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Cameron Silver King of Vintage

By Vicki Bennington

Cameron Silver is fabulously chic, witty, smart and thriving, yet pleasantly down-to-earth. According to him, those are keys to his success.

When he opened the now famous Decades vintage clothing store on Los Angeles's Melrose Avenue in 1997, he believes what helped him stand out from the crowd was his superior customer service and old time retail approach.

"I've always been extremely nice to people – I still am – and they appreciate that," he said.

Even though he grew up in Beverly Hills, Cameron jokingly said he and his family refer to themselves as "The Beverly Hillbillies." His father was an attorney and his mother in advertising, neither one in the entertainment business.

"My parents say they don't know how I got so fancy," Cameron said while laughing. "We are the most regular, normal people you would ever want to meet. But my parents liked style and shopping for clothes, and they got me excited about dressing up."

An only child, Cameron said he grew up mostly around adults, present at parties thrown by his parents and accompanying them on their travels all over the world. Along the way, he developed an eye for nice clothing.

In high school, he got into acting and majored in theater at the University of California Los Angeles. What he liked most was the costumes. What really led to his fashion career came through his time as a cabaret singer, touring the country, interpreting German songs from the 1920s and 1930s.

"I would go shopping, looking for vintage men's clothes for my performances, and I found wonderful clothes for women. I sent them home to my parents – not knowing what we were going to do with them, but they were so wonderful, I had to buy them," he said.

That first living room full of fashion finds became the basis for Decades.

At the time the store opened, the general feeling of the country was "minimalism." Even Hollywood stars were tightening their belts, and the idea of vintage couture was appealing.

"I didn't carry – and still don't – gowns that are 'costumes' or that look out of date," he said. "I choose clothes from the past that look modern. The timeless designs."

Another sign of the times in the late 1990s, is that the idea of personal stylists was practically unheard of – even by the elite. "Stars would walk into the store and shop for themselves," he said.

"Dress up!" has been one of Cameron's mottos, but he said dressing

with a little finesse doesn't mean you have to wear a tuxedo or an evening gown. "It isn't any harder for a man to put on a pair of slacks and a nice shirt," he said. "I tell my clients that you don't have to be uncomfortable to have style."

Helping to carry on the legacy of Halston, Cameron is the fashion director of H Halston and H by Halston, for which he is the on-air spokesperson on QVC, where H by Halston is exclusively sold.

His own personal style? He calls it eclectic. "Though now I am more 'Halston-esque,' I used to dress a lot wackier," he said. "Now I would say my style is more American modern chic – with occasional wackiness."

Can the average person afford something at Decades? "Absolutely," Cameron said. Prices can range from \$120 items to \$450 to \$850 for a nice cocktail dress; \$800 to \$1,500 for an evening dress. And everything in between.

"Of course, we have more expensive pieces that can go up to \$36,000, but you can find affordable vintage, too," he said.

For women who don't want to spend (or can't spend) a lot of money on multiple designer pieces, Cameron recommends finding an anchor "little black dress" and dressing it up or down. "The dress itself doesn't have to be vintage designer, though I've seen people pick up something like a vintage Valentino for a very affordable price," Cameron said. "Buy a basic dress on sale at a department store, and accessorize it – throw in a little vintage bag or piece of jewelry."

Cameron has been the creative consultant for many brand launches, curator for countless exhibitions and runway events and all-around collaborator extraordinaire for everything from jewelry to footwear. He was named one of "Time" magazine's "25 Most Influential Names and Faces in Fashion" in 2002. He is known for dressing Hollywood celebrities like Julia Roberts, Gwyneth Paltrow, Lady Gaga and Salma Hayek.

He previously appeared on the 2013 Bravo reality documentary series, "Dukes of Melrose." His book, "Decades: A Century of Fashion," published by Bloomsbury Publishing, showcases significant 20th century fashions, as well as celebrities he collaborated with over the years.

Cameron has visited St. Louis several times to participate in various events, including curating a runway presentation featuring classic couture from Versace, Christian Dior, Yves Saint Laurent and more at the Four Seasons of Fashion event benefitting the St. Louis Symphony musicians on April 4.