

kingpins

This week one of Britain's fashion leaders will be awarded the country's highest accolade: Designer of the Year. Iain R. Webb on the duellers for the crown

ON TUESDAY evening the new king or queen of British fashion will be crowned Designer of the Year at the Lloyd's Bank British Fashion Awards 1996. As might be expected, the ceremony promises to be a glamorous affair with the fashion industry turning out in their finest finery to celebrate and back-slap. And deservedly so. British fashion has not been more fashionable since the Sixties.

Since its creation in 1984 (Katharine Hamnett was the first winner), the award has been won by Betty Jackson (1985), Jasper Conran (1986), Rifat Ozbek (1988 and 1992), Workers for Freedom (1989) and John Rocha (1993). Vivienne Westwood (who is one of this year's nominees) won for two consecutive years (1990 and 1991), while Gulliano this year receives his fourth nomination, having already scored a hat-trick, taking home the top prize in 1987, 1994 and 1995. The other four nominations are Clements Ribeiro, Hussein Chalayan, Pearce Fonda and fashion's man of the moment, Alexander McQueen.

What makes this ceremony unique in the fashion world is its celebration of the diversity of British fashion, with categories covering every market and price. As well as the award for best designer, there are prizes for Best Retailer (high-street labels), Street Style (the envy of the rest of the world), Classics (one of our biggest exports) and Contemporary Collections (upmarket designer labels). Neither accessories nor evening wear are ignored, with their own categories.

Who will actually win the coveted trophies is anyone's guess. The fashion business can always be relied on to turn up the unexpected or bizarre, and, as always, it might be wise to keep an eye on the outsider on the rolls. ●

Iain R. Webb
designs with more than a twist. Designers like Pearce Fonda and Andrew Fonda prefer clothes that are understated in silhouette yet never lacking in detail: a strong signature that is a combination of subtle cutting and ultrastyle styling.



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