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## MARK BRYAN IN CONVERSATION WITH MR.PEARL: "I'VE ALWAYS HAD A THING FOR HIGH-HEELED SHOES"

MEET MARK BRYAN, A TEXAN MECHANICAL ENGINEER-TURNED-INSTAGRAM SENSATION WITH A  
PENCHANT FOR PENCIL SKIRTS AND HIGH HEELS

BY MARK BRYAN IN CONVERSATION WITH MR. PEARL   APR 19, 2021

**M**ark Bryan is a Texan mechanical engineer who works in robotics packaging and lives in Germany with his wife of eleven years. Bryan came to global attention last year, when his Instagram went viral after he started posting images of his daily outfits

in his signature “hybrid” look: traditionally men’s tops paired with pencil skirts and stiletto heels. The sixty-one-year-old father of three loves Porsches, coaches American football, and believes that clothing has no gender.

“I’ve always had a thing for high-heeled shoes,” he says over Zoom. “It started back when I was in college forty years ago. I had a roommate that was sort of a girlfriend, who was as tall as I was, but she loved to wear four-inch heels, so she was naturally always taller.” Bryan’s then-girlfriend encouraged him to try on her heels and he’s been wearing them on and off ever since. “I wore them with jeans, but I grew up in a fairly small West Texas town, so I wouldn’t walk into a country western bar wearing high heels,” he says. Four years ago, he added skirts to the mix. “My main message is that I don’t feel any different when I’m wearing a skirt or when I’m wearing pants. To me, it’s just a piece of cloth and a fashion style. It has nothing to do with sexuality or anything like that.”

JACKET ISSEY MIYAKE, SHIRT GANT, SKIRT MAXMARA, TIGHTS FALKE, SHOES KKIRA FEET  
JOSE CUEVAS

JACKET, SKIRT, SHOES MARNI, T-SHIRT SUNSPEL, TIGHTS FALKE  
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Standing six-feet tall without heels, and possessing a lean, athletic physique, Bryan cuts a striking figure in his ensembles. “I call it my hybrid style

because it's kind of half masculine and half feminine, like electrical charge,” he says. “For some reason, I tried dresses and they just didn't fit—the shoulders, the neckline was never right, and the sleeves were always too short.” The pencil skirt idea came to him watching Meghan Markle’s character Rachel in the American legal drama *Suits*. “I always liked the way she dressed,” he says. “She wore pencil skirts and white blouses, so that was my inspiration. And I thought, Well, I can do that with a men's shirt and still maintain some masculinity. I don’t really consider it crossdressing because I think clothes should be more gender neutral: I’m not crossing anything.”

Bryan, whose Instagram following was at 270,000 at the time of going to press, has been inundated with positive messages from people around the world. “I'm not surprised that I get a lot of men that say, ‘You've opened my eyes,’ or ‘You give me the courage to be myself.’ But the surprising thing is that I get a lot of women too that say, ‘I want to wear men's clothes and you've helped me find the strength to just not care what people think.’ I also get a lot of mothers that have young sons or daughters that want to wear [different] clothes, and are showing them that you can wear anything without shame.”

While Bryan’s particular brand of androgyny motivates others, it’s improved his own life, too. “I'm getting old, so I've noticed that I've started to slump over, and wearing high heels, you have to stand more upright. It’s actually given me a little bit of confidence inside, too, not only confidence in what I'm doing [with fashion], but also confidence throughout what I do during the day.”

VEST AND SHORTS FENDI, SHIRT PRADA, TIE BRUNELLO CUCINELLI  
JOSE CUEVAS

TOP JORDAN LUCA SHIRT (UNDERNEATH) AND TIE POLO RALPH LAUREN SKIRT BOSS TIGHTS FALKE SHOES MIU MIU  
JOSE CUEVAS

Bryan's iconoclastic style made us think of Mr. Pearl, who famously wears a corset twenty-four-hours a day, seven days a week (except when bathing),

maintaining an eighteen-inch waist. The fashion industry's premier corsetier since the early 1980s, Mr. Pearl, now fifty-nine, taught himself to make corsets in the traditional way, a fascination sparked as a young boy growing up in South Africa, where he would lace his grandmother into her undergarments. Mr. Pearl moved to London in his twenties, where he worked as a dresser and costume designer by day, and a nightclubber and performer at night, befriending fashion editor Isabella Blow and performance artist and club promoter Leigh Bowery. He moved to Paris to pursue his career as a corsetier after meeting designer Thierry Mugler at the Love Ball in New York and went on to work closely with Alexander McQueen. He has also created corsets for the collections of John Galliano, John Paul Gaultier, Christian Lacroix, and Chloé as well as custom pieces for Dita Von Teese, Kylie Minogue, and Kim Kardashian, a process that can take anywhere from one to six months, with a minimum of three sittings.

Here, Mark Bryan asks Mr. Pearl about the artistry and practicalities of corset wearing.

***MB: I've noticed a bit of resurgence in corset wearing by women. Or is it just my wishful thinking?***

MP: There are some very dedicated corset wearers of both sexes, while others may be influenced in the short term by popular trends. Throughout history, what constitutes a fashionable silhouette has varied. But to those who follow corsetry, it is not simply a question of fashion, more the form and function and effects achieved through the correct foundation.

***MB: If a person like me has a hard time working off that fat around the waist, is a corset going to help?***

MP: If you wear it daily and wear a belt to exercise, this will bear results after some time.



***MB: Are men's corsets designed differently from women's?***

MP: Yes and no. The male body is generally less supple than the female, and of course there are the obvious anatomical differences to make allowance for, but the basic principles of construction are the same.

***MB: If wearing a corset, how can you disguise it without wearing bulky shirts? What do you do with all the strings? Can you be stealth while wearing a corset?***

MP: Planning your look is important. To achieve this, you would need a corset of fine mesh and to ensure that the lacing is tucked in and cut short, possibly a Skims (or equivalent) stretch body over it. Of course, your choice of garment and fabric on top should be carefully considered!

***MB: If you can get past the early months of corset wearing, do you have to continue wearing one, or does it all cave back in when taking it off? Will you still have a somewhat slimmer waist in summer when you can't wear a corset to the beach?***

MP: The longer you train with a corset and belt you will benefit from the results of a contoured, slim waist. If you discontinue the training, you will gradually lose the trim waist.

TOP GUCCI, LEGGINGS MUGLER, SHOES ABRA  
JOSE CUEVAS

TOP PRADA, RUFF, SLEEVES, SHORTS KASIA KUCHARSKA, TIGHTS FALKE, BOOTS RICK OWENS  
JOSE CUEVAS

***MB: Have you experimented with carbon fiber rods or other modern materials for stiffness?***

MP: I use purpose-made metal spiral boning. There is nothing to compare to whale bone (actually, cartilage, the use of which has been banned for many years), which has a 360-degree axis and "breathes," warming with the body to give a glove-like fit.

***MB: Do corsets offer and lower back support as well?***

MP: A well-fitted corset always supports the spine and abdomen, enhancing the alignment, hence their use for orthopedic purposes.

***MB: If you have seen my pictures, how would I look better in a corset?***

MP: Well, you enjoy high heels, and they complement corsetry so I suspect you would feel further elevation and feel greater pleasure.

COAT AND TURTLENECK DIOR MEN  
JOSE CUEVAS

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