

WARIS AHLUWALIA

When heritage meets humour, Waris Ahluwalia emerges in all his diamond-encrusted glory. He is an actor and designer, regal and resplendent, unassuming and yet bursting with confidence in his creative powers. Whether gracing the big screen with frequent collaborator Wes Anderson or tracing a legacy of craftsmanship in India for his jewellery collection, Ahluwalia seems impossible to categorise. He seamlessly drifts from one passion to the next and back again whenever he so desires.

Born at the foothills of the Himalayas, he moved to New York with his family at the age of 5. Ahluwalia's story bears the hallmarks of a Hollywood tale: cutting out a Gucci advertisement for a red shoe was Ahluwalia's self-proclaimed awakening, and it is from here that his obsession with beauty began.

A liberal arts college life in upstate New York didn't quite satisfy the young Ahluwalia, though a year abroad in Manchester, England did a little more. Struck by the ubiquity of the turban in the Sikh community in the U.K., Ahluwalia began donning the religious garment on a daily basis. Neither a desire to be different nor to conform has shaped Ahluwalia's debonair distinction—he has merely grown to be urbane and unabashed.

Upon his return to New York, Ahluwalia tried a variety of different occupations, professing that if something held his interest for more than a day, then he needed to know how it worked. In his twenties, he learned how a music magazine was run, how to organise parties for the New York City art scene, and how to meet then up-and-coming film directors with a penchant for the odd.

Wes Anderson was one such film director and over a dinner in 2003, Ahluwalia was offered a role in Anderson's latest film, *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*. Despite having never acted before, Ahluwalia agreed based on the faith that Anderson had shown in him, and flew to Italy to begin shooting. When asked why he had not taken acting classes, he replied, 'When I signed on for *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, Wes never asked me if I could act. He asked me if I would come to Italy and be in his movie.'

Ahluwalia's role in the movie led to further appearances in other Anderson films such as *The Darjeeling Limited* as a stern and sublimely dressed train manager, and most recently in *The Grand Budapest Hotel* as one of many big-name cameos playing hotel concierges. It would be fair to say that Ahluwalia is known as one of Anderson's go-to actors, part

