

Ladies Man- Fifteen Minutes with the Divine Tim Gunn

Written by Claire Perkins

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It's a common misconception that Brad Pitt is the most loved man in America. It isn't Pitt, George Clooney or even Johnny Depp who truly has the hearts of American women. From what we've gathered it's Tim Gunn, star of TV show "Project Runway" and Chief Creative Officer of Liz Claiborne. He has it all; a cultivated knowledge of fashion and art, an amusingly expansive vocabulary, the passion to enlighten and inspire real women, catchy phrases like "Make it Work" and a disarmingly delightful air about him. We spent [fifteen monumental minutes](#) with Gunn at a [Scottsdale Fashion Square event](#) in March and learned about his start in fashion, his new book "Gunn's Golden Rules" and how to avoid becoming fashion victims.



Claire Perkins: Do you want to tell me a little more about the event today; you are releasing the spring lines for Liz Claiborne's brands-

Tim Gunn: We are. We are very strategic about where we bring our fashion events and we are thrilled to be here in Scottsdale and we have three of our biggest brands here- we have Kate Spade and Juicy Couture and Lucky Brand Jeans. Our aim is to really give people some education- it's not just clothes parading down a runway- there's a narrative and it's about helping people understand how items can transition their wardrobe, how to wear one item two or three different ways, how to take a look from day to evening.

CP: So you're sharing tips, it's not just a fashion show...

TG: No, no, no- it's all about information. Then we have a question and answer session afterwards, they can ask anything they want from style to runway, then we have our meet and greet.

CP: Awesome- you're here for a while.

TG: Yeah! I have to tell you, I so sincerely love these events- I love being with real women who have real issues.



CP: How does it feel to be the most loved man in America by women?

TG: You flatter me. Well, I embrace it with a huge amount of seriousness and a huge amount of respect. And I really sincerely want to help people. I always open by saying "If getting fashion right were easy, everybody would look fabulous." Fashion isn't easy.

CP: That actually leads me into my next question- Every woman has those moments when they aren't quite sure about a trend.

TG: And they *should* have those moments.

CP: What would your advice be to women to keep from becoming fashion victims?

TG: This is the perfect question. Because when you chase trends, you end up being a victim. I think most people want to feel current- they want to feel like they know what's going on in fashion- so it's to look for items that are trend-aware, without being trendy. If you ask yourself this question- "Will this still be relevant a year from now?" and if you have any question about it, then no, it's overly trendy. And one thing that I'm very happy about in fashion today, and it's exemplified in many of the items we have, is that classic silhouettes are back- like the trench- and there are many different variations on it. Color is certainly in, pattern is in for the spring. But those are such dicey areas, so the only way you really know is to try it on and bring as much critical objectivity to how you look as you possibly can. If there is any part of your viscera that says "oh, I don't know", your viscera is probably right.

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CP: So you almost suggest to play it safe?

TG: Well, at the same time- I'm all for taking risks, I'm all for pushing the boundaries of what might be acceptable to us, but within limits. The reaction should be more like an epiphany where you think "Wow- I never thought this would work" as opposed to "If I wear this for long enough, maybe I'll get used to it." It has to be more of an epiphany- a "wow" moment.

CP: You have written a book, and you have a new book coming out this Fall- Gunn's Golden Rules. Can you tell me a little bit about it, and your #1 rule?

TG: Oh god, there are 16 of them.

CP: 16 rules?

TG: Well my number one rule is "Make it Work!" (laughs). That is my number one rule. It's subtitle is "Life's Little Lessons for Making it Work". I wrote it as though it were a morality tale written to students in my office. So it's about how to navigate the world with respect for yourself and your fellow mankind, how to navigate the world responsibly- and it's not a rage, it's not a rant and raving kind of book. It's really about good tangible lessons using a lot of personal anecdotes. And, I'm really very proud of it. Actually, the book can be pre-ordered now on Amazon.

CP: Since we're talking fall, what are some things you see coming out this fall that might be timely for our piece? What are you seeing that's exciting for fall?

TG: It was a very somber New York Fashion Week. Lots of dark neutrals, though I will say black and white is always in.



CP: What is one classic item all women should own?

TG: Well, the one item I believe every woman and every man should own is a classic blazer. Because it's the easiest way in the world to dress up two ubiquitous items- a T-shirt and a pair of jeans. It's so easy. And of course it can be personalized, as well.

CP: So, you haven't always been focused on fashion. You've done fine arts, sculpting...

TG: And taught students in a lot of design disciplines. I really didn't become associated with fashion full-time until I assumed the chairman's position at Parson's.

CP: You climbed the ranks- you began in admissions?

TG: Teaching the whole time- I was in admissions, I was associate Dean for 13 years. I've been gone for three years. This is now my third year anniversary at Liz Claiborne.

CP: So you just hang out at Parson's during Project Runway.

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TG: Yes. During the month that we tape.

CP: So you've done Parsons, you've done TV, red carpet, you're an author- What is next for you?

TG: Just- (laughs) being able to stand upright! I'm the luckiest guy in the world, I say it all the time. And I'm really busy!

CP: I can see that on your Facebook updates. So you're currently on this tour of fashion events for Liz-

TG: Yes, but we're going back to New York, because generally-speaking the fashion shows are on the weekends. Also I'm a part of Dr. Oz's new show, and that's been wonderful. I miss the Guide to Style show I had on Tuesdays on Bravo, but this has really replaced that for me. These are women who have- in some cases- dire circumstances. And they really need help.

CP: One last question from a reader- What is your favorite final collection on Project Runway?

TG: Among the winners? Oh god, that's so difficult. Owing to his relative youth- When I made the home visit I really though "Christian could win this." Christian Siriano from Season 4. And I was worried that the fact that he was 21 was going to be an obstacle. It was also the case of Daniel Vosovic, Season 2. And the judges even said "You're too young for this" which I wanted to ask them "Why'd we put him on the show?" So, I thought (when I saw the collection) that he could really win, and I sat him down during the visit and said "You need to find a business partner and come up with a business plan to serve as a retort to the judges, should they say you're not ready for this win." And he did. He's been fantastic. So can I leave it that way? I'm proud of all of them, but I'm really amazed at Christian's dogged determination and tenacity and the continued evolution of his talent.

Click Next for a question quickfire with the divine Tim Gunn...



Tim Gunn Question Quickfire

What was your last big splurge?

My apartment.

What are you most vain about?

Me (laughs). I have no ego, but I'm vain.

What are you most shy about?

Basically, I'm a very shy person, and it was teaching- 29 years of it- that caused me to come to terms with that. It was either going to kill me or cure me. Basically, I'm a very shy person.

Pick Your Poison.

A Manhattan, on the rocks.

Favorite book?

Oh my god- it all depends on what mood I'm in. The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann.

What TV show can't you miss?

Two- How I Met Your Mother and The Big Bang Theory.

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Any Pets?

Regrettably, no. I travel too much, I couldn't do that to a pet.

What's for breakfast?

Dunkin Donuts coffee, and their chocolate glazed donut.

What do you find easiest to forgive?

I find that fashion mistakes are very easy to forgive.

What do you find impossible to forgive?

Rudeness.

Biggest indulgence?

Free time. Is that fair?

Who is your mentor?

Many people- my mother, my boss, I am always saying Diane Von Furstenberg. She is the person I go to when I'm really in a jam.

Where are you happiest?

I am not an unhappy person. I'm the luckiest guy in the world. I'm happy wherever I am.

What piece of art would you most like to own?

I live with a lot of artwork- I just gave a piece away to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington because they were having a retrospective of this artist and I thought I shouldn't have this- they need it. It was a painting on paper by an artist of the name of Anne Truitt. She was a mentor when she was still alive.

Favorite vacation spot?

I haven't been on a vacation since the summer of 2001.

Most treasured possession?

I'm a thing person- I have a lot of things. But no, I'm not a hoarder. If anything I'm kind of OCD. It's a Chinese screen that my mother and grandmother bought- I'm very sentimental about it. It's in my office at Liz.

Favorite fictional character on TV?

On television? I guess Barney, on How I Met Your Mother.

Favorite song?

Anything Aretha Franklin did in the 60's.

Always...

Always be confident in what you're wearing.

Never...

Unless you're at the beach, never bare your midriff.

