



Silk crepe shirt with velvet trim, £425, cotton gingham shirt dress, £295, both **BLOUSE**



George shirt, £325, **BLOUSE**



Poplin shirt with lace trim, £325, **BLOUSE**



Cotton tartan shirt with Cluny tulle, £375, **BLOUSE**



Silk crepe shirt dress with Cluny lace trim, £750, **BLOUSE**

Label to know:

BLOUSE

Offering gender-neutral shirts for a new fashion era, Geoffrey J. Finch's new brand has been a whirlwind success

Words by **BIBBY SOWRAY**

'It's all happened so quickly,' says Geoffrey J. Finch of his new label, Blouse. That's something of an understatement, he started working on his line 'in earnest' this March, and by mid June it was stocked exclusively by MatchesFashion.com. But then Blouse, which does exactly what it says on the tin, isn't your average fledgling label.

Finch has been a fashion mainstay for the past decade. He arrived in London from his native Toowoomba, Australia, in 2004 and began working at Soho boutique Antipodium. Two years later, he and the store's founder Ashe Peacock launched a label named after the store; and despite his lack of formal training, Finch became creative director. It became something of a cult brand, loved for its witty prints and cheeky pop-culture references, with fans including Alexa Chung. In 2013, he got the call to join Topshop as creative design consultant, and left Antipodium the following year.

His new venture was born instinctively. 'I kept on coming back to a feeling that reminded me of working in a shop when I was 18 on a Saturday morning,'

he says. 'It wasn't a very good shop, so you had to work pretty hard. It was really about being intuitive and distinctive and quite human – and that feels like the right approach for fashion now.'

That feeling has translated into what he calls 'a category business for a new era' that focuses on three core pieces: the shirt, the T-shirt and the shirt dress. 'Take the George shirt, for example: it's a man's shirt in blue, the archetypal businessman staple.

But it has a dislocated collar and cuff, and Cluny lace inserted in the side seam and across the pocket,' he explains. 'It's reimagining things in a modern way.'

But why the emphasis on shirts and their derivatives? 'I was sketching one day and thinking how it was 10 years since the first Antipodium collection and I'm still sketching shirt dresses, which was a staple of Antipodium. Times change and aesthetics evolve, but fundamentally they stay the same.'

The tight focus will remain, but additional pieces, such as semi-structured blazers and possibly denim, will be added with each bi-monthly, in-season drop. It also means the entire collection is unisex. 'You look at the way sexuality is accepted now and it's radically different to what I grew up with, and that's something to be celebrated,' says Finch.

Every piece is manufactured in London, and many incorporate fabric from Cluny Lace in Derbyshire and Roger Watson Laces in Nottinghamshire, which produced textiles for the Duchess of Cambridge and Diana, Princess of Wales' wedding dresses respectively. 'Going to see [Cluny Lace's] factory is amazing; you have these huge, greasy, noisy machines from the Thirties manned by gruff dudes, but spitting out very delicate lace,' says Finch. The provenance of production adds an integrity to the brand.

Blouse is a label that's responding to fashion's current sense of flux, and doing it with feeling. 'It's important for things to have heart,' he says. 'I hope that comes through to the consumer, that they can see that someone's really thought about something.'



PRADA AW17

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN VERBACE SS13

FKA TWIGS IN ALEXANDER MCQUEEN

BJORK

PROENZA SCHOUER SS17

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN AW14

NATALIE PORTMAN IN BLACK SWAN, 2010

KALVIN KLEIN 203W.39R1 AW17

BALENCIAGA AW17

PRADA AW17

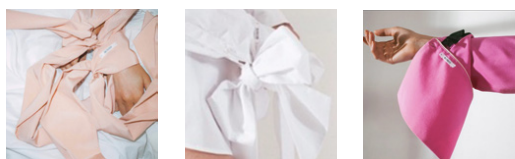
BIG BIRD

THE GREAT GATSBY, 2013

PRADA AW17

In context FEATHERS

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BLOUSE AW17 : THE DETAILS