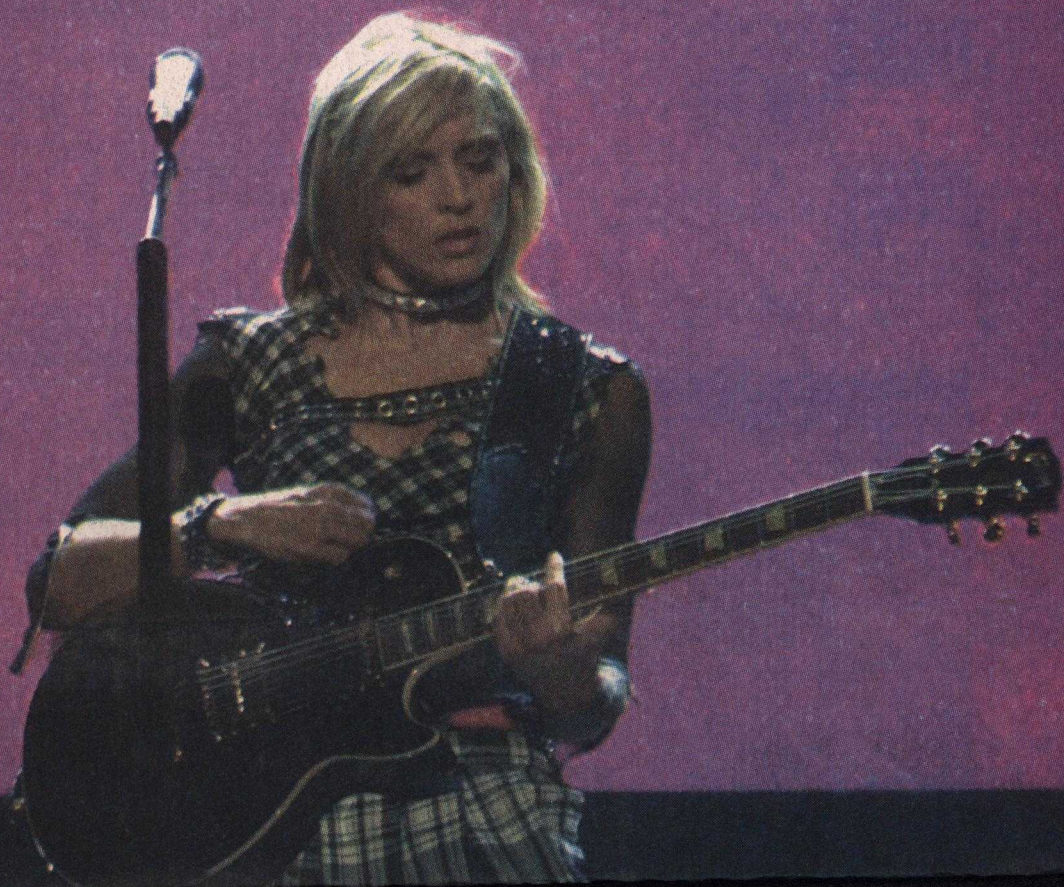




John Cameron Mitchell shows off an Arianne Phillips creation in the movie 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch.' In the middle photo is Madonna, currently wearing Phillips-designed clothes and gear on tour.

# *Glamour* **PROFESSION**





## The amazing career path of Santa Cruz's Arianne Phillips has led her to the pinnacle of rock 'n' roll fashion: dressing Madonna

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Bio P

**T**he woman who dresses Madonna is a proud alum of Wayne's College of Beauty. Let's pause a second while the enormity of that fact hits the thousands of street-cool Santa Cruz fashionistas who always considered Wayne's a local joke.

The woman who dresses Madonna (yes, THAT Madonna) is Arianne Phillips (Santa Cruz High, Class of '80) and, let's be clear, we're not talking about Madonna's valet here. Phillips doesn't zip up Madonna's strapless dresses.

She is, in fact, Madonna's stylist. Phillips picks out the clothes, selects the look and thus fashions the image of the world's most famous diva. Which puts her job up there with Bill Gates' accountant, Tiger Woods' swing coach and Julia Roberts' dentist as the most high-pressure glamour jobs in popular culture.

"I was a Wayne's College of Beauty student in 1979 and '80," Phillips said. "And I have to say, it made a big impact on me."

Wayne's quietly closed its doors last month, a week before Madonna appeared in the Bay Area as part of her "Drowned



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Dan, Arianne, and Judy Phillips at home in Santa Cruz.

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World" tour wearing Phillips' creations on stage, an irony that belongs in a bad novel.

Now swallow this: Lop Madonna off her resume and Phillips still has one of the most impressive careers ever to come out of Santa Cruz County.

The woman who dresses Madonna has also worked with

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# Designer

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Cher, Jerry Garcia, Courtney Love and scores of lesser rock luminaries in music video, magazine shoots and CD covers.

On top of that, she is navigating a booming career as a top-flight costume designer in the movie industry, having already designed the clothes for some of the most stylish movies of the last decade, including "Tank Girl," "The Crow," "The People vs. Larry Flynt" and "Girl, Interrupted."

Her latest triumph might also be her biggest.

Right around the corner from Wayne's now empty storefront, on a big screen at the Nickelodeon Theater, is another sign that Wayne's did not die in vain: "Hedwig & the Angry Inch."

The indie rock musical starring John Cameron Mitchell as a reluctant transsexual turned "internationally ignored" rock singer is the summer's most talked-about subculture hit. It's the kind of film likely to be a cult-fave midnight movie for years to come, and it's the rare picture where costuming is critical to the film's artistic integrity.

It's also Arianne Phillips' proudest moment.

## Brainstorming 'Hedwig'

"It was a pure experience for me," said Phillips of "Hedwig."

"Film is collaborative. It's all about translation and communication in terms of the images that you create and the story you're trying to tell.

"The great thing about 'Hedwig' is that it was all coming from one person, so (Mitchell) was kind of like one-stop shopping for me."

No one who has yet to see "Hedwig" can fully grasp the wow factor of the costumes.

The off-Broadway stage production on which the film is based included exactly two outfits for Hedwig. When Phillips was brought on for the movie version, that number shot up to 32, of which 28 made it to the final cut.

Those outfits include a two-piece go-go thing made of human hair, a one-sleeved red top that would give Cher pause, and a giant cape over a patchwork denim jumpsuit. Inside the cape on one side in letters that suggest graffiti is "Yankee Go Home." On the other side, in similar letters, is the punchline: "... With Me."

Phillips' choices, she said, go along not only with Hedwig's life as a cross-dressing performer, but from the character's background as a child of communist East Berlin who landed in America as a young adult.

"Hedwig's look, especially on-stage, was a bit larger-than-life, a bit-over-the-top. Given her background and her deprivation of pop culture in Berlin, she tends to overcompensate and dress uber-feminine, uber-girl."

Still, Phillips is less inclined to talk about the intoxicating freedom of "Hedwig" than its simplicity. Working with a small, low-budget film like "Hedwig" gave her a direct route to her collaborators that contrasts with the often tortuous cog-in-a-machine process of working on big Hollywood pictures.

Before "Hedwig," Phillips was slated to do costumes for the movie version of "Charlie's Angels," a typical example of the giantism that plagues the film industry.

That experience quickly became a frustrating one with delays and unclear lines of authority. Faced with a looming scheduling conflict with "Hedwig," she withdrew from "Charlie's Angels" heartbroken.

"'Hedwig' was a healing project for me," she said. "I don't enjoy these big studio movies where you're dealing



Arianne Phillips with 'Hedwig and the Angry Inch' makeup designer Mike Potter.

with committees of people instead of individuals.

"It kind of helped me re-prioritize why I'm a costume designer and to get the joy out of it again after I had lost some of that joy."

## From the beginning

So exactly how did a Santa Cruz kid get to such a pinnacle?

You certainly don't get there without a lot of nerve, and Phillips showed she had nerve to spare when at the age of 20 she left Santa Cruz for New York with the idea of storming the New York fashion business armed with nothing but a do-it-yourself portfolio made up of photos of her Santa Cruz friends wearing clothes she bought by the pound at Bargain Barn.

That's nerve.

Even before that, Phillips lived somewhat of a storybook life — if that storybook were Abbie Hoffman's "Steal This Book."

Thanks to her parents, Dan and Judy Phillips, young Arianne was at the center of several of the counterculture epicenters of the 1960s.

She was born in the Kennedy years in New York, while her bohemian parents grooved on the folk boom taking place in Greenwich Village at the time.

Then while Arianne was still a pre-schooler, it was on to the Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco, the cradle of the psychedelic hippie movement, then to volatile Berkeley, even to Canada to explore the rural life for a while.

Before moving to Santa Cruz in 1978, Arianne and her kid sister Caitlin Rose lived with their parents in a commune on the Russian River.

"We had a hippie resort," said Dan Phillips. "It was sort of a halfway resort for people looking to buy in the country and resettle from the city."

More importantly, Arianne grew up with an artistic birthright. Dan is a poet, writer and musician who just recently retired from a career teaching in several Northern California junior colleges. Judy is a painter and writer who is also a well-known local real estate agent.

After their always-in-motion sojourn through the '60s and '70s, the Phillipses have stayed put in Santa Cruz for the past 20-plus years.

Dan now marvels at the various influences, good and bad, that Arianne was exposed to in those years. Dan

and Judy were always hanging out with artists and writers, and their children picked up the unconscious cues that a creative life was a fulfilling one.

But the Haight in the mid-60s wasn't exactly a child's playground.

"When Ari was growing up," said Dan, "there were a lot of people losing their minds, doing really heavy drugs. We were really afraid for her. She was in Haight-Ashbury, Berkeley. There were a lot of strange people around."

"But she always had a center. She had really good instincts and avoided the people who might get her into trouble."

## The first purple head

When the Phillips family moved to Santa Cruz, the hippie movement had given way to punk and New Wave. Arianne enrolled in the 11th grade at Santa Cruz High and soon began bending Santa Cruz to her will.

While at Wayne's, she dyed her hair purple. Her father claims that she was the first one to do so in a town that today is choked with armies of young people with garishly colored hair.

In those days, Ari was a regular at the screenings of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" at the old Sash Mill Theater when "Rocky Horror" was the It Phenomenon of the times.

She would skateboard to the theater with her friends and lip-sync with the movie. Her purple hair gave her a cachet in the mushrooming Santa Cruz alternative scene.

After graduating from Santa Cruz High, she spent some time in San Francisco. But a car accident brought her back home to heal.

She worked at Kinko's and put her passions into a radio show on KZSC. Among the rock bands and rock fans of the era, she was something of a social butterfly.

It was from this population of neo-punks, hip posers, and pre-goth children of the night that Arianne drew the subjects of her mock portfolio.

"I wanted to work in fashion," she said. "I knew that much. But I wasn't exactly sure how to do it."

"I knew I had to make a portfolio, so I staged these mock photo shoots with all my friends, thinking I could use that to get on somewhere."

"I quickly realized how naive that was."

## Arianne, meet Lenny

1985. New York City. A punk princess from California marches into the offices of Vogue magazine with photos of her friends under her arm and a bluff or two she was prepared to use to get in to see someone important.

And she did. Somehow, she got in to see Vogue's famed fashion editor Jade Hobson, who looked over her scruffy, home-made portfolio and instantly referred her to Mademoiselle.

So Arianne trudged over to Mademoiselle, looking to exploit the connection with Hobson. On her job application, sensing that she was somewhat out of her element, she lied and put down that she attended Columbia.

"Eventually, I got a couple of lucky breaks here and there and began getting work as an assistant," she said.

Shortly after, she met a half black/half Jewish, neo-hippie, wanna-be rock singer named Lenny Kravitz, whose only connection to fame at that point was through his mother, a regular on "The Jeffersons."

Ari and Lenny were pals, both struggling to get somewhere. When Kravitz broke through with a recording contract, Ari was the natural choice to do his clothes. Her work on Kravitz's videos and album covers gave her a reputation in rock circles.

She was on her way.

From there, she was hired to style photo shoots for Rolling Stone, including such iconic images as rapper Ice-T in a cop uniform after the release of his controversial "Cop Killer" album and the Red Hot Chili Peppers, naked but for their tattoos.

Then came the movies, first a low-budget thing called "Bail Jumper," then a made-for-TV remake of "Attack of the 50-Foot Woman." Then two films in which costuming to this day is the lingering image: "The Crow" and "Tank Girl."

(Arianne was on the set when her friend Brandon Lee, star of "The Crow," was accidentally killed by a blank gun.)

"The Crow" and "Tank Girl" solidified Arianne's reputation as one of the edgiest and most risk-taking stylists around.

## The road to Madonna

In 1995 Phillips got the chance to dress the mercurial Courtney Love in "The People vs. Larry Flynt." She later outfitted Love for the cover of the Rolling Stone.

It was Love who recommended that Phillips send out a feeler to Madonna. What the heck, Phillips thought.

Phillips's amazing luck held out. Before she could catch her breath, she was outfitting Madonna for her 1997 "Ray of Light" tour.

"When I got the phone call," she remembered, "I felt very intimidated. A pop icon such as Madonna, calling me?"

"Getting the phone call was completely nerve-wracking and terrifying, and I went through every emotion in the world."

"I had always paid attention to what she's worn because she has such a great style and esthetic. But being invited to be part of her team, that was a whole other story. It was thrilling and flattering beyond words."

"Once I met her, within five minutes, I could see that she was funny and contentious and fun to be with, everything."

"She's great. She's the most inspiring person I've ever worked with, without question. She's incredibly forward-thinking, very generous and she raises the bar in my work."

Four years later, Arianne Phillips is still dressing Madonna, designing a series of outfits for the current "Drowned World" tour, including a punk look, a cowgirl look and a geisha look based on the best-selling "Memoirs of Geisha," which Madonna suggested Arianne read.

Arianne is planning to work with Madonna again, this time in film. Madonna will star in husband Guy Ritchie's remake of Lina Wertmuller's 1974 classic "Swept Away."

"You can't deny that exposure of Madonna is such that you could put a paper bag on her and everyone would be wearing it," Phillips said. "I happen to be the lucky person to collaborate with her."

Arianne's father couldn't have imagined that his daughter would someday be outfitting the world's most famous woman. But Dan Phillips was able to see Arianne's ambitions take shape even when she was a child.

"I remember in her journals, back when she was maybe 8 or 9 years old, she drew a picture of a high-rise in New York City," he said. "There was a college of beauty and a fashion designer's workshop and a store."

"Everything was mapped out precisely, and that was her dream. But that dream wasn't a kid's dream. That was real."

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