

# Red

MARCH 2015

## WHAT'S SEXY NOW

LIPS: SWAP RED FOR CORAL  
HAIR: JUST TOUSLED ENOUGH  
SKIN: 7 SURPRISING NEW RULES

EXCLUSIVE  
**SAM TAYLOR-  
JOHNSON**  
'WHY I MADE  
50 SHADES  
THE MOVIE'

EAT  
YOURSELF  
HAPPY  
by  
Deliciously  
Ella

**2015**  
INTERIORS  
TRENDS  
*Painted a wall  
pink yet?*

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# Sam Taylor-Johnson

# There *IS* NO black *AND* white...

With her edgy art and unconventional relationship, she's used to courting controversy, so it's no surprise Sam Taylor-Johnson leapt at the opportunity to direct *Fifty Shades Of Grey*. Lorien Haynes meets the woman with the power to turn everyone's favourite trash into cinematic treasure »

*Photographs* MAX ABADIAN *Styling* NICOLA ROSE

**EXCLUSIVE**

**Cashmere coat**, price on request, Céline.  
**Wool and silk jacket**, £1,695, Saint Laurent by Hedi Slimane. **Cotton top**, £110, Paule Ka.  
**Poly-mix trousers**, £255, Elizabeth and James. **18ct gold cuff**, £10,100 for a set of two, Tiffany & Co.  
**Rings**, Taylor-Johnson's own. **Leather shoes**, £295, Church's





Wool jacket, price on request; silk top, £275; brass ring, £175; leather trainers, £355, all Saint Laurent by Hedi Slimane. Trousers, as before. Bracelet, Taylor-Johnson's own

# S

am Taylor-Johnson is negotiating a sea of extension cords as she attempts to enter the garden of LA's Chateau Marmont hotel. The cleaner is busy vacuuming the carpet in the courtyard (don't ask). Actress Emily Blunt is sounding very loud

and very British behind me (because of the cacophony of said vacuum) as Taylor-Johnson slides into the seat opposite me, slight, elegant and unnoticed. At 47 and a mother of four, there is no fuss about her. And, as she fixes me with her soulful, steely gaze, no messing, either.

Glowing from walking her three dogs in nearby Runyon Canyon, in 'top-to-toe Nike', Taylor-Johnson raises her jumper to flash her T-shirt, emblazoned with 'USA'. 'See, I'm attempting to embrace the culture,' she laughs, before asking our waiter for Marmite. 'The thick brown goo? The English stuff? No!' he wails. She wants it to go with her boiled eggs and soldiers. 'I have five jars at home!' she muses. 'I used to rub it into my kids' gums when they were babies to make sure they'd like it. You have to like Marmite in my family.'

The only visible insignia that sets Taylor-Johnson apart from any other make-up-free mother this morning is her pink hair. 'Ah, yes,' she says, tugging at it. 'This happened the day before yesterday when I was feeling the only thing I have control over is my hair. The only final cut I have is the haircut.' Fetching as it is, youthful, cute and like the strawberry third of a Neapolitan, the 'cut' of her hair is a statement because she is, of course, the director of the hugely anticipated *Fifty Shades Of Grey*, and her editing is still a work in progress. It's a process she's convinced will still be happening an hour prior to the film's release.

'I'm literally going out of my mind,' she says. 'I have seen this film over a thousand times and I'm now in a blancmange. But the nuances within – the tiniest shift, look, blink of an eye – can make all the difference and flip it into the wrong territory. It's like walking a knife edge.' Whether you've read the books or not, *Fifty Shades Of Grey* immediately became a more interesting film when it was announced that Taylor-Johnson was directing it. It was material that should always have been in the hands of a woman. And knowing Taylor-Johnson's body of work, it makes total sense that she saw off Joe Wright, Steven Soderbergh and Gus Van Sant to secure directing the film version of the fastest-selling paperback of all time.

A graduate of Goldsmiths College, London, Sam Taylor-then-Wood established herself as a photographer and video artist in the 1990s. Alongside contemporaries

Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst, her living portraits explored human vulnerability and sexuality with humour and self-awareness. She married leading art dealer Jay Jopling in 1997, photographed every celebrity under the sun, from David Beckham to Robert Downey Jr, and was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1998. Her first short film, *Love You More* (2008), written by Patrick Marber and produced by Anthony Minghella, was erotic, teenage, touching. Her first feature, *Nowhere Boy* (2009), about the young John Lennon, was nominated for a BAFTA and starred her now (second) husband, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, being 'very raw, very emotional' and very much under the female gaze.

#### THIS TRACK RECORD IN EDGY SENSUALITY, AND COMBINING Highbrow WITH COMMERCIALISM,

made Taylor-Johnson a logical directorial choice for an adaptation that runs the risk of having the feminist within us jump on her high horse. *Fifty Shades Of Grey*, the book, started as writer EL James' fan-fiction blog on *Twilight*. It grew into a self-published trilogy that sold more than 100 million copies worldwide. Guilty pleasure for some, over-my-dead-body fiction for others. As Salman Rushdie put it, 'I've never read anything so badly written that got published. It made *Twilight* look like *War And Peace*.'

Literary merits aside, women the world over embraced the tale of graduate ingénue Anastasia Steele being sexually educated by business magnate Christian Grey. Eroticism went mainstream and had millions of us in its thrall. We may have been embarrassed by the 'oh my!' of it all and the cringey moniker 'mommy porn', but it introduced many of us – me included – to BDSM (Bondage/Dominance/Sadism/Masochism). And no, Taylor-Johnson didn't know the term, either. All in all, it was a vicarious sexy read, even if you were hiding it inside a copy of the *Guardian* (or in my case, a slipcover of *Tess Of The d'Urbervilles*).

It's okay until you think about your teenage daughter reading it, I suggest, thinking of Angelica, Taylor-Johnson's 17-year-old. You feel that, if taken seriously, the book could be interpreted as an exploration of female submission and victimisation. 'Exactly,' says Taylor-Johnson. 'I felt like I had a responsibility to empower the lead character. Anastasia had to go on a journey of sexual exploration but, by the end, it had to be about empowerment. It is all her choice. All the decisions, she's clearly made. She is not falling prey.'

'That's the message I want people to walk away with. That feeling of "all the riches and success and charisma >>

count for nothing, if it's under terms you cannot accept". In *Fifty Shades*, seemingly Christian has all the power and control – but actually Anastasia does.'

The degree of Taylor-Johnson's vehemence belies the current battle she is waging. Coming from the autonomy of shooting *Nowhere Boy* as an independent feature, she's found herself negotiating a studio blockbuster with a \$40 million budget and a strict approval process.

'I want to protect my vision and that's the hardest thing,' she says. 'There are so many voices. With any idea, 12 people have to approve it. And then you make it and 12 people want to adjust it. And you have to try and keep them all at bay. To keep your voice clear. To keep the shape of your art. You think, you hired me because I'm a creative artist with a vision. Don't try and knock it out of me.'

#### TAYLOR-JOHNSON IS NOTHING IF NOT A FIGHTER.

You look at her childhood – something she doesn't discuss – and she is neither entitled nor bred with a silver spoon in her mouth. Brought up in Streatham, south London, her father, a chartered surveyor, left to become the treasurer of Hells Angels when she was nine. Her mother, a yoga teacher, moved to Sussex, taking her and her brother and sister to live in a commune, before leaving them when Taylor-Johnson was 15. In the midst of so much upheaval, she says she was 'a total thicke... with five CSEs first time round and no O-levels'. She got into Goldsmiths by retaking those exams, an early sign of her tenacity and ambition.

Her mettle was most tested when, aged 30, weeks after giving birth to Angelica, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. Three years later, having fully recovered, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy. She has said of this 'drips by day, Prada by night' hell (she has a great sense of humour) that she 'took on cancer like I take on everything – a mission and a job to accomplish'. Her great friend Stella McCartney commented at the time, 'She had so much thrown at her, and yet she still keeps her head above water with dignity.'

Today, Taylor-Johnson says her health is 'pretty good, thanks'. But look to her art and you can see her anguish. Her famous photographic portrait series, *Crying Men*, shot between 2002 and 2004, depicts 28 actors, from Daniel Craig to Paul Newman, weeping. It was something she admits they were doing for her. 'I did it as an exorcism of tears,' she says of the piece, 'from not having cried through being ill. I almost never cry, and it's something I don't like about myself.'

Taylor-Johnson's ability to put genuine emotion and raw life into her work bodes well for *Fifty Shades*. Devotees can rest assured that the director is staying true to the book. 'I've practically eaten it,' she tells me. 'I have read it over and over. More than any other book ever. I had it on set with me the whole time. I have it in the edit room now.'

She says she did her research in every regard. 'Jamie [Dornan, who plays Christian] and I had to sit and meet



Lace dress, £5,420, Louis Vuitton. Cuff, as before. Rings, Taylor-Johnson's own

various dominants and dominatrix,' she explains with a wry smile, 'just to make sure we understood that world, so that we in no way portrayed it incorrectly.'

While we are on the subject of Mr Dornan, I ask if the rumours are true? If, in fact, we don't quite get to see everything there is to see of her leading man. Her eyes flash, 'Well, it says no full-frontal but...'

Of the film's stars, Taylor-Johnson says, 'Dakota [Johnson, as Anastasia] is fantastic. She has that rare knit of fragility, vulnerability and naivety, yet she's really strong. And Jamie's funny because he doesn't seem to feel any of the pressure. Or show he feels it. Everything washes over him and he's constantly happy. He's such a sweet and lovely man.'

The actor speaks equally highly of his director. 'Sam has this amazing ability to evoke calmness in the face of madness,' he says. 'It's a very handy skill to possess as a director, and as a human being in general. She's also got a fierce wit and is extremely funny, which is very useful in coping with the ridiculousness of film-making. Sam is now one of my favourite people on the planet.'

What perhaps neither cast nor director anticipated was the microscopic scrutiny that the film would be »

“ ANASTASIA had to go on a JOURNEY of SEXUAL exploration but, by the end, it had to be about EMPOWERMENT ”

under. Taylor-Johnson has not even been allowed to screen her rough cut to friends and family (husband Aaron has a cameo in it) and yet the film has taken over her life. She was offered the job in June 2013 and says, 'The moment I stepped out of the meeting, I stepped on to one of those bullet trains. The doors closed and I couldn't get off. The speed, the velocity, was unbelievable. I need to get off and breathe and think about something else.'

**THAT SOMETHING ELSE IS TAYLOR-JOHNSON'S FAMILY.** She met Aaron at his audition for *Nowhere Boy* in 2008, having separated from Jopling after 11 years of marriage. They announced their engagement at the film's premiere in October 2009 and married at Babington House in Somerset three years later – both taking each other's names. To the dissenters of their 23-year age gap, she says, 'Tell them to fuck off. If you love someone, you love someone. It doesn't matter; age, colour, c'mon!' The couple have two daughters, Wylda (four) and Romy (three), sisters to Angelica (17) and Jessie (nine), Taylor-Johnson's daughters with Jopling.

'We are tight,' she says of her family unit. 'We travel as a pack. Aaron and I try not to work at the same time. When he was doing *Godzilla* in Vancouver, we were all there with him. And then they sent us back for *Fifty Shades* and Aaron was a stay-at-home dad and did all the school runs. And I think that consistency helped. I got lucky with Aaron, he's amazing.'

They settled in Los Angeles last year because Taylor-Johnson wanted some stability for the children. They live in the hills in central LA, equidistant between the kids' three schools. She loves everything about LA life, she says, apart from the traffic. 'Most mornings I open the curtains and say to Aaron, "Look how beautiful the day is! It's like we are on holiday but we live here!" You get that childlike excitement.'

Taylor-Johnson's face lights up when she talks about her husband and children. It's clear that, irrespective of *Fifty Shades*, her mind is firmly on her family. 'I don't want to do anything next,' she says. 'I feel wrung dry and I need to find some building bricks again. I don't think I could even compose a picture right now. My creative brain has to shut down for a second. I need to be at home, put my feet up, feel calmer, eat well and hang out with the kids. That's the nourishment I need more than anything.'

**ONE COULD ARGUE MANY THINGS ABOUT FIFTY SHADES OF GREY** – that the film cannot be any worse than the book, that it will do incredibly well simply because it is a storm in a soft-porn teacup – but what is unequivocally great about it is that it has the potential to spearhead eroticism for women in commercial cinema, and has a woman behind the camera. As Scott Mendelson in *Forbes* magazine quite rightly observed, 'It may end



**FROM TOP:** Taylor-Johnson with her husband Aaron; with Jamie Dornan on the *Fifty Shades* set; Dornan stars opposite Dakota Johnson in the film



up being one of the most important films of the next couple of years for female film-makers.'

'It's going to be controversial, whatever,' is all that Taylor-Johnson will say on the subject. She clearly has no wish to become a spokeswoman for bringing eroticism to your local Odeon. But she's not naive to the impact. 'A Machiavellian part of me thinks if this is successful, it affords me the freedom and the power to make something on my own terms, later on.' Freeing herself from decision by committee, no doubt.

As Taylor-Johnson bounces up to take the dogs home and get back into her edit, she refuses to anticipate any achievement. 'I have learnt more than I ever wanted to learn on this movie and that has been fantastic for arming me to make something the next time round. I really, honestly think it's been truly, truly challenging.' And with this you realise that, as with any true artist, the journey, the learning, is all in the process and not in the product. 'Going through all the crap I've been through,' she concludes, 'I don't really listen to other people's opinions anyway; I just follow my heart and my instincts.' And with that very real and honest admission, Taylor-Johnson walks away to get on with it. **2**

*Fifty Shades Of Grey* is in cinemas on February 13th

**Go behind the scenes on Sam Taylor-Johnson's *Red* shoot and read her Best Things In Life at REDONLINE.CO.UK**