

GOTHAM

THE MEN'S ISSUE

**JON
HAMM**
HEATS UP *THE TOWN*

100
ELIGIBLE
BACHELORS

LEE SCHRAGER ON THE NEW YORK CITY
WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

OLIVER STONE'S RETURN TO WALL STREET

MAKSIM CHMERKOVSKIY DANCES INTO SOHO

ART BASEL'S ANNETTE SCHÖNHOLZER
AND MARC SPIEGLER

58
POWER PLAYERS
Life in the "reel" world



GOTHAM

- 12 Calendar
- 30 Letter from the Editor
- 32 Letter from the *Gotham* Publishing Team
- 34 Binn Shot
- 35 Insight

THE FLASH

- 45 Taking care of business

THE LIST

- 52 Today could be your day.

DEEP DISH

- 57 *To Win, You Must Try*
Emmy Award nominee Ty Burrell revels in the funny side of *Modern Family* life.
- 58 *Power Players*
Oliver Stone returns to *Wall Street*, Maksim Chmerkovskiy dances into Soho, and Francois-Henry Bennahmias revolutionizes Audemars Piguet's brand image. Plus, Sponge Skincare creator Markos Lambros Drakotos, realtor Adam Modlin, *The Spin Crowd* stars and cutting-edge training facility SportsLab NYC.

- 66 *Dispatch*
The son of an engineer, designer Bibhu Mohapatra knows how to build a collection.



66
DISPATCH
Let the fur fly.



30
EDITOR'S LETTER
Tip-top totes



38
INSIGHT
Sundry styles



Non Conformist

Jeffrey Slonim catches up with designer of the day Bibhu Mohapatra.

MID-WORKDAY, a pincushion on his wrist, Bibhu Mohapatra wears black Converse sneakers, slim-fit Marc Jacobs jeans and a T-shirt that reads OBEY NATURE. A sturdy 6-foot-1, the designer hails from Orissa, India, born to an engineer father and a mother who collected silks and saris. "My mother taught me how to look at beautiful things," says Mohapatra, "and my dad helped me to take them apart."

Mohapatra's mother taught him to use his grandmother's sewing machine at age 12. He'd cut up old saris and tablecloths to dress his sister. After Mohapatra received a master's degree in economics from Utah State University, a professor noticed his sketchbook and insisted he apply to FIT. While studying there he was hired by Halston, and when he graduated his draping teacher recommended him to J. Mendel. Mohapatra began as Gilles Mendel's assistant and was design director for the last six of his 10 years at the label. "I started with one pattern maker and two sewers," he says. "And when I left, we had 150 employees."

A birthday fête in Chantilly, France, the day after he left Mendel would change his trajectory. "I met Daphne

Guinness, my muse," he says of the socialite who collects armor. "One of her arms was diamond-encrusted from fingertip to elbow. She had on an antique Vionnet gown and a fox boa."

Mohapatra's first show was inspired by Japanese warrior costumes of the 15th and 16th centuries (there had been an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum). "Guinness knew every piece," he says. X-rays and inner beauty inspired his second collection. "I'm fascinated by the structures that give us shape," he says. "I had a radiologist X-ray snakes, sea urchins and flowers."

Styled by Lauren Santo Domingo, Mohapatra's Fall 2010 show paid homage to the film *The Conformist*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci. Authoritative military elements were imbued with dreamy European elegance. "She listens to me," he says of Santo Domingo. "She herself wears beautiful clothes, but she also has a realistic view of fashion, a good sense of what critics and retailers like. 'You designed it like this,' she tells me, 'but there are five ways we can show it to the world.'" *Bergdorf Goodman, 754 Fifth Ave.; bibhu.com*

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