

Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Christian Siriano

JVN [00:00:01] Welcome to "Getting Curious." I'm Jonathan Van Ness. And every week I sit down for a 40-minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by iconic fashion designer and member of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Christian Siriano, where I ask him, how did you become so fucking fierce? Welcome to "Getting Curious," this is Jonathan Van Ness. I'm so excited to announce this week's guest. Prolific, iconic, major, one of the, I mean, I really, the designer of our gen-, generation. I'll just jump right in and say it. If you're driving, make sure you're ready to handle this week's guest. Welcome Christian Siriano.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:00:44] Thank you! I love it. I love that you're in your closet. It looks glamorous. And fabulous.

JVN [00:00:52] You know, everything else in my house is too echo-y, that I, where I'm staying. So I, I-

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:00:57] Oh, yeah.

JVN [00:00:58] You know, randomly I have ended up recording from my closet. I didn't see it coming. But, you know, we're working with it. First things first.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:01:04] That's great.

JVN [00:01:05] I'm trying to do this new thing where I am really taking ownership of the flow of the interviews. But then I also struggle with my brain. And your fringe just looks amazing. It does. And it always has. And I can't help it. I love the texture on it. And that's just, that's just what our truth is today.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:01:26] I love it. Thank you.

JVN [00:01:27] I don't think anyone who listens to "Getting Curious" wouldn't know who you are. But you are a prolific designer and you have your gorgeous own fashion house. You burst onto the scene in 2008. You. And basically since then, you have really gone from someone who we met on telly to this, I'm sure it didn't feel fast to you, but in 2008 and '09 and '10. It's like from those years to now, you are a household name. You are an incredibly successful designer. And I think what is one of my personal favorite things about what you have done is that you have shown that inclusivity and self love and the celebration of diversity can be successful and sought after and beautiful. And I feel like you were the first designer that did that.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:02:22] I know, it's such a funny thing to like, think about that. You know, all the years later, just like doing things that I like to do are, became like these iconic moments and I'm like, oh, I just like, like to dress those people, like, you know, people like, oh, you celebrate all these curvy women. And I'm like, well, who's not dressing Oprah? I'm like, what are you talking about? Like, I, I didn't think that that wasn't the right thing. And I always thought that was, like, funny, but, but also worked out in the end.

JVN [00:02:50] So, you know, obviously, I think that we've all been very, like, inundated, rightfully so, because there is a respiratory pandemic, you know, on our hands. It's affecting the entire globe. But I only get you for 40 minutes-ish. And I, you know, I'm not going to talk about, you know, coronavirus with the most prolific fashion designer, 'cause like I got to learn about fashion. But I do just want to say what you did and how you stepped up in the midst of this crisis was just absolutely, is not was, absolutely incredible. And thank you.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:03:19] Thank you.

JVN [00:03:20] So what can you just without-? You know, I mean, I don't, I mean, I guess, you know, talk about however long you went, but knowing that we do want to learn so much about fashion from you 'cause you're a genius. But what happened? So you're minding your own business in, in your office. You're like well I'm not making dresses right now because it's all shut down. Let me learn how to make-

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:03:37] Yeah, yeah, literally, it was like, you know, I think all of New York City was like watching, you know, Governor Cuomo like every day and being like, you know, he just was like, we have no product. We don't make anything in the United States. We have no anything. And I just was like, well, that's so strange. Like, I, I make things, we, like, have a full kind of factory. I mean, obviously, we made couture dresses, but I was like, why don't, why can't we help a little bit? In some way? So really, that was why, like when I tweeted at him, it was a very naive tweet being like, what can we do? And when, I mean, when they responded within literally 30 minutes, we were like, oh, OK. And it just turned into something that we were like, well, if we can, you know, get a couple hundred and another thousand and like really turn it into something like maybe we can help people. And also, like, my entire studio is shut down. So we really, we got to help people. And also I got to, like, keep my employees who have families and jobs and need a job, too. So it was a win-win for everybody.

JVN [00:04:39] Did you accidentally turn it into like a little bit of a virologist, like learning how to make masks? Like, did you guys learn like, oh, we got to, like, wear little baby gloves when we're making them, and like and we got to make sure we had like this kind of fabric because it's, you know, small enough to catch the stuff.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:04:56] Yeah. No, it was so interesting, we were, we were like first starting. And luckily, like I, my fabric that we're using already had all of its fire and safety law testing. We did that like months ago. So we were kind of, like, prepared a little bit. And

also, like, to be honest, like, making a mask is very easy. It's a square. I make literally couture gowns every day. So my team was like, oh, we can make this. And we had the fabric. We, we so we were just kind of, like, really equipped to do it quickly. And I think that that was why it was helpful. Like, we already have a studio. Everything was kind of set in place. Now it's like, I do feel like I run a mask factory, which is a little strange. That's all we talk about all day long. And it's really quite a buzzkill. But at least we're doing good things.

JVN [00:05:48] Yeah, true and true. Okay, so well let's just divert right over from that. So basically, you know, in prepping for this gorgeous little baby interview, I learned some things about you growing up that I didn't know. Like I didn't know what you're, what you're pre-design interests were, which I just. Who knew that you were a little f'in figure skater, queen. I want to hear about it.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:06:10] Oh, my God. I know. OK. So that's what's so funny. No, I mean, I. I like really, like you, you know, like, I was really into, like, gymnastics and figure skating and ballet. I was into all of those things. And I was actually pretty good in my day. But I haven't done any of that in so long.

JVN [00:06:30] But you skated. Like, you know how to do it.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:06:33] Oh, my God. I know how to do it. And I was like, actually, really good. And I-

JVN [00:06:37] Did you have all your jumps?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:06:38] Wish I would have done more. Yes.

JVN [00:06:40] You had a lutz?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:06:41] I could, I could like. Like, I could do, you know what though? The only thing is though I was, I got, every time I got a little bit older, I got scared of the jump. Any jump.

JVN [00:06:52] Well 'cause you know how hard it hurts.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:06:54] I don't-.

JVN [00:06:55] That shit hurts. When you fall.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:06:56] Yes. It was kind of like, you know, like how Brittany can't really fully do the, you know, the, the move anymore. That's how it became for me.

JVN [00:07:05] Yeah. It's, well, it's-.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:07:05] I was a bit nervous.

JVN [00:07:07] Yeah. It's like, it's scary, but, but... You were born and raised in?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:07:10] I'm from Annapolis. Annapolis, Maryland. Which is very preppy and, you know, Naval Academy and uptight, but there was, like, some, you know, eccentric, interesting people, which is nice.

JVN [00:07:23] And then you. And then you, so I mean, because you grew up there. And then did you know growing up that you wanted to become a designer and that you wanted, like, because you know, I mean, I grew up in a small town in Illinois, and I knew from a pretty young age that I wanted to. I mean, I thought like "Star Search" in the 1992 Olympics. And I was like, oh, my God, I want to move to a big city and become, like get discovered at a mall. But I didn't know what for, but I knew I wanted to get out of my small like-. Did you feel, like did you feel like you wanted to get out of Annapolis?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:07:53] Yeah, I mean, I did in a way, but I did find this, like, really creative place and I went to like an art school in Baltimore City. So that's kind of where I went to high school. So I just knew like I wanted to create and whatever that was. But I definitely, like, I don't know, like, my mom and my sister were very inspiring growing up. My sister was a ballet dancer. So I thought for a long time I wanted to be, you know, a costume designer for ballets and theater. But then it really turned into, like, I'm more like seeing, like, a transformation of, like, women. I loved watching my mom put on a dress and, like, her whole demeanor would be different. And I thought that that was really beautiful. So that's kind of when I realized I wanted to do something more and get out and strive for something bigger. I didn't really know what bigger was, but that was, that was what I was looking for.

JVN [00:08:43] I guess too I'm like a little bit, like I was, like Annapolis is like really close to Baltimore. So it's like that's like a big, you had like, it's like big cities, you had like urban areas around with lots of diversity and stuff.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:08:52] Yeah. There with Baltimore and D.C. So D.C. is, you know, 30 minutes. So I still had a connection to some like, you know, interesting culture and different types of people. I mean, to be honest, and when I went to high school, I was the minority. It was like, you know, I mean, it was so different. I was around such different types of people at a very young age. And I went to this, like, art school. So everybody was kind of, like, you know, coming out and they were, you know, being gay was a little bit more supported, which was nice, which is why when I was on television in 2008, I was totally myself and not thinking that it wasn't OK. And, and I mean, you know, because I was.

JVN [00:09:35] Because when did you graduate high school?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:09:39] 2004.

JVN [00:09:44] Me too!

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:09:45] Yeah, 2004.

JVN [00:09:44] Me too. So then four years later, you're on one of the biggest TV shows. I mean, I remember being in, because I went to hair school in 2005 and '06. I just can't imagine going at 22 or however-. It's so young to become a just a household name.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:10:09] Yeah, I was 21 years old when I won the show. It was wild, wild, wild. Yeah.

JVN [00:10:16] And you-.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:10:16] And very like. Yeah, it just was a weird time. And also in pop culture, like, you know, Bravo was very new. You know, the Kardashians had just launched their show. There just was a lot of cultural, you know, reality TV was in a very different place. It was a wild time. I mean, Amy Poehler played me on SNL. It was, like, really interesting culturally for, you know, that world, which I knew nothing about. So I was very naive. But, but, it worked out, I guess.

JVN [00:10:45] I just really look up to you and I mean I look up to you in a lot of different ways. But being a young, queer person who was you know, I've only had a public pressure or a public understanding of what that means to be, you know, out in the public for a couple years. I really take my hat off to you because I think you just focus on being an incredible designer and you are. When you were growing up, like what were, like, the movies or like the, what were like the silhouettes, and the things- Was it, like, was it Lady Di and Emanuel in '85 or '81 or whatever where you were like, holy shit! Or was it like Elizabeth Taylor? Where you were like, oh my God, these shoulder pads? Like, what did you think was the coolest fashion growing up?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:11:36] I mean, in a, well, my favorite, favorite movie was "The Wizard of Oz." Growing up. I watched it every single day. I was obsessed with this idea of like again, like, transformation. I love that, like Dorothy's character started in one place and like transformed into this, like, person. And I, you know, and I loved, I loved all the characters. I loved all the, you know, the different clothes. And I don't know. Like, that was just like really an inspiring thing to me. So I, like, took that. But then it was, like, I wasn't a big to be honest, I wasn't a big like movie watcher. I was a very eccentric kid that I liked to make things, so, like, that's, like, what I did. And I think I watched mostly, you know, ballet and performances. And like that was like what I thought was what fashion was a little bit. My sister, she drove me to every single rehearsal. Every performance, every sugar plum fairy, whatever. That's what I really, really liked. I mean, I of course loved, like, you know, cheesy movies like "Pretty Woman" and all those things with like gorgeous dresses. And I love that movie, "Funny Face." Like, you know, there's some, some great iconic things. But I don't know, I just think I was also very curious. I, I didn't know that much about fashion or anything. So, but, I definitely, like took everything with, like, an open mind and nothing was off limits. I mean, I even love, like I even love like an action movie or a sports movie because I think I was, like, interested in that world even if I didn't want to do it. So I think that, that help, which I think has helped me be a designer that's open to a lot of different

types of people. Because I don't like saying I have to create like this couture. I like other things.

JVN [00:13:22] Love. So it wasn't like, you weren't necessarily like when you were growing up, would you like, you weren't like cutting out clippings of Vogue and being like, oh, this designer became the head designer for like whatever in 1968. And then.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:13:37] For Celine. Like, yeah, when like, yeah. I mean, I of course, like, kind of, you know, I, like, knew Michael Kors was a designer for Celine and all of those things. But it wasn't-.

JVN [00:13:47] You did?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:13:47] I wasn't obsessed with it. I, I wasn't, but I wasn't as into it as I wish that I was. I don't know. I just wasn't. I think I was. I was trying not to be that person maybe.

JVN [00:14:01] Oh. Interest. OK. Wait. So going to take a really quick break, which I'm really proud of myself for even like seeing that we had to take a break because I could just like talk to you forever, and like look into your eyes and have you tell me stuff forever, cause you're still fucking fascinating. Ok. But we really do. Ok. Really quick break. We'll be right back with more Christian Siriano right after this. Welcome back to "Getting Curious."

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:14:27] I love it.

JVN [00:14:28] We have Christian Siriano. So what we were just saying was, yeah, because I when I was growing up, when it came to fashion, like my biggest understanding of fashion until after high school was like going to the Buckle. You know? Which is-.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:14:42] I loved the Buckle.

JVN [00:14:45] I loved the Buckle so much. And the, the looks and the garments, honey, I just really could put together a cute 1998 look there.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:14:55] You really could. Now, I was really into, like, Arden B. And, you know, and Bebe and Wet Seal And like the 5, 7, 9, like, I loved all those trashy girl clothes stores that, that's really sad that they're gone.

JVN [00:15:10] I know. I really miss the tiaras from Claire's. Like, I used to take, like, quarters off my stepdad's bedside table until I got like \$15 of quarters so that I could buy a tiara from Claire's. I was really into it. So what, so, but once you, 'cause I think, you bas-, so through high school and then post-high school. How did you literally learn to make clothes? Make beautiful fashion.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:15:35] I just. I know like my mom, my mom definitely taught me a little bit. She taught me the basics, but I was a very visual, I'm a kind of a visual learner with

everything. Like, I can almost see a pattern piece in my head and figure out how to put it together. I just have to see it once, which is also why when I was on "Project Runway," I was quite fast and good because I didn't really need to think about it that much. Technically. And I don't know what that is. It's just I've always had that and it helps. Yeah.

JVN [00:16:11] I, so, I bet you're good at geometry.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:16:13] Yeah, like, I remember my mom was, like, I just was like, Mom. "How do you put in a zipper?" And she was like, "Oh, let me show you." And I was like, "Oh, nevermind. I figured it out." Just by, like, looking at it in another dress. And I think I was very good at teaching myself how to problem solve without actually knowing really what I was doing. Which I still probably do every day to this day. I'm, like, we've never made this before. But I can't pretend like I know how to do it.

JVN [00:16:42] So growing up, though, you, there was like a sewing machine around your house, so you were just kind of like naturally, like, let me just like play with this.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:16:50] Always. Yeah. Like, my mom was like down for whatever and very helpful, which was good.

JVN [00:16:57] Is there anything to this day that like anytime someone's like, oh, I really want like, whatever, where you're just like, okay. But like you like, hate, it's just like a, like kind of like in "Bake-," like you watch the baking-, "Great British Bake Off"? Do you watch the show?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:17:12] I don't watch it, but I've seen it before. Of course.

JVN [00:17:14] It's kind of like the frustration of like the collar. Like if you're going to like a collar around your cake, they can just be very fussy. You know? If it's too humid in the tent that day, you know, it's just like a little risky like what's? Like what's like the cake collar in fashion for you?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:17:29] Oh my god. I think it's. I don't know. I really have a problem more with people that really want, like, experimental clothes right now. Like, we've been getting a lot with, like, can my dress like unzip and turn into like a poncho and then into a suit. Like, they all want their clothes to, like, do all these things.

JVN [00:17:48] Yes sustainability. Oh.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:17:50] I know, but I'm just, like, not in the mood to make my gown turn into, like, a blazer.

JVN [00:17:56] You know what I bet it is? I feel like on this most recent season of figure skating, Anna Shcherbakova, who probably would have been the world champion had Worlds not been canceled. She has this fierce fucking dress at her long program that starts off like kind of like purple. But then she does this thing and then a little of a spin and goes

like this and it turns red. Like there's like a dress hiding within. It's fucking fierce. I bet everybody saw that routine. And then they were like, you know what?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:18:27] Exactly.

JVN [00:18:31] Yes! You just celebrated the 10 year anniversary of, your line in 2018, so, you really spent, like, your whole adult life being a successful designer. And I know for me in the last couple of years, I've had like, it's hard like learning to-. Just people say a lot of stuff and people are fuckin' mean sometimes. And so, I wrote down when you were talking earlier about, like, critics and I don't know about fashion critics, but I would imagine it's a thing. And, like, what's your relationship been to dealing with critics? Criticism?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:19:07] Yeah, and I mean, it's the hard-. Yeah, I know it's the hardest thing to overcome because I think like as an, I mean, fashion is such a visual form of art. You know, you're putting, you know, especially, we work six months on a collection and then someone in one second says, "Oh, I don't like it." And you're just like, you know, it's always, that's so hard. Which is kind of, like, what I always say, like, you know, how people go through a store and you like, you know, you just push everything on the side on a rack. But you don't really think about like the time and energy that someone put into designing those clothes that are on that rack. So that was always my challenge in the very beginning of my career that I took that really personally. But then I really realized that as, as it went on, that, you know, it's, people judge quickly and they always will. And you cannot be everything for everybody. You just have to find the right people that love your work and, and want to wear it and want to support you. And I think that's kind of the challenge. To be honest, the challenge is to get the customer or anyone to come back like season after season. And I think we just started doing that. We had women from all over the world that were shopping the clothes. So I kind of stopped listening to the critics very much. They kind of came around, but in the beginning they were tough. But I was like, well, I don't really care because I'm going to go out of business if I'm listening to you.

JVN [00:20:28] Oh.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:20:29] I mean, I remember I did-. Oh, listen, I did a collection. I remember the review from, you know, a high profile magazine was tough. And they were like, this is everything was not good. But the best dressed in the collection was this one slip dress. Right? I sold zero of that dress that they loved. So, it just- they didn't know anything about my customer, my world. Like we had some, they weren't in, my woman wasn't interested in that dress. So I stopped listening to those people. And now I realize that I'm glad because I'm still in business, and other young brands are not because they didn't pave their own way, you know? But it's hard.

JVN [00:21:10] Speaking of-. Yeah. I mean, I think, I mean, that has been, some of the times that I was on sets as a hairdresser. Having some of the hardest times, I mean, just like really harsh criticism. And it's. And also comments are really intense. But I think that is just, yes, because no one understands your brand as well as you will understand your own brand. But speaking about paving their own way.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:21:38] Yeah.

JVN [00:21:39] I mean, you launched your company, the 10 year anniversary was '18, that means 2008, which I was brand new on the floor in Arizona, like I had just started building my own little baby clientele, just a little hairdresser. And I remember 2008. It was like in February, you couldn't get an appointment with me for like three months. I was like such a little baby 19, 20 year old.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:21:58] Fabulous.

JVN [00:21:58] And then all of a sudden, like, but then all of a sudden, like, it was like a curtain happened and the economy dropped out. And all of a sudden, like nobody had any clients. And it, just, it was a very real time where, like, everything just collapsed. I am wearing biker shorts, just so you know everyone, we're on Zoom so Christian can see me and sometimes when I move my leg, it looks like I'm naked, but I'm not. There are biker shorts right here. So anyway, back to the story.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:22:18] I love it.

JVN [00:22:19] But, you know, I think it's really interesting that you established a couture fashion line. And then, in a tough economic time, and so for young entrepreneurs, whether it's in fashion or whatever. Obviously we're on the precipice of a really unknown time. What is, what's your lessons, takeaways that you wouldn't mind sharing on, on what that was like and how you think that relates to now and how people can find a way?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:22:48] Yeah. I mean, it's kind of wild. My very first day of market, like my first collection, I had it all on the racks. Saks Fifth Avenue was my first appointment. And it was the day Lehman Brothers crashed and Saks canceled and we had no sales and it was disastrous. And, but then like you know what, in my own way. I had nothing to go on. So I was kind of, like, well, any sales going forward will be something. So we were just happy to keep it going. And I think same with now, you know, now it's kind of like, OK, we have to pivot and we have to do other things, like, if nobody buys a dress from me in the next year, I wouldn't, I wouldn't let that ruin my brands. Like, I would figure out other ways. Which is kind of what we did. We were like, OK, we're going to flip it. We're going to make masks. We're going to make hospital gowns. We can make those interesting. And I've kind of, kind of always done that. You have to kind of rise to the occasion because otherwise, like, you won't survive. And I don't always love it. And I think that that's sometimes what we have to remember, that sometimes you have to, like, move on from what you think will be. And just let it be, which is the challenge for everybody, I guess, you know?

JVN [00:24:04] Yeah.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:24:04] It's hard, though.

JVN [00:24:05] OK, wait. So back to, like, literal, like, fashion and stuff. when I was doing hair full time was like I, whenever, like, something would become in trend. Like I had this one colorist teacher who used to say like which I always thought was kind of funny. "Just because you American doesn't mean you American-should." Because like when certain things have become, like, really trending like people come in with these pictures and it's like, yeah, like but no, like you're starting from like a level two and it's really going to torch it and it's not going to feel great and stuff. So, like, do you feel, like, when it comes to design, like are you like, are you, do you pay attention to trend? Are you very much like I really want to stay inside of myself to do what feels organic to you? How do you approach that?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:24:48] I like, yeah, I, I definitely like. I'm pretty good at, like, keeping up with what's happening. Like, I definitely, you know, like I see what like a young generation is wearing and I try to like, fit that in in some way. Like, OK, if it's like we're doing crop tops, I'll do my version of the cute crop top, like, you know, everything, oversized blazers, all of those things like I do my own take. But, but I really, I don't know, I try to be, like, as adventurous as possible in what I always make. And I like to push it and I like to-. I would rather help set the trend than, you know, really, like, continue something. I think that's always worked out for me the most, which is why, I mean, to be honest, like I've been making this like, you know, fantasy red carpet and clothes for so long now at a time when, you know, seven years ago, people thought that was, nobody liked that. They were like, oh, you make red carpet clothes like you're like, that wasn't, that wasn't a cool thing to do. Now people would die for some of the people that I've dressed on the red carpet. So it's funny how it comes like full circle. I would say.

JVN [00:25:59] Oh, and natural segue. So I know it's, like, so hard to like, you know, pick favorites because you have like, dressed, so many iconic people. And not that I'm not iconic and I don't want to like whatever, 'cause I know that-. But like, but you can include some our looks, they've been so amazing. But like what have been some of your most favorite iconic looks?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:26:18] Billy Porter is, like, one of my favorites, because, like, I think it helps inspire a different generation to feel like they can wear what they want to wear. And that is like the most important thing.

JVN [00:26:27] That tuxedo gown to this, it's like the most. I think it's, it's like the J.Lo Versace dress of the 2000-, it's like the most iconic red car-. I mean, it was obviously on the runway. But as far as, like I mean, like, did Google Images get created the second time when Billy Porter wore that tuxedo gown on the-? I mean, like do you, that has to be in your top.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:26:47] We were the number one number one Googled photo.

JVN [00:26:51] Oh my god, I didn't even know that. And I just, like, naturally knew.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:26:54] Yes.

JVN [00:26:55] And then what are some of the other? Like what was the time where someone called, like someone's representative called to be like, oh, can you make a thing? And then you were like, oh my fuck, I'm going to die. But like, so excited.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:27:04] I mean. Oh, my God. I've, I've had I honestly I've gotten to dress now like my, my number ones, like, which is from you know, from Angelina Jolie to like Gwyneth to Gaga to everyone, you know. We done every-. But I think like, what I did. You know, what I did for Billy was amazing, I think, but probably my favorite is all the times we dressed Michelle Obama, because we've dressed her, you know, probably six or seven times down every time it's just fabulous. And I love her. And she's so chic. And what, the dress that she wore to the DNC really like changed my career. So it was really great.

JVN [00:27:41] Can I tell you that when you mention that, I get such a palpitation in my solar plexus that honestly, like, I don't know if I've ever really gotten like that's like a first time tingle for me. That was real-. That's OK. Wait. I have a question. I have a question. I have a question. So. And you don't have to say who.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:27:59] OK.

JVN [00:27:59] "Cause I don't wanna be, like, a shady bitch. But, so, is there ever a time when you make someone a garment and then, like, you see them where it is like that shoe or like, fuck girl, that fucking purse or like. And then when that does happen, are you just like?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:28:18] OK. That happens every day. And it's like. And it's this thing, and you know what's so funny though, it is hard because the designers definitely get judged for all the things that have happened in the look. The hair, the makeup. I'm like, guys, I'm not with them. Like don't bring it on me.

JVN [00:28:36] Yeah. Yeah.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:28:37] You know, I didn't pick, you know, I didn't. She's wearing a fuchsia dress and she's wearing like a nude patent pump from like 5,7,9. Bring it back home. I didn't pick that shoe. So, you know, that's always an interesting thing that is a challenge sometimes. But I will say for the most part, like I, I've gotten away with, with everything but, like, even, let me tell you, like Cardi wore this amazing suit to my 10 year anniversary show, actually. She looks so fabulous, but she wore it with this like giant white fur. But I'm a huge animal activist and I don't use any fur animal products at all. And that was a little bit hard for me because I wouldn't have put a fur with it. So, you know, I got a lot of backlash for that. But I keep having to be like, guys, I, it's not mine. I don't pick what Cardi, Cardi does look Cardi wants to do.

JVN [00:29:30] Yeah.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:29:31] So but that was a hard you know, that was a hard day because people were really upset and, and that can be the challenge. You know, it's the risk.

JVN [00:29:39] OK. That's incred-. We have to take a really quick break. And I actually do want to break really just quick because I. That is so major. I'll talk about it for 30 minutes straight through and then you'll be like, "Girl, I have to go." So we're going to take a really quick break. So y'all could, need to get a little drink of water or something. Or, you know, turn the TV off. Now's your chance. Welcome back to "Getting Curious." We have Christian Siriano. So, yeah. So my stylist, Ali Brooks, who I love so much. So, because, obviously the designer does like the main garment or whatever, but you aren't literally what the person wearing the garment to be like this, this and whatever. But I don't think you do. But have you ever like? Will you ever be like, yeah, I'm going to send you this gown, but can you please not put it with whatever? Like do you ever have like, do, will you ever give suggestions to the stylist?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:30:28] Yes.

JVN [00:30:28] About, like, can you not do like a, what, a thing?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:30:30] I do now. I def-, I definitely am a little more boisterous as my career gets more intact a little bit. I used to be afraid, but now I definitely like I realize that my, it's my work, too. So I want to make sure that we're all celebrating, you know, the best that we can. So I give my opinions on everything because I think, you know, it's important. And, and to be honest, sometimes now I'm like, well, listen, like you know, if it's not gonna be that, then I'm not the right designer for you. Which has happened. You know, sometimes. You know, we just, we did a dress not that long ago. And I didn't love-. They wanted to, I forget what happened was. But it was they wanted to put a political statement on the back. But I just didn't agree with it at that time. So I felt like I didn't want to do that dress. So that happens sometimes. But for the most part, everybody's, everybody's been pretty great lately.

JVN [00:31:30] Love that. OK. So what is your like, as far, not necessarily like garment wise, but just in the course of your career, like, what are your most exciting aspects of being a designer? And then the aspects of it, and then like your, the opposite, like your least favorite?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:31:50] Oh my God. I mean, I really just love getting to like have moments with people and making them transform and feel like their best self. Like, whether it's literally like a mom, like, getting a dress for her son's wedding or something, or to like Lizzo winning her first Grammy in a dress that I made. You know, I love, being there for those moments, like, are the best part of the day. It's actually the only reason why I still do it, because the rest of fashion is, like, very hard. And it's a really hard business and it's really expensive. And yeah, and also, I mean, you can't people are so quick to move on. I mean, think about it. I mean, I'm sure for you, you know, you're at a fitting and sometimes you're just not feeling it. And it's not because, you know, you don't want to personally, it's

not because you don't like somebody or something. It's just like, you know, feeling where you that look today. So I've learned to not take things so personally. But it is a, it's a hard business.

JVN [00:32:51] I think not taking things personally is like the hardest thing to do. Like-

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:32:57] It really is.

JVN [00:32:57] It's incredibly challenging. So, but I mean, because you have been on the forefront in fashion in so many ways. Do you, do you sense that it's changing in any positive ways, in any, do you sense a positive change and more acceptance trend?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:33:19] Yeah, I mean, I think even like I mean, even like when I post, you know, pictures of you and things that you've worn. Gowns or on covers of magazines like, I mean, it's, I think it's pretty amazing to see like the response from that. And I think that's really nice to see. And I, it goes with the same with like when I dress a curvy woman or like someone who's not the normal "It" girl. People like love it more now, than when I do dress up, I mean, I could dress somebody so famous and it's so interesting, people are like "OK." But if it's like it could be a random new singer and they're like, "Oh, my God," they die for it. It's quite-, the tables have turned a little bit. I mean, unless it's J-Lo, like J.Lo is always a hit. But other than that, I don't know, it's tough.

JVN [00:34:07] I mean, I got nominated for an Emmy for, you know, like for "Gay of Thrones." "Queer Eye" has been nominated several times. And like, I know that there are times where people are harsh and people are mean, and, like you dress people that other people don't give the time of day. That is so the example of being the change that you want to see.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:34:29] Yeah.

JVN [00:34:29] And you're such an important reason why people are even getting to celebrate body diversity because people can't even see the glory and the amazingness of curvy bodies and other bodies if no one wants to work with us and it's so fru-, and it's like it is so frustrating when you can be an Emmy nominee, an Emmy winner or this winner or whatever. And it's like people don't care. It's like they're, like and it's, and it's, and it's like Julia Roberts in "Pretty Woman," it's I got money to spend, like, I want to get it. But it's like, they won't even take the time to work with you. And I just think that you've changed the standard and you've changed the idea of beauty. And I just think that that is really amazing. But so you, but you do feel like, do you feel like some of the shit people are changing or it's, it's because it is becoming more amazing to become accepted, do you think, or accept, be more acceptance minded instead of like rejection minded? Do you think that is becoming the norm in fashion? Or there's just a home for acceptance in fashion now?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:35:27] I mean, I think, I think it's just I think it's definitely like it's getting-. Some days I feel like, oh, my God, we've made so, we've, we've made such

progress and everything's going amazing. But like I will say, like I, you know, I did a little campaign, you know, not that long ago. And the photos. I felt like the person who I photographed, an actress, you know, she was a curvy girl. And I feel like it was harder to get placed, which I thought was interesting. And, and I think there's still issues with what people perceive as beautiful, or what they, or what they think peop-, other people will love. And I'm like, but you don't know, like you're not trying. And that's what bothers me the most. I don't like people that say something, it's not going to work. That's like when people said, oh, you can't put curvy girls on the runway, like people won't understand. And I'm like, but you don't know that. You've never tried. So what are you talking about? So, I hate that, that drives me crazy. So hopefully where we've moved on from that a little bit. But I don't know. Some days, some days not.

JVN [00:36:36] Sometimes I feel-.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:36:37] I'm sure you see that.

JVN [00:36:38] Yeah. No, I mean, I definitely do. And, I, sometimes I, I mean, I have some friends where I've literally heard. Like one of my good friends literally was rejected from a campaign because she is curvy and the company had used a curvy girl in a campaign in the last six months, and so they were like, oh, we can't have two curvy people in a row. And it's like. And I also have had that, I've also experienced that with myself where, like, people, whether it was like roles or, you know, opportunities where it was, like, my gender identity or my sexuality would be a factor, that it's, like, going for someone else who's like not so non-binary, or going for someone who is, like, a little bit more of like a classic, like, can I get like a muscle-y, you know, classic cis gender, more based gay for this. So, you know, it's like, you know, it's, I think it's kind of like a, a quota based casting or a quota, that it's like, oh, we already did one this year, like, so we can't do, and I don't think that, it's like faux diversity. So. Yeah, I feel what you're saying there. One thing I think is really interesting. You've done a lot of different designs and you've also have designed- because you've done, like, a lot of collections with a lot of different price points. And you've also just done a lot of different types of fashion. But is there something that you, like, haven't gotten into yet that you would really like to like? I don't know. Like fascinators or is there, like, something you're, like, currently, like, you, you're obsessed with but you, like, you haven't done it yet?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:38:17] I know, it's so interesting, like because I get asked to do, like, funny little projects all the time. But I think my number one, that I'm like really into and obviously, now that we're all stuck in our homes is, like, I do, I have like, a little, I have some home collections, like, we do bedding and stuff like that. But I do want to make that something bigger. Like, I want to bring, like, my fabric knowledge and color knowledge, like, into, like, the home. So that's kind of like my only goal for 2020 and 2021, because I want your, you know, I think people who now more than ever, like, you need to be chic.

JVN [00:38:54] You know what I really want, like is a, a great throw blanket. I want like a great-.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:39:00] Totally. I mean, I do like a beautiful throw. I'm going to send you one.

JVN [00:39:03] You do?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:39:05] Yeah, it's fabulous.

JVN [00:39:07] I was not even fishing for a thing. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. OK. I'm not going to fight it. OK. So that's interesting. What about, OK, but what about bags?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:39:21] Bags. I mean, we do bags, in a small scale, but we do do them. I mean, what's so crazy is I- I was with Payless for almost eleven years and we did shoes and bags with them for so long that now I'm, like, oh, God. I'm like, we got, we got to do, we gotta do more. We got to-, we got to figure this out. So we're on it. Don't worry.

JVN [00:39:43] Well, I've always loved a bag. I mean, I've always loved a bag for my entire life.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:39:48] Me too.

JVN [00:39:48] There's pictures of me with, like, cabbage patches and, like, my mom's old purses. Like when I was 2, I've always loved a purse. But it got a lot worse once I, you know, like it was right before "Queer Eye" where I started being able to, like, save enough money to like do real damage on not having a retirement fund and spending it on clothes and bags instead. And newsflash, I still am doing that.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:40:10] I'm the same.

JVN [00:40:11] So yeah, just bags. I'm obsessed with them. So, yeah, and especially big bags. So just saying if you ever get, like, a design, if you want to bring it back, honey, once we can leave the house again for, yeah, I want to see, like, a just a really Christian Siriano bag.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:40:24] I'm going, I have a gorgeous bag, I'm sending it to you.

JVN [00:40:29] Ok, I'm not trying to. I wasn't trying-.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:40:30] You're going to get so many Siriano gifts after this.

JVN [00:40:34] Can I tell you, like not to sexually harass our guests, but I don't have like reactive nipples at all. They're very just like, they don't really do anything. And they're very unresponsive. And they are, as you said those last four sentences. They are so, they are so, oh, my God. They, and- they can just cut through this fucking top. OK. So I love that story. So what are some of, ok, so, for instance. When it comes to hair, like, to short hair like I love when I see like French twists, for instance, or something that always make me really

excited. Also, like on shorter haircuts when the hair in front of the ear kind of goes back towards the back of their head. But then the hair behind their ear comes forward. And like, I like that that that like zhuzh, zhuzh. What are, like, the things that where, yes, what are some things that when you see that you just think like, oh, that feels really chic to me? Like if someone wants to like chic-a-fy themselves and they think that you are really chic. What are the things that you think are just like really chic when you see them? In daily fashion wear.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:41:37] It's so interesting. In daily fashion wear. I am still a very big believer of, like, a, like, wet, slicked back type pony or tight bun, like old school ballerina style with a red lip. I think everybody looks great that way. I really do.

JVN [00:41:55] I love a bold red lip so much, I can't even say that.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:42:01] Yes. So much.

JVN [00:42:02] But also. But yes, slicked back bun and yes, red lip. But what about like clothing wise? Like.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:42:08] Oh my God. You know what? You know what I would say? I still think that, like. I don't know. I've noticed like lately I've been seeing what people are wearing at home and they're in their videos or whatever. I still think like a really cool, like, blazer dress or like a cool trench dress. I love that like everybody's like belting their pillows. I don't know. I think that cinched waist thing. Just still look chic. You know, it just does.

JVN [00:42:34] And always will.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:42:35] An over-, I love seeing like an oversized Me-, Men's shirt with a big belt. Like that's still, like, fabulous.

JVN [00:42:42] OK, one more question then we're going to do Yogi Recess where you can talk about whatever you want, but I just have one more thing. OK, so let's say that you're someone who is like a young person and you've never really, like, you know, maybe been into fashion so much. But like you, and you just don't really know where to start. With, like, your own look and like finding your own style. So I guess is, this a two-part question. Part A is how do you think about finding your own style, developing your own style? If you were to think about your own style as like your own brand? One, and then two, what are like the pieces that you feel like every young person, old, just everybody needs, like their basic, like their go-to things in their wardrobe that's like, not like a 1990s show about, you know what I mean? Like, just like, just like what are, what do you think like grown up fashion people should have?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:43:34] Yeah, I think like, I think anybody, like, still like trying to figure themselves out is like all I ever say is like it's all about, like, taking risks and trying things that you would never try. You know, I hate when people say, oh, I can't wear strapless. And I'm like, why? Because one strapless dress you ever tried on you didn't like?

That doesn't mean forever you can't wear a strapless dress. So I think people have to take risks, push themselves. That's why I, like, I love, like, fashion girls who, like, will wear like a really expensive piece. And then they'll wear something from the thrift store like that is, you know, about style and creativity. But you also have to remember, like, you have to wear clothes that make you feel really great. And it's like you feel really great in a tutu every day and rock a tutu. Like, who cares? That's, like, my rule. And then I think the pieces that you need. It's very hard. I don't know. I'm into so many things. I'm into like a really fabulous-. I'm still into a really fabulous, you know, skinny black pant, whatever that is, if it's a jean or just a trouser. I'm still into, like, a hot suit or even if you just have a blazer. That is very important. A strong one. And like something strong, you have it. I'm really into like I love an oversized bag. I think we all need one. I still love a trench. And I'm also like, I'm really into things that are, like, overly opulent, like something with beading or texture or like, I think like you need one piece that's like really extravagant that people will talk about when you go to a party. That's it.

JVN [00:45:08] Oh, my God, and then I realized that I just have like two really quick questions and then the Yogi Recess. Who is your favorite designer? Who, who is either like doesn't have, like they've, like, either sold their line, don't design anymore. They like retired to a cottage in France or anywhere or they like, passed away or just like, from the old days?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:45:28] Oh my God. I probably. It's probably like Cristobal Balenciaga or Saint Laurent. Because like old school Saint Laurent clothes were actually like, Saint Laurent now is very tailored and sexy and lean. But old school Saint Laurent was so whimsical and sculptural and very feminine. And I really love that, that era. Yeah.

JVN [00:45:51] OK. Current favorite accessory line that is not your own. Like what is like the bag that you're like, oh, my God, I just like, if like the quarantine was lifted. Like, this is where I would be impulse buying like bags I shouldn't get right now. Or shoes or whatever.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:46:09] Oh, my God. Or shoes, whatever. What did I just buy recently? Oh my gosh. I can't even remember. I haven't shopped clothes in so long. I've been cheating on it with furniture. That's a "Sex and the City" quote. OK, wait. I would say, I don't know, I bought a really beautiful, like, vintage Gucci bag. Not that long ago. That was, that's stunning. I mean. Oh God, what else is good? I think that was my favorite bag that I just bought. It's like an old suede Gucci bag from the 90s. It's like my favorite. Stunning.

JVN [00:46:40] Yes, vintage, obsessed. So ok, so now, Christian, we've reached the time in the podcast where several things. One could be like you nightmare, you invited me on here to talk about this one thing that I accidentally got too excited and we never talked about. Or just something that you're really inspired by that you'd like to talk about or just something we didn't talk about that you want to talk about. It's Yogi recess. It's your time like, you know. However long you need. What? Is there anything we missed? Or do you just, like, want people to know or something?

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:47:11] I don't know. What did we miss? I don't know. I guess, now I feel like we covered so many things. What else is interesting to talk about? You know what I do think will be really interesting to talk about? That one day, you know, I really hope that people that, what people are wearing doesn't like bother people so much. Like, why does it like. I mean, we're not curing cancer here. Like we're putting on a dress or we're putting on, like I never, I always do think that that's a really strange thing. And I hope that in 2020, after a pandemic, maybe we can all be a little more supportive of, of how we choose to express ourselves. That's my ending quote of life.

JVN [00:48:00] What a good way to wrap up the podcast. Christian Siriano, I love you so much. Thank you for your time. Thank you for everything you do for everyone. I just. Yeah. Just stay safe. I love you so much.

CHRISTIAN SIRIANO [00:48:11] Thank you.

JVN [00:48:12] Thank you. You've been listening to "Getting Curious" with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guest this week was CFDA designer, Christian Siriano. You'll find links to his work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quin. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend and show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter at CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are running curated by Emily Bossak. "Getting Curious" is produced by me, Erica Getto, Julie Carrillo, Emily Bossak, Rae Ellis, Chelsea Jacobson and Colin Anderson.