

PIN-UP

DAVID
ADJAYE
DANIEL
ARSHAM
SHIGERU
BAN
BARRY
BERGDOLL
BEN VAN
BERKEL
RICARDO
BOFILL
SANTIAGO
CALATRAVA
RAFAEL DE
CÁRDENAS
DAVID
CHIPPERFIELD
CLAUDE
DALLE
ODILE
DECQ
DELFINA
DELETTREZ
FREDRIKSON
STALLARD
SIMON
FUJIWARA
CYPRIEN
GAILLARD
MARTINO
GAMPER
JEANNE
GANG
ZAHA
HADID

PIERRE
HARDY
JACQUES
HERZOG
SOPHIE
HICKS
JUNYA
ISHIGAMI
JOHNSTON
MARKLEE
WILLIAM
KATAVOLOS
FRANCIS
KÉRÉ
DAVID
KOHN
HANS
KOLLHOFF
REM
KOOLHAAS
DANIEL
LIBESKIND
GREG
LYNN
NIKLAS
MAAK
PHILIPPE
MALOUIN
PETER
MARINO
JÜRGEN
MAYER H.
THOM
MAYNE
ROY
MCMAKIN
RICHARD
MEIER
PAULO MENDES
DA ROCHA

INTERVIEWS

OFFICE
KGDVS
RICK
OWENS
ANCA
PETRESCU
BORIS
REBETEZ
CHARLES
RENFRO
ROLU
OLE
SCHEEREN
CLÉMENCE
SEILLES
ANNABELLE
SELLDORF
PETER
SHIRE
JULIUS
SHULMAN
HEDI
SLIMANE
ETTORE
SOTTSSASS
OSCAR
TUAZON
RAFAEL
VIÑOLY
ANDRO
WEKUA
ROBERT
WILSON
JAMES
WINES
BETHAN
LAURA
WOOD

LONDON

**SOPHIE
HICKS**

Interview by Emily King

With her boyishly short hair and smart men's clothes, Sophie Hicks is widely known for her sharp personal style. She developed her fashion skills during the nine years she worked as a stylist, first as a teenager for *Harpers & Queen*, then at *Vogue*, and afterwards for Azzedine Alaïa. It wasn't until her mid-20s — with a little indirect help from Madonna — that she discovered her true calling: architecture. After a degree from London's Architectural Association, she went on to design office space, exhibitions, private residences, and shops — for Paul Smith and Chloé, among others. Her Parisian flagship store for Yohji Yamamoto is a miraculous exercise in crafted wood and folded paper. Hicks's style is subtle, quiet, detail-oriented, and elegant. Her spaces are never flashy, but always smart, and often witty. Meeting her in her long, lean mews house home-cum-studio in Notting Hill — which she shares with her boyfriend, children, and pets — I found myself impressed by her poise, determination, and sharp intelligence. But the true focus of my envy was her indoor swimming pool.

Emily King Oh, I'm a big swimmer and I would love an indoor pool like that!
How long is it?

Sophie Hicks It's 12.5 meters.

EK Exactly half the width of an Olympic pool!

SH Well, actually it's a few inches too short, but it doesn't matter.

EK Do you swim every day?

SH I try to. But when I go to the country for the weekend I tend to miss a Friday night. But I'm careful not to miss too many other days. But the real reason the pool is here on the ground floor is because this building's on the mezz and people walk right outside the window. If you have the luxury of space to spread around, you think, "Well, what am I going to do on the ground floor? Do we want to eat there, with everybody watching us having breakfast?" Then you think, "Garage?" But that's a bit...

EK Boring?

SH Yes. So my main project has been developing a façade design for a building in London, right on the street like this, where you get some light coming in and some views in and out. It should be oblique enough that you feel protected, but the wall would still be light permeable. It would solve the problem of being watched, unless of course you don't mind that. I mean, in Amsterdam for instance, they all quite like being watched.

EK The other problem with houses in London — the Victorian ones, at least — is that the raised ground floor is the sitting room. It's the nicest room in the house, but you never go there because you spend all your time in the basement kitchen.

SH Yes, which is horrid. It's much better to live laterally. In a way it would make sense if everybody could sell parts of their houses to their neighbors and chop them horizontally. [Laughs.] While my family and I were waiting for this building to be finished — just after we came back from France — I rented a mansion flat in Holland Park, and it was incredibly nice, just one rambling room after another.

EK When did you live in France?

SH When I bought this house with my ex-husband, in 2003, there was a lot of structural work to be done. While working on the Chloé shops, I got used to employing executive architects: there were so many projects there was no way I could do everything by myself, so I'd do all the design and then hand it over to the executive architect for the day-to-day management. When we started working on this house, I thought: "Why don't I use the architect who did Chloé? I don't have to stand here and check people putting steelwork in, and setting concrete floors!" Rather than stay in London, renting a big flat

that would have cost a fortune, I asked him to manage it all and took off for a year with the kids to Megève in the French Alps.

EK Surely your three children rebelled? How old were they then?

SH Arthur was about 14 then, and he took it quite well. But Edie, who was twelve at the time, said: “Absolutely no way!” But I convinced her by promising to take her horse with us and to drive her to ride every day after school. Olympia, the little one, was fine. She actually loved it. We drove there from England during a boiling hot summer, with a horse trailer, a cat, and five kittens in the car. Every time we stopped something terrible would happen. Once Edie forgot to shut the gate, and the horse escaped. But the journey was actually hilarious fun.

EK You started working in fashion quite early. I read that you edited the *Harpers & Queen* teenage issue in 1977 — you must only have been in your teens yourself!

SH Yes. It’s funny, I actually just came across that issue the other day. It’s absolutely ghastly, but also quite brilliant in a way. They had a very interesting features editor called Anne Barr. She’d teamed up with the writer Peter York, and he came to her with this germ of an idea about a tribe of people that he’d kind of identified, and together they created the “Sloane Ranger.” [“Sloane Ranger” is a 1980s term for a particular breed of well-heeled young Londoner: see the *The Official Sloane Ranger Handbook* by Ann Barr and Peter York (Ebury, 1982).]

EK Had you already found your uniform back then?

SH I used to always wear a Claude Montana sailor suit. It had a white-linen collar, wide navy-blue linen trousers with buttons on the front, and a navy blue linen jacket with gold buttons and turned-back cuffs. It had big shoulder pads, but I took them out. It was quite fabulous and I really loved it. I used to make my mother wash and iron it overnight.

EK How did you get the money to buy it?

SH I’d blagged my way into the Montana show in Paris, and I thought, “Ooh yes, I want that!” But I obviously couldn’t afford it. However there was this man, Ricky Burns, who had a shop with his mother in George Street. Ricky was an incredibly camp hairdresser-type with a gorgeous bouffant. He had one of the few shops that stocked designer clothes. I remember going in to see him and saying: “I really, really want that sailor suit, and I don’t want you to sell it to anyone else. But I can’t afford it!” And they were amazing: they probably gave it to me for half the price, or something.

EK Were you always a particular dresser, even as a child?

SH Yes, but my first memories of clothes are actually dreadful. My mother had a dressmaker who lived in a stinky house on the outskirts of I-don’t-know-where, and she used her front hall as the fitting room. My mother would buy

white-cotton piqué with strawberries printed on it — horrible material — and this old bag used to make me sundresses that were short and triangular, like 1950s A-line with matching frilly knickers and a sunhat. And underneath these sundresses I used to have wear a petticoat to make them stick out. [Laughs.]

EK Now that actually sounds pretty cute. And when did you cut your hair?
SH When I was nine my mother left me at the hairdresser to have a trim, while she went off, probably to John Lewis to buy some more of that horrible material for my sundresses. [Laughs.] The man asked me, “What do you want me to do?” And I said, “Take it off, take it off! Off, off, off! All of it!” So he took it all off. And it’s been like that ever since.

EK Most of your interviews tell the story of your epiphany, when you switched from fashion to architecture. Legend has it that you were flying a big crew out to photograph Madonna, and she canceled the shoot mid-air. Is that true?
SH Yes and no. It was more exhaustion, I think. I had been traveling with Azzedine Alaïa for weeks, working as his stylist for a book. He is absolutely lovely — and still a great friend — but he’s also completely exhausting. He doesn’t need much sleep, and I need quite a lot. During our trips we had all these ghastly disasters, which we now laugh about. We made a trip around America, staying in hotels with kitchenettes, cooking very stinky North African food and setting off fire alarms. It was a hilarious trip, but I got more and more tired because after every shoot Azzedine likes to go and party. He’s like, “Oh, we’re going to see Grace Jones, she’s having a dinner!” And you’d get back to the hotel really late, completely knackered, and then, at six in the morning, I’d hear little mouse-like noises in his room next door. He couldn’t order breakfast, because he can’t speak English, but he’d wait, incredibly politely, until about 7:15, and then I’d hear: “Sophie? *Tu es réveillée?* Sophie? Sophie?” And I’d think, “No! I can’t... Leave me alone... Yes, I’m *réveillée*. Okay, breakfast!” And after a couple of weeks of that I thought I was dead. And then fucking Madonna canceled and I thought, “That’s the last bloody straw, that’s it!”

EK People tend to say that you trained relatively late to be an architect, but it wasn’t that late, it’s just that you started in fashion so early.
SH It wasn’t late, but it felt late. I was only 26 when I started studying architecture, but at that point I’d already done nine years in fashion.

EK What was it like becoming a student again?
SH It was hilarious! The Architectural Association asked me in for an interview, and they said, “Bring your portfolio.” I didn’t have a portfolio, so they said: “Well, you must have some sketches or something.” So I turned up at the AA in top-to-toe Azzedine, and I showed them my fashion-show sketchbooks because we all used to sketch everything on the runways — you weren’t allowed to take photos in those days, everything was very secret then.

- EK** And once you were accepted you started working on your first architecture commissions before you even graduated.
- SH** Yes. In my third year, I worked on the “Pop Art” show at the Royal Academy. We put white linoleum over the entire Royal Academy galleries. We got this cheap white linoleum and stuck it down everywhere, over the plinths and everything.
- EK** Do you think your fashion background meant you were less constrained by architectural convention?
- SH** I’m freer thinking, probably. I look at art a lot, and I think that helps. I do find architects are quite trapped, often — mentally trapped. It helps having been in a different world before going into architecture. Fashion is an interesting world because it captures the zeitgeist. Architecture also has to capture the zeitgeist, but it has to last a lot longer.
- EK** Do you find the timeframe of architecture frustrating?
- SH** No, not at all. You just can’t be frustrated by it. Architecture takes forever, you can’t be in a hurry. You have to see everything over a ten-year span, rather than a half-year span like in fashion.
- EK** Of course there are buildings like the Barbican which already looked dated when they opened...
- SH** But now the Barbican’s fabulous again! Things go in and things go out, that’s what’s nice about architecture. It sort of hangs on in there, and comes round again. One of the reasons I gave up fashion is because I wanted to create things myself. Although it’s quite interesting doing styling, helping to create a look, you’re very much part of a team, which is not a bad thing, but in the end I wanted to be the key creative person.
- EK** But you never wanted to make clothes?
- SH** No.
- EK** Perhaps there’s a parallel between fashion and architecture, in that they are both about housing a body, but in two different kinds of ways?
- SH** I actually can’t bear “architectural” fashion. It just drives me mad when they go on about... They’re always describing Hussein Chalayan as architectural, and it’s just bullshit. He has some very interesting ideas, but it’s often irritatingly conceptual. When Azzedine makes clothes he dresses a body to look more fabulous than anybody has ever looked before. That’s what he does, it’s his great art. That’s why he has to cut every pattern himself, why he’s an absolute control freak. He’s just started allowing his senior tailor to presume to make some tiny changes and bring them down to the workshop for his approval. And he probably wouldn’t admit to it!
- EK** So you think fashion and architecture are completely different?
- SH** Clothes have to house the body and they have to be practical up to a certain

point. But architecture is so much more complicated: there are rules and regulations you have to obey — loads of them. So you lose a lot of the spontaneity. But that's fine, because it needs to last longer. To me architecture should have an emotional impact. The person experiencing it should think, "Mmm, I feel uplifted," or, "I feel comfortable," or, "I really like the way I'm walking around this place." That's the way I approach it.

EK Do you prefer doing retail to residential?

SH I've actually stopped doing retail, although perhaps you shouldn't write that, because if someone incredible approached me... [Laughs.] Global luxury goods went completely cold after we finished the Yohji Yamamoto shop in Paris, and I'm glad to finish retail on that, because I'm really happy with it.

EK What was Yohji Yamamoto like to work with?

SH Very nice. He engages on a very detailed level as well as a general level. We had fantastic meetings, actually. The first presentation went really well. We'd done a deep study on him, his image, his thoughts, and I went off to Tokyo with a book that we'd made for him. I did a 40-minute presentation, and at the end I looked at him, and he uttered, "Fabulous!" And he's quite stern and has a very thick accent, so I thought: "Oh my God, what did he say? Have I done something wrong?" [Laughs.] And finally someone said, "I think Yohji's saying it's very nice, Sophie."

EK One of the worries in retail is that there's a shelf life. Do you know how long they'll keep it?

SH It's always a worry, yes. But it's a very good showplace for him, so maybe they'll keep it for a while. I really hope so.

EK So if that was your last retail project, what's next?

SH I'd like to design a guesthouse-type hotel and run it, so I've been searching for a site or a building in London that I can rebuild. Obviously I won't attempt to run the hotel all by myself: I'll team up with somebody who's made all the mistakes before.

EK Most London hotels are terrible, aren't they?

SH They're often kind of charmless and flashy. You know, "cool" — ghastly! My fantasy hotel is the Bristol in Paris. I used to go there once a month when I worked for Chloé. And it's fantastic; you're part of this vast machine that runs like clockwork, with incredible service. Of course it's not my style at all, but it's so lovely. I'd want to create a place where people can come and experience a city in a way that you could only experience it if you actually lived there. A hotel/guesthouse that feels like a private residence: no reception, no concierge, really, really good service, but hidden. So, breakfast is delivered to you, but put there invisibly; the bed is made during the day, someone tidies for you, but it's as if you're in your own place. And there'd be a letter or booklet, an insider's guide to the neighborhood,

which will say: “The new bicycle shop’s opened up here, but the old bicycle shop’s still down there. And for coffee you can go here, but, actually, a much nicer place is over there.”

And in fact there is something else I would like to do: through my work for Chloé, Paul Smith, and Yohji Yamamoto, I realized that there’s an absolute gap between the company that goes out and commissions a designer or an architect, and the implementation, the actual building process. The people in the companies are not usually educated in that and it causes massive problems. So what I’d like to do is to work as a consultant for brands, to help them pick the right architect, and to be there and explain to them when they’re about to get something wrong.

**EK Let’s end this conversation on fashion. Tell me what you’re wearing right now.
SH Actually, these trousers are Comme des Garçons. But when I was being photographed for PIN-UP earlier last week, I decided that I would only wear Azzedine Alaïa, simply because every time someone does a shoot with me, they always drop the Azzedine — I assume it’s because he doesn’t advertise. So this time I made sure I was wearing Azzedine in every single shot! [Laughs.]**