

Superstar hairstylist Sam McKnight has had a storied career, sought after by the world's leading photographers, fashion designers and most famous women alike. But he's not about to rest on his laurels.

**BY DANA WOOD
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
ANTHONY MAULE**

Suffice it to say that Sam McKnight isn't often found reminiscing over the mountain of clips he's accumulated throughout his stunning, 30-year career. The superstar hairstylist, who has worked with every major photographer from Richard Avedon and Irving Penn to Patrick Demarchelier and Bruce Weber, is far too busy tearing into the 21st century for that.

A miner's son from Ayrshire, Scotland, McKnight—who currently calls London home—juggles his myriad editorial assignments with runway work (for a slew of venerable houses, including Chanel) and trots the world on behalf of Pantene, for which he serves as a global ambassador. Then there's all the forward-thinking, artsy projects that fill his calendar, such as the wildly inventive short films he helps create for photographer Nick Knight's uberedgy SHOWstudio.com.

If anyone could have comfortably stuck to print, it's McKnight, who has long had his pick of top-drawer sittings. By his own estimate, he still devotes 50 percent of his time to magazine work, happily taking a chance on new editors, photographers and makeup artists if the proposed story appeals to him, as with the portfolio here, photographed by Anthony Maule with makeup by Ozzy Salvatierra. "I'd never worked with Anthony before," says McKnight. "And I knew Ozzy as an assistant to Lucia [Pieroni], but had never worked with him directly. It was great. Really exciting."

That enthusiasm over exploring new avenues of creativity has long driven McKnight. Nothing if not prescient, he dove into other mediums 10 years ago by teaming with Knight and other collaborators—including makeup artist Val Garland and designers John Galiano, Gareth Pugh and the late Alexander McQueen—to create elaborate, often otherworldly, short fashion films.

Knight says he has filmed every sitting he has done for the last 20 years, so many of the shorts found in SHOWstudio's rich archives are spin-offs of magazine assignments. But as a bellwether of where fashion is headed, within the last few years, he's been

commissioned by several companies to just shoot the film and skip the still pictures or ad campaign to which it would have previously been attached.

McKnight is savvy enough to see the handwriting on the wall, but rather than bemoaning the loss of the old, he's looking squarely forward. "It probably is the end of an era," he concedes of the decline of print work. "It would be foolish not to recognize that. But the end of one era always brings the beginning of a new one."

And great hair is great hair, whether it's viewed in the pages of a glossy magazine, on a red carpet or on some hip twentysomething's iPad.

Clearly, McKnight delivers on that front, as well as several others. "Sam has a very interesting mixture of talents," Knight says, from extraordinary technical expertise to an "encyclopedic" knowledge of fashion imagery. "If you say to him, 'Well, it's bit like that Sarah Moon picture from 1974, mixed with a little of that Bill King feeling,' he'll know what you mean," says Knight. "He gets the reference, whether it's from film or photography."

Of course, McKnight brings plenty of his own references to the set. For one of the shots in this portfolio, for instance, he opted to channel a *Parallel Lines*-era Debbie Harry via hair extensions. "Rather than putting black underneath, we used dark green," he says. "It's just bringing one thing to it that makes it modern rather than retro. Strong color is of the moment right now."


Modernity is a major force in McKnight's work. To him, that translates into one key notion: simplicity. "Even if it's a rather big style, it has to have an element of simplicity to it," he says, "a kind of ease that reflects confidence, rather than an overbaked look that wears you."

McKnight is enamored of a ramped-up—but accessible—take on hair: that whole "you, only better" vibe that reads effortless but actually requires time, elbow grease and heaps of talent. "If I had to describe my style as a hairdresser," he notes, "I'd say that it has a kind of sexy, glamorous energy—and life and reality to it."

In addition to his immense styling chops, Knight applauds McKnight's ability to put models and celebrities

Dress by Missoni;
bracelet by Aurelie
Bidermann; ring by
Pamela Love.





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Dress and scarf
by Celine; ring by
Solange Azagury-
Partridge.

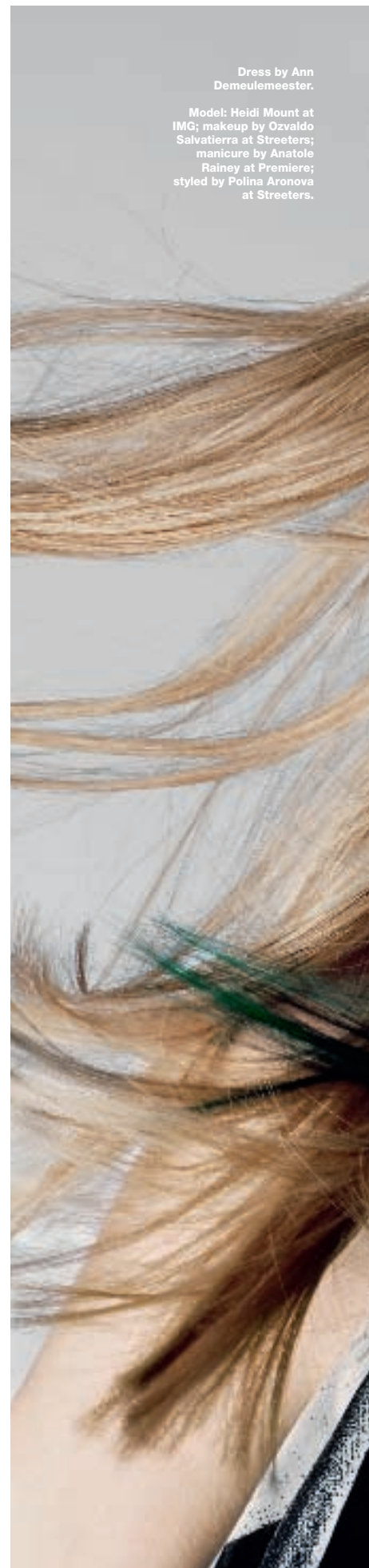
Opposite: Shirt by
Hussein Chalayan.





Dress by Ann
Demeulemeester.

Model: Heidi Mount at
IMG; makeup by Ozvaldo
Salvatierra at Streeters;
manicure by Anatole
Rainey at Premiere;
styled by Polina Aronova
at Streeters.



at ease. “He’s brilliant with people,” Knight says. “When someone has spent three hours in hair and makeup, and they get in front of my camera, they must be in the frame of mind that they’re dying to deliver their best performance. Sam prepares people to walk onto set completely enthusiastic about having their photo taken. They’re in such a beautiful and lovely mood when they’ve been through Sam’s hands. The fact that he’s able to put them in that emotional state is priceless.”

Garland, who recently teamed with her hairstylist pal for 28 Lady Gaga shorts shot by Knight in a scant two days, also bears witness to McKnight’s people skills. “Sam is enigmatic, charming, very funny,” she says. “But he’s also deadly serious about his work. He’s definitely a solution finder.”

That focus and professionalism extends to his work for Pantene, the hair care brand marketed by Procter & Gamble. McKnight logs 30 days a year, give or take, traveling to different markets around the world to demonstrate the looks he crafts for shows like *Dsquared*, *Fendi*, *Balmain* and the aforementioned *Chanel*. He also makes the rounds of the product giant’s research and development facilities, from Darmstadt, Germany, to Kobe, Japan, to Cincinnati. “I get to see a lot of the stuff that doesn’t even have a name yet,” he says, sounding a bit like a kid in a candy store. “Their technology is extraordinary.”

Ask what informs his creativity after all these years and McKnight says simply: “Sometimes tons of books, old movies. Carrying around seven or eight bags of stuff helps, too, because there’s always something in there to use. I also think just being aware of your surroundings—seeing

people and exhibitions and such—all of that is important.”

Press him further, however, and he’s quick to steer the spotlight on to someone else. “I’m incredibly inspired by the people I’m with,” he says. “We’re lucky in this business, because we’re surrounded by talent like Nick Knight and Karl Lagerfeld. You’d really have to be something not to be inspired by these people.”

Another person from whom McKnight has drawn inspiration, but for very different reasons, is the late Diana, Princess of Wales. First introduced by British *Vogue*’s Anna Harvey and photographer Patrick Demarchelier, McKnight became Princess Diana’s personal hairstylist for seven years. And without question, he is responsible for some of her best looks, such as the slicked-back style that enchanted the international fashion crowd at 1995’s CFDA Awards.

“I’d done that for her in private many times,” he says of the look, the polar opposite of the poufy bob she usually sported. “But she always use to feel that she needed to get the full Lady Di drag on for her public. I’d say, ‘God, why don’t you just leave your hair alone?’ And she’d say, ‘No, these people need to see Princess Diana.’ Because a lot of times she was meeting the ill, or the elderly. And I totally respect that.”

Even her appearance at the CFDA was selfless, recalls McKnight. “She was there for Liz Tilberis’ sake. She would never have gone for her own ends, just to get attention for herself,” he says. “But that night, I said, ‘Look, you’re in New York, you’ve gotta look drop-dead fantastic, and I’m slicking your hair back.’ She was so nervous about it, but I think she carried it off.” A typically modest comment from a superbly talented man. *

