

Local Color

FROM EAST LOS ANGELES,
A LABEL THAT KEEPS IT REAL.

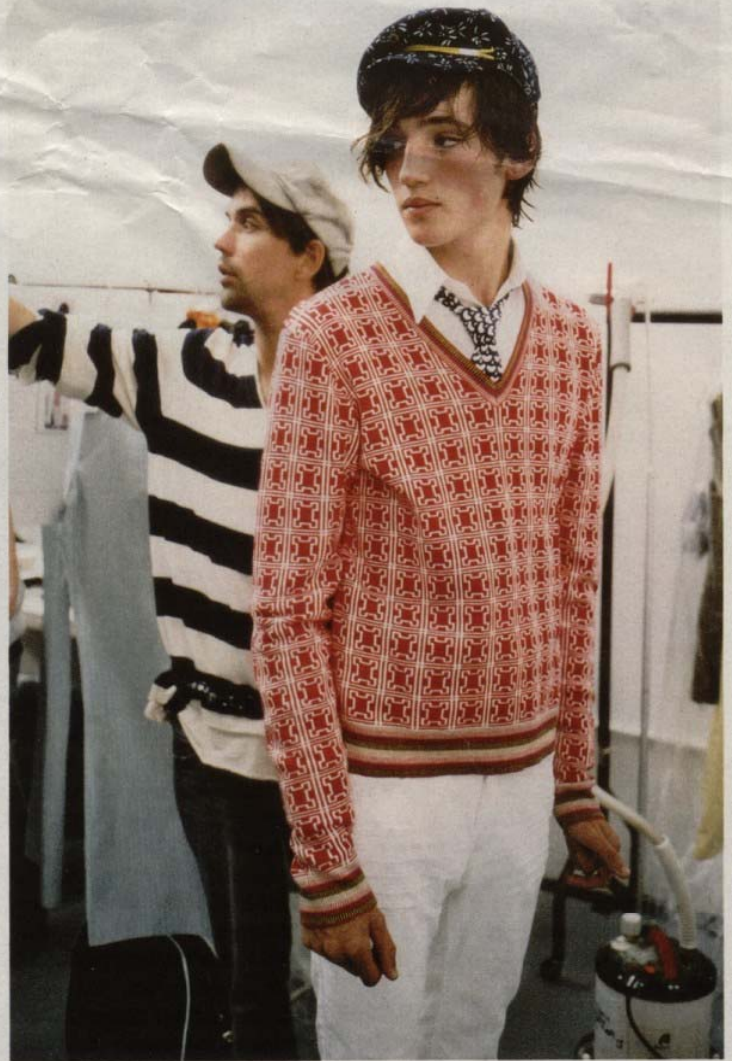


Mention the word *descamisado* — Spanish for “shirtless” — to most men’s-wear designers, and they’re likely to conjure up visions of Puerto Rican go-go boys at the Roxy. But for the English-born James Abbott, who worked for the cult label Body Map before moving to California 11 years ago, the association is somewhat more political. “That’s what Che Guevara and Eva Perón used to call the working poor,” he says.

Abbott lives in Boyle Heights, a Latino neighborhood in East Los Angeles that does not abide by Hollywood’s jeans-and-muscle-shirt uniform. “During my first two minutes here, I saw a group of mariachis hanging out, some guys driving by in a low rider and a Mexican cowboy rocking up the street,” Abbott says. “Men here pay a lot of attention to how they dress. Their clothes are pressed and creased, and the look is always very sharp.” His Los Descamisados label (above) — go to www.losdescamisados.com — features serape-knit polos, T-shirts with tattoo lettering, Dickies-inspired trousers, midcalf shorts and oversize shirts and boxers covered with bosom-heavy drawings inspired by Teen Angels Magazine, a publication popular with Latinos in prison.

Abbott is quick to point out that while Latinos are currently the largest minority in the States, they are underrepresented culturally. “I have some friends that are harassed because of how they speak English,” he says. “There is definitely still a sense of shame about being Latino. That’s why the prints and graphics in my clothes are done by local tagging crews, and my models are just guys from the neighborhood. I want to keep things authentic and show that there is something special here.”

ARMAND LIMNANDER



LONDON CALLING | THE MAN SHOW

One small step for Man-kind, one giant step for men’s wear. At least that’s what they’re saying about the Man show. Held for the first time last September, it not only previews Topman’s stock in trade, but it also reflects the London store’s core belief that fashion no longer intimidates men. For those who can’t go to Oxford Street, select items are at Opening Ceremony in SoHo.

IAIN R. WEBB



NOW SERVING | HOLD THE TONIC

Gin is ready for its close-up. Though most of us associate it with lethal cocktails, and with at least one memorably bad night in college, a new generation of distillers is ignoring its mixed reputation and creating versions that are distinctive enough to convert even the most resistant palates. By United States law, gin must have a flavor dominated by juniper berry, so each brand’s unique profile comes from its secondary notes. Hendrick’s Gin, introduced in 2000, is distilled with 11 botanicals, rose petals and cucumbers, a combination that makes it dangerously easy to drink. No. 209, a sister project

of the Rudd Vineyards and Winery of Oakville, Calif., uses bergamot and cardamom for a round mouth feel, while Damrak, made in Amsterdam (the spirit’s birthplace is the Netherlands), is full flavored, distilled with 17 botanicals. The titan among them, however, is Plymouth Gin. A great gin of the 18th century, it stumbled during World War II, and by the time Absolut’s parent company took interest in the moribund label in 2000, a bottle of Plymouth was as easy to spot as an MG. Now the brand’s clean and smooth flavor has become the mixologist’s favorite. Whatever you do,

don’t waste your time with a gin and tonic: the quinine in the tonic smothers the gin, like dousing a steak with ketchup. Opt for a classic aperitif, like a Negroni. OLIVER SCHWANER-ALBRIGHT

Negroni

MAKES 1 COCKTAIL

- 1 ounce gin
- 1 ounce Campari
- 1 ounce sweet vermouth.

Pour ingredients into shaker filled with ice. Shake and strain into cocktail glass. Garnish with orange twist.