

RETAIL

Holt Renfrew takes pride in self-expression, platforms queer celebrity duo

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The activation stars Ms. Weyman and Mr. Gerges getting ready together as they share their experiences as members of the LGBTQIA community and create luxury looks from Holt Renfrew. Image credit: Holt Renfrew

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

Canadian department store chain Holt Renfrew is celebrating diversity, fashion and community in a new campaign.

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Tapping Raffaella Weyman the singer-songwriter known as "Ralph" hails from Toronto and Canadian Egyptian model Mina Gerges to share their experiences as members of the LGBTQIA+ community and create luxury looks from Holt Renfrew's selection, the retailer is taking a stand during this year's Pride proceedings. Further, Holt Renfrew has announced a collaboration with Covenant House Toronto (CHT), the largest agency in Canada serving those aged 16 to 24 who are homeless, trafficked or at risk.

"At a recent job fair that CHT organized for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness, an overwhelming amount of the youth were interested in working in film," said Michael Seater, director at **CHT**, in a statement.

"As I had just started prep as director of the Holt Renfrew Pride 2023 Campaign, I saw a great opportunity for two queer youth to attend and observe all creative meetings, location scouts and, of course, the shoot days, while being paid a fair wage," Mr. Seater said. "The participants were able to get a taste of what a professional film set was like and the different departments and positions they might explore, along with developing universal skills that can be used in any field and are foundational on the road to financial independence.

"I'm grateful for Holt Renfrew's enthusiasm for this mentee program and look forward to partnering together again in the future."

Fit for Pride

Ms. Weyman and Mr. Gerges use Holt Renfrew's platform to speak to the importance of queer spaces, a concept that the retailer recreates for the occasion.

Titled "Getting Ready With Pride," the duo put together outfits from brands carried by the store in a campaign video, donning sparkling and vibrant attire as they divulge their personal journeys to self-acceptance and well-being.

Confidence, the importance of rest, gender norms and transparency are among the topics of discussion. The two

were hand-picked by CHT to participate in the filmmaking project as mentees.

Holt Renfrew's latest Pride campaign was created in part by Toronto's LGBTQIA youth

"My first experience of a queer space was online because it was so terrifying to even do that in the real world," says Mr. Gerdes, in the video.

"Having friends in my life who embraced my queerness and made me feel like there was nothing wrong with me once I experienced that love and acceptance from people, it emboldened me to be myself in real life and that was such a game-changing feeling for me."

Ms. Weyman offers personal anecdotes amidst themed outfit changes, with "Big Night Out" up first. For this, the singer chooses designer monogrammed denim sets, silver chain link necklaces and sequined tops along with dramatic eyeliner and cosmetic looks from Holt Renfrew's luxury beauty names.

Ralph and Mina Gerdes share their personal experiences all while putting together some fab looks. Click to watch Getting Ready with Pride! ><https://t.co/a4zPrX6xYQ>
pic.twitter.com/R8m8s5huu7

Holt Renfrew (@HoltRenfrew) June 12, 2023

Viewers are given a line into her creative process, steps toward accurately representing her own identity in her music and struggles a balance between authenticity and performative action.

"Recharge" is the second occasion that the pair dress for, the two stars relaxing and replenishing with face masks and minimal makeup. Both of them wear colorful, silk pajama sets as they feast on brunch, inclusive of parfaits, avocado toast and energy balls, all evoking offerings available across Holt Renfrew's health-conscious cafe menus.



A brunch scene evokes offerings available across Holt Renfrew's health-conscious cafe menus. Image credit: Holt Renfrew

Ready to serve

Wellness, on a physical and emotional level, is central to the video's last few sections. The term's relationship to Pride is explored by both public figures, Mr. Gerdes focusing on how fashion can help support positive body image.

"Being a bigger guy, people always put rules on what kind of fashion I'm allowed to wear," Mr. Gerdes says, in the video.

"I actually don't care if people don't like what I wear," he continues. "As long as I look in the mirror and I like what I see, then that's the most important thing.

"That's my stamp of approval."

Finally, in a nod to the structure of celebratory events worldwide, "The Parade" prompts Holt Renfrew's participants to pose against a blue sky backdrop in rainbow looks.



At the end of the film, the stars wear their Pride Parade-ready Holt Renfrew outfits, screaming in the last shot in a nod to the importance of using one's voice. Image credit: Holt Renfrew

Aside from making space for LGBTQIA+ narratives, Holt Renfrew has included a list of organizations for consumers to engage with and support all year round on a dedicated [landing page](#). The list includes Asian Community AIDS Services, LGBT YouthLine and Out In Schools.

Holt Renfrew has dropped "Get Ready With Me" programming before in February 2023, similarly structured content placed a spotlight on North American National Hockey League player Mitch Marner ([see story](#)).

Other luxury retailers are following suit, publishing styling content with universal appeal. Taking to her closet to showcase her most coveted looks, U.S. department store Saks recently involved American actor Emma Roberts in a campaign of this nature ([see story](#)).

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