



## Dressing for Fame: Johnny Wujek Talks Katy Perry's LED Met Gown and That Time Nicki Minaj's Costume Nearly Made Him Break Down



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*If celebrity status is conferred in red-carpet appearances, then no actress today can compete without the help of just the right stylist. As Kerry Washington once told Glamour after she noticeably upped the sartorial ante, "There were a couple of actresses whom I felt were having the upper hand careerwise—because they knew how to work that red carpet." A carefully crafted collaboration between stylist and client, the perfect look can create an indelible impact on agents, casting directors, and those of us watching from the sidelines. Straight from the epicenter of all things celebrity, we've asked some of the industry's top stylists to share their experiences and impressions from their perch above Tinseltown. With our Dressing for Fame series, we bring you an exclusive, insider look at everything it takes to create those iconic moments captured by a million photo flashes.*

### Johnny Wujek

When you count Katy Perry as a client, it's safe to say that you're used to pushing the proverbial envelope. For stylist Johnny Wujek, Perry's just one of his best-dressed leading ladies (Kate Mara and Ariana Grande also top his list) whose jaw-dropping looks shine on concert stages, red carpets, and at press junkets alike. Here, Wujek talks to Style.com about how he lit up the Met ball, why fashion can be like a high school lunchroom, and what he gets from his mama.

How did you get your start styling?

### **How did you get your start styling?**

I started styling with movies. One of my best friend's cousins was a movie director, and I worked as an intern in the costume department—for free. The woman who was the main costume designer was a big-time stylist, who hired me after the movie to be her assistant. I worked for her for a little under a year, learning the business, traveling, and being on sets, then producers started calling me directly to style jobs on my own. Low budget, but I was in charge! Right away I got an agent and started booking gigs, networking at parties, and collecting clients. It all happened very fast. Before I knew it, I was working every day—sometimes for free, just to build a portfolio. The rest is history.

### **What's your favorite part about your day to day?**

There are so many highlights. I love my job because of all the people I get to interact with. From the showrooms to the costume builders and sewers to the lighting technicians, producers, directors, and, of course, my clients. Every day is always a different experience, prepping and confirming or finding that perfect dress, or seeing the final outcome of a costume I've been working on, or seeing the actual performance live. Seeing people's reactions when Katy walks out in a costume. It's all part of the amazing process. It's crazy to even call it a job because I have *too* much fun.

### **What's been your most challenging experience thus far?**

Nicki Minaj's American Music Awards opening performance. It was a test of time, patience, and my ability to not have a full breakdown. She was opening the AMAs with David Guetta. I had worked with her a few times before and everything went so easily. For this project she was to be a fembot. The costume design was incredible. All the sketches were approved and we were moving forward, until there was a request to modify the sketch, so we did, and then we continued to move forward. Until there was another request to modify the costume. Time was getting closer to the show, and this costume was complex with lights, wiring, building—it was not something you make overnight. Long story short, it was down to the wire getting this costume put together—like, honestly, five minutes before she had to be onstage, we were throwing this costume on her. Running down halls, crying sewers. It was intense. And of course, just as she steps onstage after being wired and all plugged in, her assistant helps her up to the platform, but in doing so switches off the whole LED wire system. So she never lit up. Needless to say, it was the most stressful job I've ever worked on.

### **How do you think styling musicians differs from styling actresses?**

Music you can do more and push the envelope more. You have performance costumes, things that light up and spin. An actress wants designer looks for best-dressed red carpet. They are two different worlds really.

### **What do you do when you disagree with a client?**

Arm wrestle or paper-rock-scissors. Just kidding. I never, ever force anyone to wear something they do not feel comfortable in. If I need to push a little, I do, but never to where things get heated. It's all about the client being happy and comfortable in their clothes. But there for sure have been times when a client won't even try something on, then when I get them to, they end up *loving it*. Those are always the funniest moments.





## Have you ever had a “made it” moment?

I feel like I’m always trying to top myself—trying to do more, do better, push, push, push. But there have definitely been some major moments where I felt very rewarded, like the Katy Perry cover of *WWD* after the Met in the light-up gown. That was fun. I mean, everyone was there that year, and she took the cover *alone*. My first Grammy performance for “Kissed a Girl” was major. Honestly, every day I wake up feeling blessed that I get paid to do something so enjoyable and creative. I will be making it till the day I die.

## How do you nurture your clients’ relationships with designers and brands? Do you find those relationships limiting at all?

Over the years, I have built relationships with many designers and brands through placements, dinners, parties, attending shows, etc. No relationship is limiting unless you make it that way. Like in high school in the lunchroom, I jumped from table to table, I was friends with everyone. That’s just me. I get it from my mama.

## You’re working on *America’s Next Top Model*. How do you think that job informs your work as a stylist?

Well, it airs in 186 countries, so it was amazing for my brand and getting my name further out into the world. Being on *Top Model* was a great experience of a different angle of the work I’d like to be doing: on-camera hosting and teaching and sharing.

## Are there any up-and-coming designers who have you excited?

Loving Baja East. Their loose luxury brand is so something I would spend every day in. Love Timo Weiland and *love love love* Wes Gordon.

## What advice would you give to stylists on the rise and people looking to get into the profession?

*Go for it!* Any opportunity you get to be on set, to assist, even if it’s free work, do it. You will gain experience, and it will lead to many other things. And be ready to hustle. Getting started is the hardest part.

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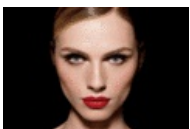
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