

Redefining Style & Identity: Willy Chavarria Creates a “New Life”

Willy Chavarria once again creates a collection that feels like home.



ITZEL SOSA

SEP 15, 2023  PAID

We're back with another NYFW review. This season's shows have come to a conclusion and I don't know about you guys, but as quickly as this season came is as quickly as it left!

*Today we're talking about a brand (and designer) celebrated for its unique take on men's fashion, seamlessly blending elements of race, politics, and sexuality to create garments that are graceful, elegant, and at times, edgy. Let's get into **Willy Chavarria**.*

Willy Chavarria earned recognition as one of the early New York designers to exclusively feature models of color, harnessing his fashion shows as a means of expressing profound political messages.

Today, guest writer Itzel presents another fascinating and insightful review of Willy Chavarria's Spring Summer 2024 runway show.

Happy reading,

Amarissa

 **Subscribed**

Fashion is a medium for self-expression and is a celebration of individual pride. Yet, what unfolds when the fashion industry frowns upon or commodifies styles rooted in one's culture, deeming them insufficient for its 'high-end' standards? What if your culture is unfairly misconstrued as hostile and dangerous, rather than being appreciated for the beauty it embodies, like the Chicano style of the Latino community?

Within the fashion world, particularly for individuals belonging to the Latinx community, there is an unspoken code that discourages the celebration of one's cultural heritage and unique styles. This unspoken rule ingrains the fear of being perceived as inferior to peers based on the clothing choices that reflect one's roots and personal style.



Models pose for the final walk onto stairs at the Willy Chavarria Spring Summer 2024 show. Image: Harper's Bazaar // Selwyn Tungol.

I was drawn to Willy Chavarria not only for his captivating creative work that resonates with diverse audiences but also for his profound sense of cultural pride. As a Latina who endured judgment due to my culture and language as I was growing up, it was challenging to imagine achieving success without conforming to societal norms. The discovery of designers like Willy Chavarria, who authentically embrace themselves and, in doing so, attain remarkable success, serves as an empowering representation for Latinos everywhere, instilling the belief that we too can follow in his footsteps.

Willy Chavarria consistently infuses Chicano/Latinx culture into his collections, ensuring the majority of his models are of Latino background, thus imbuing his looks with a sense of familial connection and cultural authenticity.

Diverging from the conventional practice of hiring professional models, he opts for street casting, personally selecting individuals who epitomize the "everyday" person, those whose style aligns with his brand's message of embracing ownership and authority with pride. These models confidently walk down the runways, exuding a commanding and compelling presence, as if conveying saying: "We are here, we take pride in who we are, we are beautiful, and we demand to be seen and respected."



Images: Harper's Bazaar // Selwyn Tungol

Chavarria acts as a catalyst for positive change by bridging the gap between high-end fashion and the community, all while pushing the boundaries of menswear. His designs draw inspiration from his roots in California's San Joaquin Valley, which embodies the essence of Chicano culture, yet he manages to create something entirely fresh and visually striking.

He pays homage to his home and culture by infusing his designs with avant-garde silhouettes and minimalistic imagery. He takes the Chicano style and elevates it to a level of elegance while incorporating elements from Machismo culture and adding a touch of femininity. In doing this, he pushes the boundaries to represent a more open and queer perspective within men's culture.

Chavarria's collections are known for being political, whether it's the sources of his inspiration, the venues he chooses, or even the name of the collection. There is always an underlying message.

His first collection "Harder" drew inspiration from activist organizations and historical depictions of civil disobedience. His collection "Eulogy", featuring 100% sustainably made garments, served as a reminder of

how we are in control of our futures on Earth. This concept was portrayed through a somber and mournful runway show, symbolizing a funeral procession. For last year's collection, "Please Rise", he hosted the show in a non-denominational church that assists Latino immigrants as well as supports and advocates for the LGBTQ+ community.

However, with his recent collection, "Kangaroo," Chavarria takes a different approach, placing a greater emphasis on the clothing itself rather than centering the collection around political themes. As he gears up for his Spring/Summer 2024 collection, anticipation runs high, leaving the audience eagerly awaiting what he has in store for the upcoming show.

Willy Chavarria Spring Summer 2024

It is only fitting that Chavarria's show is held inside a church-like venue, coinciding with his choice of theme for the collection, "New Life," representing the rebirth of his branding. The show opens with a classical music rendition of "Besame Mucho," a classic Latin ballad, as the models descend onto the runway.



Images: Vogue Runway // Laura S. Fuchs

Embracing his trademark inspiration drawn from Latinidad culture, Chavarria introduces a fresh style to men's clothing in his initial looks. Maintaining his characteristic exaggerated silhouettes, he unveils a fusion of Chicano flair and elegance through an all-white suit featuring oversized lapels and generously wide-legged trousers, complemented by a broad-brimmed red caballero (cowboy) hat.

Throughout the show, Chavarria includes different takes on the "cholo" uniform, creating a more elevated and avant-guard design. With his originality and innovative ideas rooted in Latino culture, Chavarria draws inspiration from the zoot suit era of the '40s, fashioning a modern interpretation with classic bright blue suits that can be best described as 'firme.' As models grace the runway in these ensembles, complete with traditional white hats, his designs come to life, paying homage to a past era while adding a fresh twist.



Image: WWD



Image: Harper's Bazaar // Selwyn Tungol



Image: WWD

Following Chavarria's theme of past meets present, he takes the classic "Cholita" subculture hair, constructing a new contemporary style of all up-dos and slick back hair, reminiscent of '60s Chicano culture.



Image: WWd



Image: Harper's Bazaar // Selwyn Tungol



Image: WWD

Chavarria has recently expressed his desire to transition his career toward a more refined and less politically charged direction, all the while maintaining a connection to his Chicano heritage. That is exactly what he accomplished in this show.

Recognizing that the future lies in the hands of the youth, he created a few pieces that embody the challenges he believes the new generation faces today. Some of his designs even feature an imaginative youth

collective named "Grupo Nueva Vision Por Vida," which translates to "A New Vision for Life Group", written across the clothing.



Image: Vogue Runway // Laura S. Fuchs



Image: Vogue Runway // Laura S. Fuchs

Beyond his appeal to the youth, Chavarria also designed a few looks that serve as a visual representation of the chaos he believes the present-day youth experience. While steering clear of overtly political themes, this notion underscores the idea that we have yet to confront the numerous challenges plaguing our society today, all of which will fall into the hands of the next generation to fix as they transition into adulthood.



Image: Harper's Bazaar // Selwyn Tungol



Image: Harper's Bazaar // Selwyn Tungol

The show reached a breathtaking end with the spotlight on three exquisitely crafted dresses. These dresses, nearly identical apart from their colors, featured billowing trains and prominently embellished Mariachi bows in the front, an iconic symbol in Latino culture. As the models took their final walk, the quintessential Latino ballad, “Los Caminos de La Vida”, played in the background.



Images: Vogue Runway // Laura S. Fuchs

Willy Chavarria's namesake brand consistently strives to evoke a sense of familiarity that resonates with any Latino, evoking the essence of "home". Through meticulous attention to music selection and clothing design, Chavarria succeeded in transforming his show into a celebration reminiscent of gatherings within one's own home. Personally, this show found its way into my heart by reminding me of how beautiful it is to celebrate my heritage.

How can you revitalize and celebrate your culture, infusing it with fresh meaning and purpose, instead of undermining its essence?

Final oversight & edits by Amarissa.

Today's writer...

Itzel is a participant in Fashion Talk's Summer 2023 Student Writing Program. Aligned with our mission to uplift young voices in the fashion industry, I'm

excited to share her voice with our community.

Learn more about Itzel [here](#).

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