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Dressing for Fame: Kemal Harris, Stylist to Robin Wright and Idina Menzel, on Making Sure Her Clients Never Show Up Naked



Alexis Brunswick

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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.

As one part of the bicoastal styling team of [Kemal & Karla](#), Kemal Harris brings her New York sensibility to her enviable roster of clients. Whether she's shaping Robin Wright's killer figure in a custom backless Ralph Lauren jumpsuit or helping Idina Menzel realize her red-carpet potential from behind that powerhouse voice, Harris has a singular aesthetic that draws on both contemporary and historical fashion. Here, she talks exclusively with Style.com about why styling as a pair keeps clients covered, how Feist changed her career, and why she'll never be a yes-man.

—Alexis Brunswick

How did you originally form your partnership with Karla Welch?

We met at fashion week through a mutual friend and always kept in touch. I was working with the singer Feist here in New York and connected her with Karla for her L.A. appearances, and through that connection, our bicoastal styling team was born.

What is the process like working as a duo?

Well, clients are never in one spot for very long. Their movie will premiere in L.A., and then they fly to NYC for all the press appearances. I live in NY and Karla is in L.A., so it certainly doesn't hurt that no matter where they go, we can make sure they're never naked.

Do you think there is a certain sensibility you're expected to maintain as a New York-based stylist, as opposed to being in L.A.?

It's a fact that editorial styling is much different than styling for the red carpet. They almost require different sides of the brain, and neither is easier than the other. Regardless of what medium you're working in, I think it helps to have a very strong sense of your aesthetic, the sensibilities and requirements of your clients, and an almost preternatural grasp of how garments will photograph.

Do you think your clients expect something specific from you, and if so, what is that?

Personally, I think it's so important for a stylist to be honest and straightforward with their clients. They're depending on us to make sure they look their best on their big night. An effective stylist is not a yes-man.

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