

The catwalk was literally paved with gold when Burberry presented their latest summer collection in a milanese palazzo. Shades of creamy beige, yellow and antique gold dominated in a collection, which also suited Christopher Bailey's image as the fashion scene's golden boy.

After having graduated from the Royal College of Art at 24, Bailey was first hired by Donna Karan in New York and then by Tom Ford at Gucci in Milan. For the past five years as creative director at Burberry, he has given new life to a British institution which this year celebrates its 150 years.

In November Bailey was elected Designer of the Year by British *Vogue*. Nevertheless, the 33-year-old designer is probably the most low key person in the business.

"I'm from the North of England, where people don't like too opulent or too decadent fashion, so I think my approach is more down to earth. I don't like intimidating fashion, where you approach a very tiny audience. I see myself as a people's designer. I love the idea of democratic fashion, which works for many different people and not just for a very fashion oriented kind of person," says Bailey at Burberry's head office in Milan situated off the famous shopping street, Monte Napoleone.

Bailey is eloquent, focused and good spirited and could be from the country side, as well as from the city of an indecisive social background – a mix which also characterises Burberry's broad audience.

Within a few years, Burberry has grown into a multi-million dollar company which appeals to anything from British pensioners to Madonna.

In a fickle fashion world, Burberry remains as British as the queen, afternoon tea and bad weather – 'Burberry weather' as employes call it. The company was founded in 1856 by Thomas Burberry, who invented the weather-proof raincoat, and its famous trench coat which is Bailey's main reference, was originally used by the British army in the trenches during the World War I. Later it became cult in films such as *Casablanca* with Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart.

While the Burberry London line is based on classic designs, Burberry Prorsum – which takes its name from the Latin word, meaning 'forward' – is presented at the fashion shows and portrays the new, modern sides of the Burberry woman.

"I always try to sum up Burberry's history and this time I imagined how a young, English debutante from the 60s would dress today. So I translated the couture ball

gown fabrics into the Burberry signature and the Burberry icons, such as the trench coat, the pleated skirt and the coat," says Bailey.

Old Burberry belts and buckles were turned into a new pattern on dresses and skirts while old Burberry photographs by Lord Lichfield inspired him to reinvent the trench coat and use coloured silk ribbons as belts.

"The collection is aspirational in the sense of quality, and in the sense that you dream to look like that. For me that is what fashion is about. That people can actually imagine themselves in my clothes, instead of looking at it and saying, 'ooh, that's interesting, but it's not for me'.

"As soon as I'm done with a collection, I automatically start thinking about the next one. It's almost like a sixth sense – I start seeing things in a new way. I work very much by an instinct, a feeling and a mood. My role is to sense when the time is right for a particular style."

Bailey's role encompasses much more. He oversees the home collections, works on advertisements, new perfumes and he's involved in the interior design of the shops. He visits factories and even designs accessories for dogs.

"One of my strengths is that I'm able to compartmentalise all my different projects. I have hundreds of different things going on and I feel stimulated by them. Of course, I'm always apprehensive and I hope that people will like what I'm trying to do. But I'm not someone who gets nervous about things," says Bailey who is nevertheless embarrassed about receiving awards.

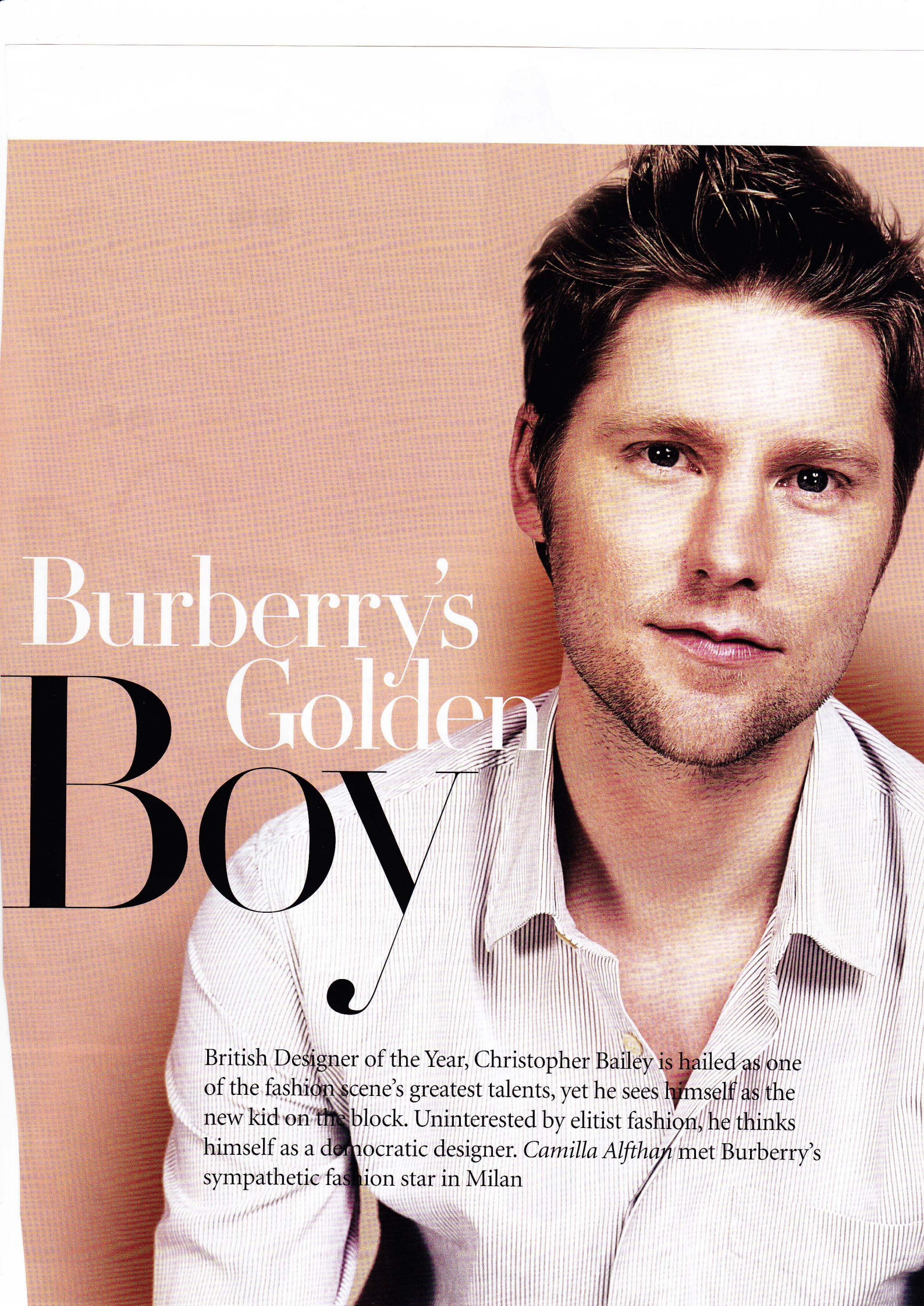
"I'm always chocked when I'm given something. I feel like I've only just started, like the new kid. I'm probably not anymore, but I still feel that way. I'm someone who works very hard and I don't see my friends and family as much as I would want to. When I do something, I always do it 100 per cent."

Before the presentation of his new collection he was involved in every little detail. He listened to hundreds of different music tracks, to find the right ones, he chose the stone that was used on the floor, the stools people sat on, and the drinks they were given when they came in, just as he chose the little square gold candles in the hall, that resembled the square Burberry Brit perfumes which were given to guests.

To Bailey, it is important that everything in a room represents what a designer wants to express. Some call it perfection, to him it is about passion.

"People always ask me what's next, now that I've achieved everything. But I don't feel that way. I'm someone who doesn't plan things and who lives from day to day. It is the moment which is important to me, not the future."

For the same reasons he has never thought about establishing his own label.



Burberry's Golden BOY

British Designer of the Year, Christopher Bailey is hailed as one of the fashion scene's greatest talents, yet he sees himself as the new kid on the block. Uninterested by elitist fashion, he thinks himself as a democratic designer. *Camilla Alftan* met Burberry's sympathetic fashion star in Milan

FASHION burberry

“For me it’s enough to be content and creative, and challenged everyday. I never wanted to see my name out there. I never wanted fame or yachts or my own jet. I’m a very private person and I lead a very simple life. To my friends back home I’m the same as I was 20 years ago. They don’t know my everyday routine. They know that I’m a designer and sometimes they see me in a magazine or a newspaper and they kind of laugh about it,” he says, laughing himself.

In London he lives in a ‘work apartment’ in Mayfair, and in Milan he owns a minimalistic pied-

à-terre in the Naviglia area. When he’s not working he spends his time at his Georgian house in Yorkshire, where he grew up and where his family and friends still live.

“I think the reason why Burberry has been succesful is that we never tried to copy somebody else’s succes. We always believed in the heritage as the foundation of the company, and I feel very passionate about

it. If you don’t look at what you have, it’s difficult to move forward. Sometimes the problem is that people want to start from zero and forget the past and do something new just for the sake of it, but if there’s no soul, it’s impossible.”

It was Donna Karan who taught him to follow his instincts and to do what he belives in, and Tom Ford worked by the same philosophy.

“Donna took an immense risk when she hired me directly from school. And Tom took a risk as I didn’t have much experince when I arrived in Milan.”

“My years at Gucci were wonderful and crazy, because we were travelling all the time. We would have a meeting in New York and then Tom would say, ‘lets look at fabrics in Los Angeles’ and then the day after; ‘let’s go to Paris and do a fitting’. It was a different way of working. Tom was a jetsetter who had homes in London, Paris and Santa Fe. I’m a different person and I approach my work in a different way. Neither is right or wrong.”

The interview is coming to an end, as Bailey is getting ready for an advertisement meeting, where he’ll plan Burberry’s new campaign. This time, however, it won’t feature his favourite model and close friend, Kate Moss after her much publicised drug abuse.

“It’s weird how it was picked up in the press. Kate will always be a part of the Burberry family. I feel very close to her. But we decided at the time that it wasn’t suitable to do the next campaign. Kate’s an amazing woman and she’ll pull through. We will soon be together again”

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