

MARTIN GREEN



OUTLAWS

FASHION RENEGADES OF LEIGH BOWERY'S 1980s LONDON



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INTO TABOO

Madonna released 'Into the Groove' on 15th July 1985, and that's how I can date my first trip to Leicester Square.

Leigh Bowery's notorious club night Taboo on the dancefloor erupted as Leigh threw himself on the ground and the room was filled with smoke, screams and dancers sniffing poppers as DJs Jeffrey Hinton and Rachel Auburn played a crazed concoction of Hi-NRG, Bollywood, Italo disco and 'Into the Groove', which we heard five times throughout the night, sometimes directly after it had already been played. Taboo was unpredictable, unabashed and unforgettable. A new court had taken over London and Leigh Bowery was king.

Taboo closed in 1986 and rapidly became mythical. Then in 1991, erstwhile agitator Matthew Glamorre asked if I would like to start a weekly club night with him at Maximus. Together we launched Smashing and along with Michael Murphy DJed a mix in the spirit of Taboo, so when Leigh first arrived and immediately began pogoing to X-Ray Spex, I felt especially honoured.

He swiftly became a regular and in 1993 his avant-garde art-rock garage band Minty played their debut gig at Smashing. But that's another story. Now, after years of running clubs, I know about second nights. Openings are packed, but it can take a while to build up a regular following. Taboo was no exception, but although it wasn't busy, the people attending were the most dressed-up provocateurs in town and word rapidly spread.

Lads in cropped jackets strutted around in black and white BodyMap leggings and Dr. Marten's steel toe-capped boots, while a group of girls danced together in plastic coats, PVC miniskirts, go-go boots and great big Jackie O sunglasses. Then at midnight Leigh made his entrance wearing a double grey wig with big pink spots covering his jacket, trousers and face.

When I embarked on co-curation of the:

Fashion Renegades of 80s Exhibition with

James Lawler and NJ Stevenson, I specifically

wanted to put back into history the frequently

forgotten figures from that era. I spent over two

years contacting people on social media and

asking friends of friends while searching through ex-clubber's wardrobes, sheds and attics to find hidden gems. Style writer Ben Cobb called me 'the Indiana Jones of curation'.

This was a difficult task as many designers only produced for a short period and in very small quantities. Mark Lowings and Syrie Pantoni of Mark & Syrie are a prime example; they only produced collections for four years before disappearing. The impoverished duo slept on floors while tailoring suits from garish rugs and tourist tea towels, which then sold to Barbara Streisand and Madonna. I discovered a few rare pieces and found Syrie, who had left London, changed career and has kindly contributed to this book.

As I discovered more and more pieces during my treasure hunt, I was constantly amazed at the skill, imagination and expertise that produced such a wonderful array of inventive designs. In particular, Elmaz Hüseyin, whose

astounding work her sister found in boxes in her parent's loft, unopened for 40 years, observing the world of Taboo and the designer

The brilliant Elmaz, who tragically died in 2019, was part of a group of influential graduates from St Martin's School of Art including Stephen Jones and John Galiano. I recently discovered that her fellow student Peter Dink created T-shirt designs before his stellar

career as an internationally renowned artist.

through Peter who suggested we photograph the pieces in this book flat rather on mannequins which we did thanks to Dominic Harris, who built a giant light box in his studio. Other pieces were shot at Westminster University Menswear

Archive thanks to Andrew Groves, who founded the UK's only educational institution dedicated to creating a major collection of contemporary menswear. On the pages that follow, you'll

find those photographs along with interviews with their designers – compiled with help from BlueVision co-founder James Lawler – first-hand accounts from those who were part of the scene and stories from those who wore the pieces.

I must thank original club kid David Cabaret, who now works as a specialist costume maker for Hollywood movies, for helping find many pieces including his own, and restoring them back to their former glory after years of disco damage.

For this book and the Lawler exhibition, I wanted to evoke the thrill I experienced as a teenager who inhabited the scene; continual surprises, radical glamour and the creative unpredictability of the 1980s, when working-class kids were paid to go to college, accommodation was cheap, squats were accessible and nightclubs were our social centres.

A time when anything seemed possible.



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TIMELINE

1962

Education Act passed requiring local authorities to pay tuition fees and provide maintenance grants for first-degree courses.

1967

Kensington Market opens in West London.

Sexual Offences Act passed, decriminalising homosexual acts between men aged over 21.

1969

The Royal College of Art awards degree status to its fashion course, followed by St Martin's School of Art and Kingston University.

1970

Joan and Sidney Burstein open Browns on South Molton Street.

1971

Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren open Let It Rock on the King's Road, later rebranded as Too Fast to Live, Too Young to Die followed by SEX, Seditionaries and finally Worlds End.

1972

London's first Gay Pride march.

1974

Covent Garden Market opens.

1978

Steve Strange and Rusty Egan take over Tuesday nights at the Blitz wine bar in Covent Garden. New Romantics are born.

1979

Margaret Thatcher becomes Prime Minister.

1980

The Face and *Blitz* magazines launch.

Leigh Bowery arrives in London from Australia.

1981

Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer marry in St Paul's Cathedral. Diana's dress, by the Emmanuels, places the 'romantic' fashion trend firmly in the mainstream.

The Cha Cha club, run by Michael Hardy, *Sex*, *Blame* and *Scarlett Canon*, opens at Heaven. Leigh Bowery attends the club.

The Greater London Council (GLC) starts directly funding small LGBT groups and organisations.



1982

The Terence Higgins trust is set up after Terry Higgins dies of AIDS-related illness at St Thomas Hospital, London.

Boy George first appears on the cover of the band 'Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?' tops the UK charts.

Hyper Hyper, a unit providing stall space for new designers, opens on Kensington High Street.

Michael Clark becomes resident choreographer at the Riverside Studios.

Steve Strange takes a group of British designers including Stephen Linard, Stephen Jones and Ann Demelemaester to Paris for a fashion show to promote the launch of Visage's album *Anvil*.

Circus, the peripatetic warehouse party run by Alan Ford, La Paz, Jeremy Healy, Patrick Lilley and Lu Morgan, launches and is later featured on the ar TV program *South of Watford* where Leigh Bowery is among the interviewees.

Chris Sullivan, frontman of Blue Rondo à la Turk, and hairdresser Ollie O'Donnell open The Wag Club pub and alternative venue The Bell opens in Wardour Street. The club hosts the UK's first King's Cup event, with 25 artists from the US.

Total Fashion Victims opens at The Wag, hosted by Stephen Linard and with DJs Princess Julia and Jeffrey Hinton.

Olli Wisdom, singer in the band Specimen, opens goth club The Batcave on Dean Street.

1983

The Enterprise Allowance Scheme gives unemployed people £40 a week to set up their own business. Pete Burns and the band are dressed in Dear

Susanne Bartsch holds New London in New York fashion show, followed by London Goes to Tokyo year later.

The British Fashion Council is formed to promote the British fashion industry and support London Fashion Week.

Philip Sallon opens the Mud Club in Leicester Square with Tasty Tim and Mark Moore DJing upstairs. Tim is interviewed about 'gender bending' on the release of his single 'Sugar, Sugar'.

1984

'Relax' by Frankie Goes to Hollywood reaches number one in the UK despite being banned by the BBC.

The Michael Clark Company dances to The Fall playing 'Lay of The Land' on BBC2, with costumes by Leigh Bowery and make-up by Trojan.

Katharine Hamnett, wearing a 'Don't Mess with the Pershing' T-shirt, meets Margaret Thatcher at a reception at 10 Downing Street.

John Galiano's St Martin's School of Art graduation collection 'Les Incroyables' inspired by the French Revolution, is bought by Brown.

The UK miners' strike starts in March and lasts almost a year.

1985

Dphre & Glesne top the UK charts with 'You Spin Me Round'. Pete Burns and the band are dressed in Dear Bright's graduate collection.

Leigh Bowery and Tony Gordon open Taboo at Maximus in Leicester Square, with Jeffrey Hinton and Rachel Auburn as DJs.

Leigh Bowery and Trojan are photographed by Shei Rock in their 'outer space' look for The New Glittera featured in The Face magazine.

Psy-Fiase opens on Wednesdays at Heaven, one of the first clubs in the country to play house music.

The Africa Centre in Covent Garden hosts Jazzie B's Soul II Soul sound system on Sunday nights.

An estimated 15,000 people, including mining communities showing solidarity in return for gay support during the miners' strike, march at Gay Pride.

The Limelight opens in a disused chapel on Shaftesbury Avenue with decor by Michael Costiff.

ABC top the US dance charts with 'Be Near Me' wearing clothes by Leigh Bowery, BodyMap, Elmaz and Vaughan & Franks.

Bob Geldof launches Fashion Aid at the Royal Albert Hall.





1986

Designer Martin Degville of Kensington Market boutique YaYa scores a hit with debut track 'by Jimmy Trindy, with DJs Princess Julia, Mark Missile F1-11' by Sigue Sigue Sputnik.

John Crancher opens Anarchy at Studio Valhalla, Kingly Street, Soho with Jeffrey Hinton and Confusion as DJs.

South of Watford devotes an episode to Leigh Bowery with comedian Hugh Laurie shadowing him first at home, at a BodyMap show and finishing at Taboo.

Madame Jojo's cabaret club opens on Brewer Street.

Hail The New Puritan, a 'fictional' documentary about dancer and choreographer Michael Clark, is broadcast on Channel Four featuring a scene in Leigh Bowery and Trojan's flat.

The Clothes Show, a weekly fashion programme hosted by Jeff Banks, Selina Scott and Caryl Franklin, begins on BBC1. Leigh Bowery is given regular guest appearances.

The House of Beauty and Culture opens in Dalston.

An article in *The Mail on Sunday* exposes the drug use at Taboo and provokes the club's closure.

1987

Daisy Chain opens at the Fridge, Brixton, run by Jimmy Trindy, with DJs Princess Julia, Mark Lawrence and Jeffrey Hinton.

Princess Diana opens the UK's first purpose-built AIDS unit at London's Middlesex Hospital.

Government-issued leaflets with the words 'All Don't Die of Ignorance' are delivered to every household in the UK.

Shoom, the first weekly acid house all-nighter, opens in Southwark hosted by DJ Danny Ramp.

1988

Section 28, prohibiting the 'promotion of homosexuality' by local authorities, is introduced by the Conservative government.

DJ Mark Moore has a UK number one hit with landmark acid house track 'Theme from S'Express' using early sampling techniques.

1989

Kinky Gerlinky drag balls run by Gerlinde and Michael Costiff open at Legends in London's W End, hosted by Winn Austin, with DJ Princess J

INTRODUCTION

'I remember seeing the 1960s film *Smashing Time* on the telly in the early 1980s, all about coming to London and being famous and getting fabulous clothes. And I remember thinking: "Oh, can that happen to you?" Can you have a life like that where you come from a working-class home and then you can be discovered, and you can make it and suddenly your life could change?'

—David Cabaret
performance artist

The London that Leigh Bowery encountered in 1980, when he first arrived from the Melbourne suburb of Sunshine, was a place where things were starting to happen. Three new magazines, *Tes*, *Face*, and *Blitz* had launched that year, an indication of a sea-change of style in the capital that was infiltrating popular culture. A post-punk synthesis of youth fashion and subculture had begun to be noticed – most particularly at Steve Strange and Rusty Egan's weekly night at the Blitz wine bar in Covent Garden. The New Romantic look (as its denizens refused to be called) was recognisable in the designs of the St Martin's fashion students who frequented the Blitz, in the street-style photography in the pages of pop bands such as Spandau Ballet and Strange and Egan's own band, Visage.

Avidly devouring any information on the British New Romantic scene that he could find, it was this that shaped Bowery's expectations as a 19-year-old. Ambition, a grounding in technical fashion education and a sewing machine were his initial resources in the journey to become the central figure in a scene of his own making.

OPPOSITE:
Rachel Auburn and
Leigh Bowery, 1980

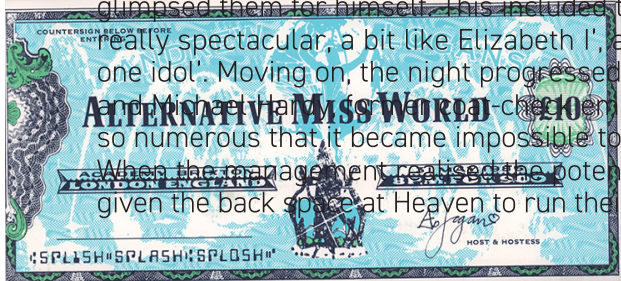


Associating with a group of talented and driven designers, artists, performers and musicians, Bowery was quick to absorb the ever-changing atmosphere of self-expression in clubland. It was not long before his presence and vision infected the creative output of mid-1980s London with the radicalism of Taboo.

MEETING YOUR HEROES

Bowery later told his friend, the designer Richard Torry, that 'the Blitz was over and done with by the time I arrived because news reached Australia a bit too late.' Night shifts at Burger King, 'because my money was running out and I hadn't met any fabulous people', were detrimental to an aspiring nightclub personality, but when Bowery saw an advertisement for sculptor and designer Andrew Logan's Alternative Miss World party in *Time Out* magazine, he asked for the evening off. It was at the fancy-dress ball extravaganza that Logan had been running periodically since 1972 that Bowery first met the drag performer Yvette the Conqueror, which led to a change of fortune.

Yvette took Bowery to Steve Strange and Rusty Egan's new venture, Club for Heroes: a David Bowie-themed night on Baker Street. Since the Blitz, the media had been fascinated with the stars of the new club-centric fashion scene and Bowery finally glimpsed them for himself. This included the exotic Blitz Kid Kim Bowen, 'looking really spectacular, a bit like Elizabeth I', and Strange, 'at that point, my number one idol'. Moving on, the night progressed to the Cha Cha club, run by Judy Blame and Michael Harty, for whom employees at Heaven whose friends were so numerous that it became impossible to get past them to retrieve your jacket. When the management realised the potential of the alternative crowd, they were given the back space at Heaven to run their own club. Bowery encountered Scarlett





ABOVE
Leigh Bowery
at Busby's, 1985

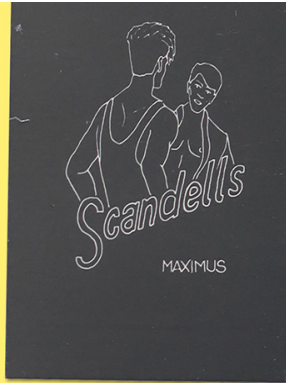
Cannon on the door, a hairdresser at Antenna magazine cover girl with 'pure white hair shaved at the sides, and earrings which were two chicken She just sat there and looked bored by everybody arriving.' Spotting Blam Stephen Linard and other really famous club people was just at the beginning Yvette took Bowery through to the main club: 'This was exactly what I was looking for. It would happen the day I got off the plane. It took about nine months, but then it did happen. I was so excited. I remember there were mirrors on the side of the dancefloor at Heaven and I kept watching myself and checking out everyone else and trying to copy them.'

WHEN WE GET TO LONDON, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A SMASHING TIME

The Blitz scene was remarkable because so many of the regulars became successful in their fields; this book celebrates what happened next. In a matter of months, a new influx joined the original Blitz Kids – a little too young for the excitement and anarchy of punk, yet affected by the way it opened up youth



LEFT
David Cabaret at
Daisy Chain in 1988



Like Leigh Bowery, they were hanging on the coattails of possibility that the Romantic crowd forged, and ready for something new. Some of the fashion whose pieces are featured in this book and shown in the exhibition, were, like David Holah and Stevie Stewart of BodyMap, Richard Torry, Judy Blain, Stephen Linard, already established as part of the nightlife scene. Some, such as Elmaz Hüseyin, Mark Lawrence and Dean Bright, came to study fashion and became part of the club crowd. Others, including Paul Bernstock of Bernstock, Annie La Paz and John Crancher, ran clubs themselves. Students and graduates such as Rachel Auburn, Vaughan & Franks and Joe Casely-Hayford, and underground designers such as Wayne and Gerardine Hemingway of Red or Dead and M. Syrie, followed the do-it-yourself ingenuity of established scenesters like Paul Degville, Jane Kahn and Patti Bell and set up in markets.

Among the Blitz Kids were the inhabitants of a squat in Warren Street in central London, which was first set up in the late 1970s and became notorious as a breeding ground for creative talent. These included pop stars Boy George and Marilyn, film director John Maybury, make-up artist Lesley Chilkes, DJ Priya Julia, milliner Stephen Jones, stylist Kim Bowen and fashion designers Lesley Sheldrick and David Holah. The Warren Street squat afforded its occupants alternative ways of living and working, away from the constraints of the burgeoning capitalist society. Young creatives coming to London in the early 1980s continued to benefit from the broken urban sprawl where properties were occupied and space adapted. Straitened councils struggling with derelict buildings often turned a blind eye to squatters or offered peppercorn rents, satisfied that buildings were at least partially maintained. Since 1962, local education

'Kensington Market, the Great Gear Market on the King's Road and Camden Market were established centres of 1980s subculture.'

authorities were required to pay the tuition of students attending full-time first-degree courses and provide them with a maintenance grant. The fact that art schools had finally granted fashion courses degree status in the 1970s meant that many of these students were fully funded.

St Martin's School of Art, then on Charing Cross Road, was very much part of the buzz around Soho at the time. Designer Dean Bright remembers from his time there: 'Boy George would come to St Martin's on the first day of term because everyone turned up in a look. So he'd come painted green with Stephen Linard and all of that crew. There was a performance element, and he'd even go into college. The rest of term, you'd go and sign the register then go to the bar or to the Capacetto coffee bar or to the pub.' Patisserie Valerie on Old Compton Street was a daytime meeting place and hangout, and curator Iain R Webb remembers: 'They used to put cakes on the table and you would see how many you could eat without paying for them. Someone would order some toast so you'd be able to sit there a bit longer. You'd literally survive on a cup of tea and sit in there for half the day.' This was the Soho where the Colony Rooms harboured artists Lucien Freud and Francis Bacon, and jazz musician George Melly mixed with young clubbers at the Soho Brasserie before they left for The Wag, the club on Wardour Street opened by Chris Sullivan, frontman of Blue Rondo à la Turk, and Antenna hairdresser Ollie O'Donnell in 1982. In the 1980s Soho was still a mix of the seamier side of London life and old communities. Old Compton Street was a busy central London thoroughfare choked with diesel fumes from black cabs. The Raymond Revuebar nestled among the sex shops and stairwells of Walker's Court, steps away from the bustling Berwick Street market and round the corner from Lina Stores, the Italian grocers. Cheap after-hours drinking bars like the Cozy on Berwick Street and The Pink Panther on Wardour Street meant