

THE AUSTRALIAN  
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## MORE THAN ONE WAY TO BE CREATIVE

**O**N FAR-FLUNG islands around the world, people have always had to do more than one job: to muck in and to put enough bread on the table. So you'll find the postman is also the baker, the local fisherman doubles as the ambulance driver and the vicar runs the hotel.

The latter example is actually true of Hotel Saint-Barth Isle de France, on the über-barefoot-chic island of St. Barthélemy in the French West Indies. It is frightfully handy should you want someone to do a bit of Bible reading and fix the drinks at the same time. St. Barths is, of course, a fashion favourite where the French *Vogue* skinnies go for their tans. Oh lucky them! But I can see why they need some downtime – all this multitasking in fashion has become so exhausting.

Take Tom Ford. Not satisfied with having been the force of international fashion for a whole decade, he had to go and make a Hollywood movie, too. Although isn't it a relief that *A Single Man* is quite so heartbreakingly good? Because had it tanked, fashion people

would be rewriting his past to look like his Gucci years were some kind of fluke.

Colin Firth, the actor who is superb in *A Single Man*, has two jobs as well: he has to emote brilliantly while looking so damn hot in his suit (by Tom Ford). The new model Ford, called The Faulkner (after Firth's character) is now available in Tom Ford's menswear stores. (Talking of reaping the rewards of product placement by cutting out the middleman – the glasses Firth wears are on sale, too.)

It seems that a modern creative now has to tap into many areas of expression. Hence Victoria Beckham who, OK, was not that great a singer (though the Spice Girls were quite groundbreaking, I guess) but now, season-by-season, keeps shocking fashion cynics by proving herself as a designer.

My favourite crossover artist is musical impresario-cum-fashion designer Pharrell Williams (pictured) – and not just because he manages to look manly in pink. One of the wonderful things about fashion is, whatever your background, nationality, age, race, there will be common ground. In the case of Pharrell and myself, there's a thorough knowledge of the complete works of Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton and even similarities in our upbringing.

Both our mothers were schoolteachers and we both started work really young, although while I was making pennies after school, he was a multi-instrumentalist who, by the time

he graduated from high school, was all set to work with Madonna, Britney, Shakira and J Lo.

Pharrell's main fashion label is Billionaire Boys Club. He has a label called Ice Cream, too (although his idea to open an actual ice-cream shop hasn't eventuated yet). When I was having lunch with him recently (charming young man, so regrets having had all those tattoos), he was talking about how the perfect creative life is to do everything and anything. "I'm a huge Batman fan, and I've been like, 'I need my own Wayne Enterprises.' So now, Williams Enterprises!" he tells me.

Of course, not everything you try works out quite right. Let's not forget that even Tom Ford had an unsuccessful career as an actor, although being able to seduce an audience has held him in good stead ever after.

"I think it was Edison who said: 'I haven't failed. I've just found 10,000 ways it hasn't worked'," Pharrell tells me as he forks up his salad. "So I don't think any idea is crazy. I think they all deserve to be poked and prodded at; you just never know what will come of it. I discovered in my life that nothing has to be a mistake; it can all make sense and have some kind of brilliant symmetry." I guess the St. Barths vicar might say amen! to that. ■

INTERNATIONAL FASHION EDITOR

MARION HUME IS BASED IN LONDON.



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