

QUEEN OF GLAM

During awards season, Reem Acra is the designer A-listers trust to make their wardrobe wishes come true. Here, she reveals what happens behind the scenes



Two days before last year's Academy Awards, Kristen Stewart cut her foot on a piece of glass, leaving fans to wonder if she'd even attend.

In addition to the starlet's legion of devoted "Twiards," one woman was particularly interested in her convalescence – Reem Acra. The Lebanese designer had been told that Kristen, who was scheduled to present an award that evening, had selected a blush-pink gown from her 2009 bridal line as her dress of choice. But what if she didn't show up?

"I'm sitting here, watching [the red carpet on] TV with the phone in one hand," says Reem. "Her team told me, 'No, no, no, she is in your dress.'" Fortunately for Reem, they were true to their word. Wearing a single Jimmy Choo heel and with a set of crutches in hand, a glowing Kristen took to the carpet in the hand-beaded number.

Since starting her bridal line in 1997, followed by a ready-to-wear collection six years later, Reem has been dressing royalty both of the Hollywood and the to-the-manor-born varieties.

Celebrity clients Angelina Jolie, Halle Berry, Olivia Wilde and Kate Hudson slip into a Reem Acra not just for the glam factor but also for the construction. "I have a look that is alive, that is sensual and glamorous. It's really like Old Hollywood with a modern state of mind. Plus, I fit well." We caught up with Reem at The Room at Hudson's Bay to talk designing for the stars, Oscar night and fashion emergencies.

How much time do you spend creating a gown?

Oh my god, it's complicated! It takes a couple of months from A to Z, but each dress is different. Sometimes, a dress doesn't take much time because it's easy and understated. Other dresses are so complicated – they can take 10 times longer to create. Sometimes, I will say, "OK, I am not satisfied, take it out – I can't think about it right now, bring it on the next round of fittings. I need to rest to think about it." It's a long process. [Laughs]

Do you design a dress with a certain celebrity in mind? My most popular dress was for Olivia Wilde [at the 2008 Emmys]. I remember draping that dress on set and starting to work with the fabric on a bodice, and I said, "Oh my gosh, that is definitely Hollywood. They're going to eat it alive!" I wanted to make it simple but elegant, flowy and romantic. I knew that a Hollywood star would wear that dress.

Has a celebrity client ever requested any last-minute changes to a dress? Halle Berry's dress for the 2003 Golden Globes was white, and the day before, her team told me they wanted it in baby blue. Within less than 24 hours, we dipped the dress in a baby blue colour, and it was magical.

How far in advance do you know that a celebrity will be wearing your dress? I know when they walk down the red carpet. Even if it's custom, you never know for sure. You'll know when you're watching TV and you have the phone in your hand and you're calling someone and saying, "Where is she? Is she really walking the red carpet in my dress?"

Is that what happened with Kristen Stewart at last year's Academy Awards? Kristen was late [to the awards] because she stepped on glass. My brother, who is a doctor and doesn't have anything to do with fashion, called me and said, "Well, she has stitches in her foot, I don't think she's going to wear your dress." I'm like, "How do you know?" Then, 20 minutes later, she walks out with the crutches, and thankfully she was wearing my dress. **H**

REPORT: JULIA SEIDL

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: SAMIR HUSSEIN/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; FRANCOIS GUILLOT/FP/GETTY IMAGES; JIMI GELES/TEPATRICK MCMULLAN CO/SIPA USA; JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES; STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; GREGG DEGUIRE/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTOPHER POLK/GETTY IMAGES; SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES (OSCAR)



Halle Berry (left) was a vision in sky-blue Reem Acra at the 2003 Golden Globes. The frothy lilac confection Olivia Wilde (centre) wore to the 2009 Golden Globes wasn't her first gown by Reem – she chose the designer for the 2008 Emmy Awards. Right: Even with crutches, Kristen Stewart looked ethereal at last year's Oscars. Opposite: Taylor Swift was angelic at the Winter's Whites Gala. Custom Reem Acra gowns kept Angelina Jolie (inset) glamorous while pregnant in 2008.

OPERATION: OSCAR

The designer fills us in on the process behind creating a red-carpet-worthy gown

THE MATERIAL

Reem's creations start with the tapestry. "I am presented with many types of embroidery so I can pick what I like. Sometimes, I will start by sketching the embroidery."

THE SHADE SELECTION

When choosing the colour of a gown, the designer keeps her client and the season in mind. "On a woman who wants to look young, I would use a purple colour. But, for example, if it is for fall, I want the purple colour to have a bit of navy blue in it."

THE FIT

The inner construction and fit is of utmost importance. "I think about everything inside, even how I finish it. Is it going to scratch you? I think about whether the bustier is going to lift or not – if you are a size C, will this bustier be enough for you? Will you be pulling your dress up or will you feel comfortable in it? Will the weight of the skirt be held by that kind of bustier?"

