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Functional Fashion

The new Billy Reid store in Pepper Place is primed to become a cultural hub for the city.

BY LAUREN HELMER



FASHION DESIGNER BILLY REID fondly recalls helping his mother in her small-town Louisiana clothing boutique. “[The shop] was in my grandmother’s old home that she had converted into her store,” he says. “I have a lot of memories of that, because it was a really cool hangout for people in a lot of ways.” The boutique was less retail store and more community gathering place. The shop often was filled with laughter and conversation, impromptu parties, and other creative shindigs—all things Reid is known for recreating in his creative and fashion-focused endeavors today.

Reid’s artsy, salt-of-the-earth upbringing sparked an eye for design that resulted in a signature style that transcends place. That style, self-described as lived-in luxury, has taken the successful entrepreneur and designer across the globe. In short, Reid is in his element whether on the runways of Paris or at a local coffee shop

in his hometown of Florence, Alabama.

It’s easy to see that intriguing duality in Reid’s clothing: lived-in and rustic, yet sophisticated and modern. There’s an element of down-to-earth charm that comes from his Southern roots coupled with an element of elegant modernity that stems from his international, high-quality design discipline. Despite his acumen in the fashion world, Reid doesn’t adhere to any of the industry’s pretenses; his heart remains ever in the studio and his passion lies in the craft of making.

“I have a love-hate relationship with fashion, I guess. I love the fact that you can make someone look and feel wonderful and what that does to them inside. But I’m not a big fan of all the noise around fashion and the fickle nature of it at times,” Reid says. “I’m definitely more into the craft, the process, making something, working with a team of people to bring an idea that was in your head

to a sheet of paper that then ends up on the rack and hopefully on somebody’s back. And that’s why I get up every day and do it. I love making things.”

Reid’s impulse to create goes beyond fashion. That’s why you’d be mistaken to assume his new shop in Pepper Place, which opened in late October, is just another retail outpost. Like his mom’s shop and his 11 other locations, Billy Reid stores are vibrant hubs of creativity—gathering places for the community to connect through the arts.

And with the Birmingham store’s soaring 24-foot ceilings, massive garage-door-style windows, and movable furniture allowing for a transformational space, the shop is perfectly primed to welcome the community for much more than just shopping. Reid has big ideas for his new spot: supper series featuring local chefs, art openings, intimate concerts, and eventually a full-service, in-house restaurant.



“I love the fact that you can make someone look and feel wonderful and what that does to them inside...”
— BILLY REID

Billy Reid inside his new store in Birmingham’s Pepper Place



Events like these are par for the course for Reid, who caught the community-building bug when his flagship store, a converted historic bookstore in Florence, Alabama, brought culture and activity that revitalized the downtown area. Eleven years ago, he launched Shindig, a gathering of creatives—chefs, artists, and musicians—in Muscle Shoals, and invited editors and writers from U.S. media capitals to witness the beauty of the South. “The hope was that they would come here, have this incredible experience, and they would go back and tell the world about it,” Reid says. “And it worked.”

The network of creatives he regularly loops into his events isn’t made of only Southerners. “It’s definitely a like-minded group of folks from all over the world, whether they are making textiles for us in Japan or shrimp and grits

in Oxford, Mississippi,” Reid says with a laugh. “It’s a diverse group of folks who are all into making things well and putting their heart and soul into it. That creates a connectivity, and we try to bring all those diverse pieces of rich culture together—whether it’s food, music, art, or fashion—and share it.”

Of course, the heart of the Billy Reid experience is the clothing. What might be most striking about his work is its incredibly broad appeal. Says Reid, “I’ve seen 18-year-old kids come in and buy something, and I’ve seen a 65-year-old man come in and buy the same item, so it is really open to everybody.”

He takes fun and inventive risks through patterns and graphics, limited-edition handmade items, original art translated into textiles, or interesting new shapes. “At the end of the day,

we are making clothes that people can wear. Even when we’re taking risks, we’re not putting light bulbs on top of hats or anything,” Reid says. “It’s something you can use. Sometimes designer clothing has a stigma that it’s too precious to wear, but we just want it to be their favorite piece, that piece that lives with you.”

With Billy Reid, you get fashion that feels good, but also music that sounds great, food that tastes delicious, and art that stirs the senses. Each thread that Reid brings to town is set to enrich the cultural fabric of the Magic City. ■

DETAILS

LEARN MORE ABOUT BILLY REID AT BILLYREID.COM.

PHOTOS BY CARY NORTON