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## INSIDE ERDEM'S WORLD

Meet the man who  
dresses Alexa Chung,  
the Duchess of Cambridge,  
Samantha Cameron  
(shall we go on?)





PHOTOGRAPHY: PHILIP SINDEN

# ERDEM

## COMES TO TOWN

His name is a red-carpet fixture, and A-listers from Michelle Obama to Alexa Chung want to be first to wear his elegant dresses. As Erdem Moralioglu opens the doors of his first London store, he gives Stella a tour and showcases his new-season collection

Writer: *Kate Finnigan*

Left: Long-sleeved roll-neck dress, £2,240. Right: Bracelet-sleeve jacquard coat, £1,580. Previous page, left: Long-sleeved fitted dress, £3,640. Previous page, right: Long-sleeved trapeze dress, £2,225. All from Erdem, 70 South Audley Street, London; 020 3653 0360

## He has seduced women with the whisper that the feminine can be powerful

'I'm a megalomaniac,' murmurs Erdem Moralioglu apologetically as he steps back from arranging a dress on a model during our photo shoot. A perfectionist, certainly – show me a designer at the top of their game who isn't. But if the sweet, softly spoken Moralioglu is a megalomaniac (and boy, that's a mouthful), I've been working with the wrong definition.

It is the end of August, two days before the first Erdem store opens on South Audley Street, in London's Mayfair.

The site is crowded with builders, electricians, visual display teams and assistants. Erdem, 37, dressed in his 'uniform' of navy cashmere sweater, jeans, white Stan Smith trainers and black-framed spectacles, oversees as his mannequins – made by the same company Yves Saint Laurent used – are dressed and undressed and dressed again, rails are shifted and a green velvet sofa's skirt is hemmed, because in Mayfair even sofas have seamstresses.

Designed by Erdem's architect and boyfriend, Philip Joseph, this is not one of those white fridge-like boutiques that tries to intimidate your credit card out of its wallet. Erdem's idea – as with his most recent catwalk shows, where the sets were an integral part of the theme – has been to envisage the space as a home for the 'Erdem woman' of his imagination.

'I love the idea that it's about her, not me,' he says in the clipped Canadian accent that becomes more anglicised by the season. 'It's almost forensic. What she would sit on? What would she live with? It's like her little Mayfair pied à terre.'

She has great taste, this woman, surrounded as she is by mellow mid-century furniture and highly covetable art, which Erdem has kindly 'lent' her from his own collection. Pieces include sketches by Jean Cocteau and Andy Warhol and a 1933 David Hockney photographic collage of Fountains Abbey. 'I started collecting things a while ago. If something went well or there was a good show, I'd buy a piece of photography or a drawing.'



## 'I have this great privilege to dress these extraordinary, intelligent women'

### Erdem's leading ladies



From top: Keira Knightley, Alexa Chung, the Duchess of Cambridge, Rosamund Pike, Emma Watson

The Erdem woman's walls are a soothing blue-grey and her diamond-shaped marble floor tiles are from the same quarry they used for the marble at Versailles. There are oversized exotic plants and, downstairs in a little courtyard, a fernery, recalling the Erdem s/s 2015 collection inspired by Victorian hothouses. And then there are the clothes, of course. Lots and lots of clothes.

It is 10 years since Erdem, a graduate of London's Royal College of Art, set up his label making luxurious, romantic but entirely modern womenswear. In famously sumptuous fabrics, with attentive craftsmanship, the look was and remains neither overtly sexy (although you can look very sexy in an Erdem dress) or radical (although you won't find a style magazine in the world that doesn't photograph Erdem clothes). He has seduced women with the whisper that it is OK to be feminine; that feminine can be modern, strong and powerful. It has won him accolades such as the inaugural *Vogue* Fashion Fund award and last year's British Fashion Council Womenswear Designer of the Year, and seen him stocked by over 170 prestigious international retailers.

His clothes are loved by stars such as Alexa Chung, whom he escorted to this year's Met Gala ball. Alexa wore a glorious violet brocade strapless gown from his new autumn/winter 2015 collection. 'I love Alexa,' he says over tea later at the genteel Connaught hotel. 'She's great to go to something like that with... it's just so nice to be there with a real friend.'

Emma Watson, too, was photographed in a recent issue of *Vogue* in vivid green Erdem. 'Have you seen what she's been doing with the UN? It's amazing,' Erdem says. 'I have this great privilege to dress these extraordinary, intelligent women, and there's no better compliment than that, really.'

Michelle Obama, Samantha Cameron, Kristin Scott Thomas, the Duchess of Cambridge have all worn Erdem. He does like the Royal family. When the subject of Queen Elizabeth II's historic landmark as our longest-ruling monarch comes up and I say I feel a bit sorry for

Queen Victoria, he leaps to HM's defence. 'Oh no, I love our Queen!' he says. 'She's incredible. She's so chic. I've met her actually... four times. The first time she was wearing a beautiful white brocade dress with a star brooch. It was amazing. We met at Buckingham Palace and obviously you don't address her directly, but I said, "It's very rare I get invited to a party where there's a Vermeer staring into the back of my head." And I got a little smile. Some might say a laugh. I have witnesses.'

Erdem was born in Montreal and grew up in its suburbs. The son of a Turkish father and an English mother, both now deceased, he has a twin sister. He was a dreamer as a child. 'Living in the suburbs, daydreaming in my basement. That's the fashion designer: take a funny kid in the middle of nowhere, give him an active imagination and there you go.'

His creativity was fed by his mother, Marlene. 'She loved art - Manet, impressionism - and EM Forster. I think she liked anything that was English because she was homesick, and most of the programming you got was through PBS [Public Broadcasting Service]: Merchant Ivory, a little bit of *Prime Suspect* and *Hyacinth Bucket*.'

His mother has featured in some of the imagery he has used for catwalk show invitations. 'She's always there,' he says. 'It's difficult when things like [the store opening] happen because it's something she should see. I hate that. She was such an important part of who I am, both of my parents were. I'm sad that neither of them are here now. But I was very fortunate to have them, they did instil this kind of fearlessness: if you want to do it, you can do it and be good at it.'

Back in the shop, Erdem is arranging books and bags on shelves and plinths, wondering whether the mannequin should be in pink or purple. He muses, half seriously, on how embarrassing it would be if nobody turned up when the doors open. What about announcing it on Instagram the day before? He wrinkles his forehead. 'On Instagram? Wouldn't that be too much?' he says, that megalomania surfacing again. ☐