



# Boy's Guide to Feeling Pretty

by  
**D-L Alvarez**

*aka DeDe Aster,  
Miss Uranus 1990*

KRIS KOVICK

In the conservative community I grew up in, I fared better with the other "weirdos," most of whom were straight, than I did with the sweater-set fags who actually believed discretion was a good idea. The most painful element of coming out was discovering that the new options laid out for me were just a crude mirror of the ones I was leaving behind. Like many, I simply moved from being an out-of-place freak to being a tolerated freak; a queer amongst queers. Judy Garland was not a drag queen, domestic partnership is an obvious embrace of traditional values taught in heterosexual schools, and we did not invent brunch.

As soon as possible, or maybe a bit earlier, I hightailed it for San Francisco. When I arrived in 1984, it wasn't much different than it is today. I discovered that here, like back home, the gay-identified uniforms were for the most part camp versions of their straight predecessors: the college prep, biker dude, bookish nerd, jack, nine-to-fiver. Even when they stepped out of gender, gay males generally succeeded only in performing gross exaggerations of female stereotypes. I found more role models among the lesbian community, where there seems to be at least a shred of originality.

As a fag, I've made a consistent and conscientious effort to present a much wider persona than just a guy who dresses like a girl. I am an individual who dresses like neither, and both. I'll encourage anyone out there with tendencies toward the same to follow them.

I want to impress on you the divine pleasures of dressing up, not as some parody of an established character, but as a creature that lives outside the pigeon-

holes of male/female, hip and square, the glamorous and the beige. I want to take you into that arena that's been dubbed "genderfuck" and show you a good time.

(You remember genderfuck. Despite what you may have read in *Interview*, there's a lot more to it than androgyny, although this is a fine starting point. It was the fashion that accompanied many movements of the sixties in the form of unisex clothing and hairstyles. It was popularized in the seventies with the boom of glitter rock. But by the time this baby was old enough to steal to the thrift stores, out from under Mamma's watchful eye, leather jackets had become the one common fashion accessory—no matter what bend of taste they were hiding beneath their folds—and David Bowie had come out as a latent heterosexual.)

Here is some of the anti-fashion I've adhered to: Skirts are spiffy, but dresses are definitely darlin'. I can recall in '85 all the queens who had never worn a skirt in their life pointing at those who were wearing them, and saying, "That's so last year." When picking out a dress, I'll choose one that fits and looks nice on my frame, not one I need to fill or compromise myself for. I find that I'm most comfortable in the extra-dowdy, almost Eleanor Roosevelt-style frocks. One should never go two-dimensional.

When shopping, I will think in schools of painting for themes rather than eras or characters. Instead of finding an outfit that's very Breakfast at Tiffany's, I'll go for the one that screams Dali, Picasso, or Joel-Peter Witkin. In a more daring mood I might venture into the conceptual works of dadaist Duchamp or the silver-  
*(continues on page 20)*

plated kitsch of Jeff Koons. Remember, art you can meet and interact with is infinitely more interesting than that which rests on a wall.

As for makeup, I always travel against the grain. I have the most fun with eyebrows. I like them Groucho Marx-thick, or near-Vulcan. Accessorize with the atypical: workboots with cocktail dresses, fishnet with thick ties. I like to wear things where they don't normally go. Hot glue saves a lot of time. Most important, I do it because it feels good. Political statements are extra bonus points but not an end.

Whatever I choose to wear, I've found the less regard I have for public opinion in my wardrobe, the more comfortable I feel as a human being. Like Miss Day, I drool over dresses made of lace, but I also know how to work the giving end of a leather strap. Neither of these characteristics relies on me playing butch or femme. In fact, if the guy I'm with doesn't bite back, I'm disappointed. Nobody should have to know their place. Boys and girls, we've spent most of our early years wearing what Mom had picked out for us. Let's not spend the rest of our lives being dressed by a penis or a clit.

The nicest compliment I've ever received came from my good friend Christian Huygen, who said, "Darrell, before I knew you, I didn't own a single dress, and now I have six to choose from." As of this writing, that number is up to eight and counting, and I tell you: the dude looks stunning in each of them. ▼

*In June, D-L Alvarez will be curating Liquid Eyeliner, a group show by drag artists and gender-benders, at the Art Commission Gallery in San Francisco.*

My hips stick out like bumps, I can't wear this. Oh fuck it, everybody else wears these stupid little skirts, why can't I? I realize it just takes a little chutzpah, that's all. Within moments I have left all my doubts and am really into the look. (I find out later that those bumps can be minimized by not wearing underpants under the pantyhose. I wonder whether all real women know this.)

When the saleslady sees me gaze at the "All Earrings \$1" sign and asks me whether I need a pair of earrings for my outfit, I feel more confident that I blend in.

My first challenge: getting into the car without spreading my legs. My second problem: not tearing my pantyhose on the wire car seat.

Clicking down the street, mincing steps, instability. Vulnerable. (It's mostly the heels but that is part of the skirt experience.) I find myself taking the elevator down the three floors from my office rather than racing down the stairs as I usually do. It just doesn't feel safe—half of my body weight perched on something the size of a pea. Maybe it's like riding a bike and you get used to it.

Feeling sexy. For the first time in my life enjoying the catcalls. I'm in drag and I'm faking them out. People don't seem to be staring at me as they might a drag queen. Men watch and/or comment, women ignore me. At the same time that I'm in drag, I'm perfectly normal, pretending to be your average citizen. I love the contradiction, even if it's only in my head.

I act it up, swinging my hips, swaying my body. Playing the femme feels both natural and odd. I have uncovered a me that I don't often play with. It amazes me how much a piece of fabric can change who I am, both to others and myself. How much symbolism is invested in this tiny piece of clothing.

Having fun flirting with my girlfriend. The politically correct dyke in me screams, "You're playing into the most male-identified symbol there is! You're a sellout to feminism." There's no doubt that we've both been inundated with male standards of beauty and that's why she's excited to see me in this skirt. Does it change if we're both women?

Our new staff member's first day at work: should I tell him that I don't usually dress like this, should I put a disclaimer on my straight-acting appearance? I feel slightly embarrassed that he sees me femmed out and unable to lug boxes and crawl under tables to plug in office machines.

It really is a drag that this skirt so limits my mobility. I can hardly bend down to pick up my sixteen-month-old son, his bag, his bottle, and my purse without exposing my crotch for all to see or flipping over backwards in these heels.

My straight but hip therapist (who always wears pants unless it's terribly hot out) tells me I look sophisticated in my outfit. I haven't told her it's a costume.

At the Halloween party, kids and lesbians running around as cowboys/girls, Batman, and dinosaurs. I'm the only one in a skirt, appearing to have no costume at all, except that I now also wear a long, curly wig. "What are you?" everyone asks. I have a hard time explaining.

Taking off this skimpy rag to hang it in the closet, I wonder when I will wear it again. As much as I enjoyed blerding in, I also know I'm a pragmatist. Lace is itchy, skirts don't keep me warm, and I can't stride in heels. I wish these things weren't true. When I don't mind a little discomfort, though, I'll look forward to wearing my skirt again. ▼

*Kim Klausner is one of the publishers of OUT/LOOK.*