

Some people might ask: What does a guy who's been shirtless for at least two-thirds of his life have to say about fashion? If you're one of them, this interview is not for you. Read it some other time, after you've listened to *The Stooges*, *Raw Power*, *Fun House*, *Lust for Life*, and *The Idiot* and realized that Iggy Pop's animalistic physicality has informed style for decades and will continue to do so well after the last time he writhes and slithers across a stage.

Iggy's ubiquitous uniform—pants so tight they could have been spray-painted on, a sinewy bare chest that didn't start aging until his 60s, and Beatle boots or bare feet, depending on his mood—undoubtedly looks at least five times better than whatever you're wearing right now. It was also carefully calculated, like a sleek, stripped-down hot rod built with the single-minded goals of efficiency and speed.

A thorough perusal of archival photos and video of Iggy reveals that he took the same care in his appearance offstage, where he tends to wear a bit more clothing; almost every outfit seems iconic in some way, but also natural and unforced. As far as I can tell, over the past four decades he hasn't worn anything that could be considered embarrassing or dated in 2012. I'm not sure there's anyone else on Earth—save menswear designers who never stray from suits—whom you could say the same thing about.

But Iggy's not just a historical figure. In the 21st century, he has worked hard to revitalize his name, with Stooges tours, records, and collaborations with various clothing brands. His argument for participating in these unabashedly commercial enterprises is that the Stooges never got the recognition and the sales they deserved in their brief lifetime. So if this is the way to finally achieve some payback, he has no problem jumping on board.

As far as I could tell, no one has interviewed Iggy explicitly and exclusively about fashion, so that's precisely what I did.

VICE: Do you remember the first time you understood the concept of fashion or at least being cool?

Iggy Pop: When I was in elementary school, I saw two older boys who were dressed in the 50s delinquent look—jackets with the collar up, dark blue Levi's with the cuffs turned up, and winkle-pickers—and they were leaning against the wall of my school for some reason. They were too old to be there, and one of them said, "Shit." I'd never really heard the word, but it sounded bad. I wouldn't say I thought they were cool, but there was electricity in the air at that moment. Let's put it that way. Then they disappeared, and I thought, "Oh my God, what are the implications?"

When I was about the same age, my great-uncle George Osterberg came from Chile to visit my father, and he brought his daughter with him, who looked and dressed exactly like a male greaser. She had the greasy pompadour, like a young man, and spent a lot of time just lying around, sneering at everything. On a woman, I thought, "Woah, she's bad. That's cool." I was very impressed; I found it attractive.

How about the British Invasion? Did it influence your sense of style, or were you more into American trends? I always liked Charlie Watts's look. I'd go to thrift stores and try to buy suits so I'd look more like him. I was a drummer at the time, so I liked that almost Savile Row

look very much, which he'd taken from American jazz players. The others had a good look, too, and there was this store in New York called Paul Sergeant that imported most of their stuff from London. It was a good place to shop.

There were two chains for shoes in America at the time: The best was one called Cancellation, which was where black people went in the inner city to buy their cheap, flashy Italian models. And then there was something called Flagg Brothers. I didn't know this, but there's a new film out about William Burroughs that I participated in where they mention Flagg Brothers, so I guess it was also a place where... Anywhere with good style is where boys tend to meet boys. A lot of that went on.

During the early days of the Stooges, would it be fair to say that your look was a lot more put together and less raw than it came to be?

Well, I was careful about what I wore. From our second gig on, I looked a lot more like what I've looked like, on and off, since: no shirt, a pair of tight, slim jeans, bare feet, and I had permed hair and a white, painted face. By the third or fourth gig, I lost the perm and the white face, and I started wearing this same pair of shoes that you can see in every photo of the Stooges from mid-'69 to the end of '71. They were these authentic Anello

& Davide Beatle boots. Dave Alexander had brought them back from England because he and Ron [Asheton] had skipped their senior year of high school to go to Liverpool and see what was going on. I used to wear them over and over, and they had holes in the bottom, like a cartoon hobo.

Then, as I began doing more gigs, these flimsy pants I wore would start to rip, and I left the rips in. I thought it looked right. It was the thing at the time for people like P.J. Proby or Jackie Wilson, or even James Brown, to leave loose basting instead of proper stitching in the crotch of the pants. Before the end of the show they'd rip onstage, and that was part of the gig. But I was the first one to just come out with the rips, as far as I know.

“Male dogs smell each other’s dicks and stuff, and then they jump female dogs and do everything to everything.”

Some perceived your style as machismo, but you weren’t particularly macho onstage.

No. I actually think there shouldn’t be any genders. Male dogs smell each other’s dicks and stuff, and then they jump female dogs and do everything to everything. That’s the way humans really are, but there have been elaborate codes adopted to weed out parts of behavior that don’t match whatever gender or social group you want to belong to. And I think that actually cuts both ways, straight and gay—each cuts out or emphasizes certain bits. It’s sort of like using hair spray on your personality. But no, I never wanted to look particularly macho. For one thing, I realized the girls don’t really go for it. *[laughs]* I think ideals of beauty in our society are dictated by those who identify themselves as feminine, at least in their thought processes. Whether those are gay people, or women who are thinking in a particularly devious, savage, amoral manner, which is how women think when they really get down to business. And that’s where the bread is buttered, so I wanted to look kind of smooth, slinky, and super forward.

Then there was your silver period, which seemed to be the evolution of this point of view.

Yeah, I first had these silver gloves when I lived in the Midwest, before I started hanging out with glitter people and competing more in New York and internationally. More glamour became necessary. I was using Nestle’s Streaks ’n Tips on my hair, and that gives a great effect onstage, but it takes four showers to get that stuff off your body. I don’t know if it was popular with streetwalkers, but there it was. It was an actual silver paint that you sprayed on your hair. You could get it in gold and silver at all the cheap drug stores. Then, eventually, it was the silver pants and, later, sarongs. I had this pair of underwear





Iggy in his silver leather pants, which he wore for special occasions, 1972.

I bought at a little kiosk in Piccadilly Circus, where they sold peanuts and cigarettes and souvenirs. They just said SOHO over the penis. I guess they were women's, but I didn't really think about that. I just thought about how cool I would look in them. And I would see pictures of women in knee boots and would think, "I want some. I want to wear knee boots and have my legs show." And vice versa. I'd see biker stuff, the Hell's Angels using, like, wolves' heads or something, and I'd think, "Hey, what about a horse tail?" so I had one of those made up. I'd get stuff out of old Greek and Egyptian books as well.

"Occasionally lone men in cars would slow down and stare at me intently, and I had no idea what that was about."

Where did you get the now-iconic leather leopard jacket featured on the back cover of *Raw Power*?

James Williamson and I were staying in Kensington, and there was a market. I went over there and, it was like Steve Martin in *The Jerk* or something, you know? Like, "Hey, it's me! It's who I am." I bought it that day, and I bought a man purse, like a shoulder bag made out of—honestly it looked like it was made out of a black-and-white chinchilla cat. So I had that, I would walk around Kensington, Hyde Park, Mayfair, and Bayswater in my dressed-down leather pants. I had two pairs of leather pants—silver glitter leather, which were for, like, special state occasions like a Stooges gig or going out to a really big gig, and black leather pants, but instead of stitches there were rivets; they were heavy duty. And by this point I'd been to Anello & Davide and bought a new pair of Beatle boots because they still had some left over. I would sort of mince or trundle or slink around those neighborhoods, going on long walks, trying to figure out what I was doing, wearing the cheetah jacket, leather pants, and Beatle boots. [laughs]

I'm sure you drew some attention.

Occasionally lone men in cars would slow down and stare at me intently, and I had no idea what that was about. Occasionally [it happened with] the other gender too. One day, in Fulham, I ran into a *Men Only* cover girl and I was going with her for a while, but I'd never really hang out with people for any length of time.

I wanted to ask, did you go to Malcolm and Vivienne's shop, Let It Rock—or whatever it was called then—on the King's Road?

Yeah, it was Let It Rock, and you walked in the door and he had a huge, dirty cardboard bin full of winkle-pickers with no laces in them. Most of them were, like, frozen solid; there was absolutely no flexibility left in the shoe, and I'm pretty sure it was £5 per winkle-picker. Then he had all the rock stuff. James loved it and went more than

I did, but I was over there regularly for some reason, just kind of snooping around. I remember there was some guy there, and it was probably Malcolm, and then there was a woman there, who could have been Vivienne. Then later she was kind of an item with James. I also remember there were a lot of extremely skinny guys walking up and down Fulham High Street, King's Road, in American Boy Scout uniforms, gas-station-attendant jackets, and old bowling shirts. All this weird shit that I recognized from my youth. You would go into thrift stores and find very, very small sizes of all this American gear that was incredibly expensive, so people were doing that too. It was odd.

Hearing you talk about this makes me think of the too-small jacket you're wearing on the cover of *The Idiot*.

I borrowed that jacket from my girlfriend at the time, Esther Friedmann. It was a woman's jacket. It was probably French, or it could have been vintage German. The idea was that it didn't get in the way. The waist was kept short, and the arms were too short so that it emphasized the hand and length of the whole arm.

In the late 70s and early 80s, when a lot of people were trying out god-awful looks, you still had a good sense of style. You've always kept an interest in fashion, haven't you?

I had a nice look for a while in the early 80s—Americans really hated it. I was still going with Esther, and I would just buy all her clothes and go out onstage with moderate heels, fishnet stockings, a miniskirt, a little leather jacket, and a mini leather cap. Sometimes I'd wear a little white shirt underneath. I looked like a temp secretary or something. That was a good look.

Why did Americans hate it?

When I played my own gigs it went down fine, but when I went and opened for the Stones one night [laughs] people threw bottles, everything they could at me. They were very keen on the macho look in that era. And once rock 'n' roll became *rock*, once it became that one word, it kind of took all the play out.

Do you think Americans are more reserved than the Brits when it comes to clothes?

Absolutely. It's a bigger country and harder to move. It's not a flamboyant place. That's a good word for what I was saying about before, what got lost around 1975. If there was ever an American flamboyance, it happened in those 25 years from '50 to '75, and it had to do with the blues, R&B, rock 'n' roll, big cars, and giant breasts.

Nowadays it seems like some people think it's a sin, if you're a musician, to explicitly want to look good, to have real style. Do you think that's an important part of being in a band?

Abso-fucking-lutely, yes. I mean, God, I was so disappointed. I was reading a promotional interview with the



Iggy soaking up
the sun in his
yard, 2012.



Iggy sitting in his bed, enjoying his bongos, 2012.

singer of Coldplay in the *Guardian*, and the interviewer asked him about his shoes—he had some cool sneaks on—and he just went, “Oh, I don’t know, the stylist just gave them to me.” It’s like, come on dude, give me a break. I thought, “Gee whiz, can’t we have somebody better than that at the helm of guitar music?” So yeah, it is really important, and it can be achieved in any number of ways. You could look hideous; that’s OK too. You could have one guy who looks really good and one guy who looks hideous, but he’ll start growing on you. It’s important to look amazing or astonishing or intriguing, but mainly interesting in some way.

Is the goal to look sexy?

There can be some sex in there, but there can also be some humor. Also, I think maybe some sort of canned spirituality is in there. Like if a religious person sees a light when they find God, well then some guy in the hood can just buy some hubcaps, you know what I’m saying? A lot of it is also something about being a human—the spiritual need to shine a little.


And now we’ve kind of come full circle. It seems like every brand and designer on the planet wants to work with musicians like you who were at the forefront of style in the late 60s through the mid-70s. How do you feel about these types of collaborations?

To be very to the point: People are hearing our music through different media, bypassing the old media that refused us entry, and what I’ve done is two things. One is to push through any door that’s opened in this new type of media, and the other

thing is to do things that make it OK for what’s leftover from the old media.

You recently worked with Vans to make some shoes and a few articles of clothing. How’d that come about?

I was asked to OK something, and I was happy to because I used to wear their shoes in 1977 in Malibu. I was in a phase when I was trying to break out of the rockist mold. I’d just made *Lust for Life*, and I was about to tour behind it and was stuck with this standard American baseball-cap-wearing road crew. So I had this concept: Get me rental furniture and home lighting, and we arranged this stage in the rehearsal room that looked like a living room. I was going to sing the songs on a couch, and I had a little attaché case; I had this character in my mind, the rockin’ realtor. [laughs] Anyway, I saw these shoes one day and they were cool. They were like a deck shoe, but they didn’t have the shape that implied a paunch and a lack of hair; it was a sneaker shape. But what was really cool was that the canvas was a black-and-white checker, and you just didn’t see checkers around.

Except for S. Clay Wilson’s Checkered Demon in *Zap Comix*. Yeah, it reminded me of the Checkered Demon! He would fuck people with his tail. [laughs] That’s what he would do. He’d come in and some really nice guy would be having an evening out with his date, and the Checkered Demon would jump in with his tail, which had a spade on the end and would sort of lash out between his legs toward wherever he wanted to put it—to do the deed to his victim. I always loved him. 



*A rarely seen
shirted Iggy dons
greaser gear in New
York City, 1980.*