at Prada revolutionary is no understatement. And one need only glance at the way those archival pieces are fetishized on social media, at the way they're mimicked by contemporary labels or even at the nylon renaissance currently underway on the runways of Prada itself, to see what is, ironically, the timelessness of Barrett's zeitgeist-defining designs.

Is he flattered, then, that a younger audience is rediscovering some of his seminal early work – and, in some cases, essentially copying it? "That's the craziest thing about fashion, especially when you age within fashion. We've been around the block a few times," he chuckles, "so we feel that everybody has the same knowledge of fashion as we do – all the baggage that we accumulate with pleasure over time...But then people of a younger age never lived through Helmut or Margiela, or early Prada, come to that. So they're not aware of it. And so I get why people are redoing it and it's actually the right moment to do it because it was a great period of design. It had a message and it was very pure and it had a point of view... It was quite radical at the time."

If the kind of understated garments Barrett has remained faithful to no longer seem quite as radical as they might have done twenty years ago, then perhaps that's because minimalism has transcended the trend cycle to become something of a menswear mainstay. For many guys, the look Barrett helped establish is simply now the norm. And though some may mistakenly attribute his aesthetic to one or more high-street copycats, they'll be missing what makes a Neil Barrett garment so special. "I think that what I do as a designer...is that I am minimal, I'm quite simple," he reasons. "At the same time it's rather complex...because of the amount of work it took...It's just a black coat, but we're trying to get that black coat to fit perfectly so that when

All cloth
NEIL BARRETT
Watch OME

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Blue Sweater: Capsul
Polo: Figura
Watch: March L.A.B

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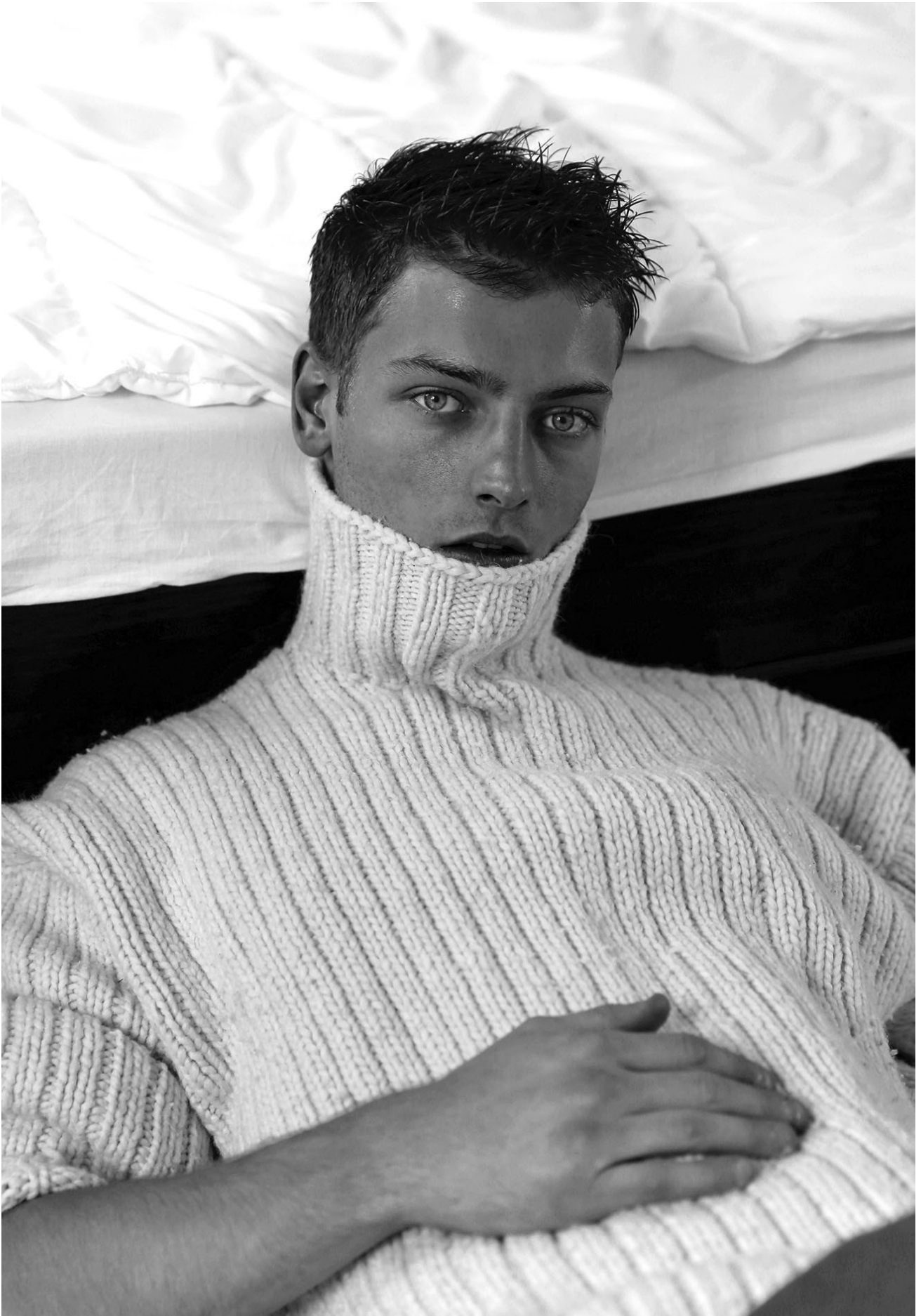
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黑色高领衫、酒红色西装、
酒红色长裤均为 Boss

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