

VANITY FAIR

Retirement and Rebuilding: Law Roach's Next Moves as an Image Architect

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Law Roach [Photo: Sandra Riaño for *Fast Company*]

Law Roach was done.

“You win ... I’m out,” he wrote in the caption of a since deleted [Instagram post](#) in 2023, under a blank white picture with a red stamp reading “I’m retired.” He had been named the *Hollywood Reporter*’s top stylist in 2021 and 2022, and received the inaugural Stylist of the Year from the Council of Fashion Designers of America.

Roach was at the top of his career. Until he left it all.

I follow Roach upstairs to his office in his Georgia home. The cottage sits on 17 acres of rolling green plains, isolated from the chaos of the fashion capitals. The

original woodworking still remains from when this home was built in 1984, over 40 years ago, rooting the house in time – a stark contrast to his modern Los Angeles home.

In his office, he pulls files on files of his past work. Framed on his desk is a photo of him and Zendaya from this past Spring featuring a piece that was responsible for breaking the Internet earlier this year – the “robot suit” from Thierry Mugler’s fall 1995 couture collection that Zendaya wore during the *Dune: Part II* press conference.



Zendaya and Law Roach attend the World Premiere of 'Dune: Part Two' in Leicester Square on February 15 in London. SAMIR HUSSEIN/WIREIMAGE

When Roach retired from the industry, he did not retire from Zendaya. The day after he announced his retirement, he [tweeted](#), “So y’all really think I’m breaking up with Z...we are forever.” Myself and the rest of the world breathed a sigh of relief with this statement.

The pair first started working together when Roach got a call from a friend, asking if he would help a fourteen-year-old Disney star find an outfit for the premiere of Justin Bieber’s *Never Say Never* documentary. He flew to California to meet and shop for Zendaya, kick-starting their partnership.

“My fashion soulmate, historian, and constant inspiration,” Zendaya said of Roach in her [acceptance speech](#) for CFDA’s 2021 Fashion Icon of the Year.

And their partnership has only grown since then. Zendaya’s widespread looks for both the *Dune: Part II* and *Challengers* press tours last spring covered just about every page

on social media. From tennis balls on her shoes to a custom Balmain gown molded like sand, the pair was spot on every single look.

“We’re Jordan and Pippen, baby. We don’t miss,” [Roach said](#).

He’s right, they don’t. Zendaya was the youngest person ever to receive CFDA’s Fashion Icon Award, and one of – if not, the only – one to consistently work with one stylist. The pair has made headlines after headlines. I flip through his files of their past work and his collaborations with other celebrities from Kerry Washington to Bella Hadid, and I can’t place why he would leave it all behind.

“My career had got so big that there was nowhere for me to go besides to do more work,” [he said](#).

Roach puts down the photo and we continue back down the stairs of his country chic home. Hanging above the staircase is a photo by Richard Avedon of a little Black boy in Harlem. He points it out to me as the most sentimental object in his house because it reminds him of his nephew who passed away in a tragic accident a few months prior to his retirement announcement.

“He was three years old, and the boy in the picture is around the same age,” [he said](#).

Back outside on the patio, Roach looks out to the land and recalls memories of his nieces and nephews coming to visit, running around the backyard and taking “gratitude walks” with their uncle. Roach is the eldest of 5 siblings, all raised by a single mother on the South Side of Chicago. When he was a teenager, his mother moved herself and his four siblings to her boyfriend’s house, and Roach was taken in by a friend’s family. He spent much of his time with his grandmother, who he credits first introduced him to the [“spell of style.”](#)

Roach enrolled in Chicago State University, earning his Bachelor’s in psychology – a degree he finds himself relying on daily in his job. After graduating he opened a vintage store with a friend, Deliciously Vintage. Here he made a name for himself in sourcing archival pieces, and this was when he got the call to work with Zendaya.

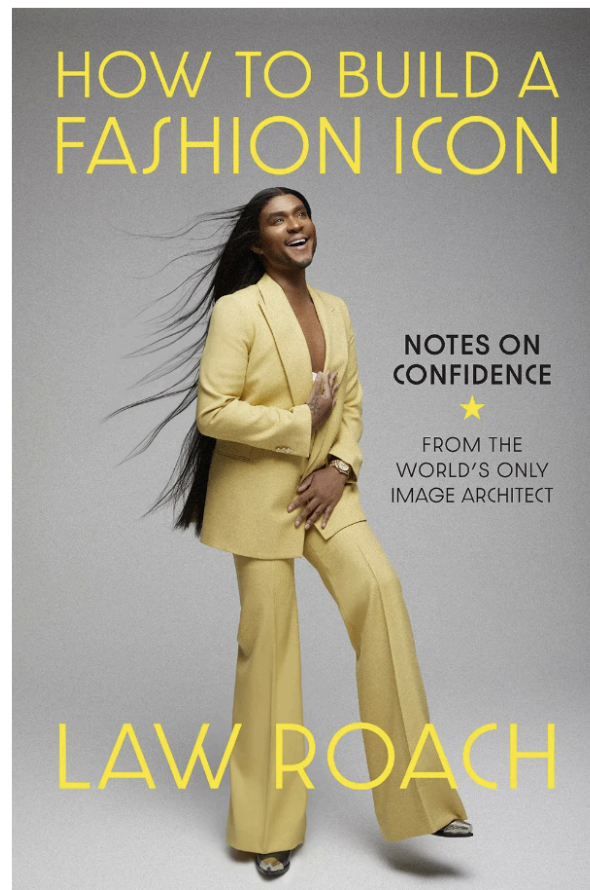
Once he relocated to LA, his life never stopped. Job after job, fitting after fitting. He had no time to breathe, no time to relax. And when his nephew passed, he still didn’t stop, never getting the chance to fully cope. It all hit him the morning after the 2023 Oscars. He had styled six clients for the *Vanity Fair* after-party and flew straight to Miami to attend the Hugo Boss show. The Met Gala was seven weeks away, and a client had called

him complaining that a design house told them Roach was not responding to calls, leaving him to defend himself once again. He wanted it all to stop.

“I just wanted to be left alone,” [he said](#).

Thinking back to his psychology studies and journey with Zendaya, Roach knew that it takes more than clothes to build an icon. And it was his knowledge and background that he felt was being undervalued by the industry, causing him to want to take a step back.

In his recently-published book, *How to Build a Fashion Icon: Notes on Confidence from the World's Only Image Architect*, Roach dives deeper into his mindset and motivations, spilling the secrets on how he ended up as one of the most known stylists in the industry.



How to Build a Fashion Icon by Law Roach (courtesy Abrams Image) COURTESY OF ABRAMS IMAGE

“The secret to being a fashion icon is not a Vera Wang gown or a custom Valentino. You don’t have to be Zendaya on the cover of *Vogue* or Anya Taylor Joy accepting an Oscar. It’s confidence,” [he writes](#).

Landing placements in *Vogue*, *NPR*, and *The Cut*, this book came at a critical time in today’s industry, filled with comparison and competition fueled by social media. His memoir explains his perspective on the industry and gives readers a glimpse into why he wanted to leave it all behind – but also why he can’t seem to fully let it go.

Roach’s retirement announcement sparked outrage. Naomi Campbell burst out of her dressing room at the Hugo Boss show, calling Edward Enninful, Editor-in-Chief of *British Vogue*, and putting him on speakerphone with Roach.

“There was no way I was going to just let him retire without pointing out how important he was in the industry, not only as a great stylist but also as a person of color in fashion,” [Enninful said](#).

Roach was the first Black person to be named *The Hollywood Reporter*’s top stylist, and he frequently advocates for Black creators’ space and importance in the fashion industry. He isn’t afraid to call out racism and exclusion – after all, as [Roach said](#), “that’s the only way – screaming.”

This advocacy proves that Roach’s role goes beyond choosing clothes – in both his job and larger role in the industry. He is a self-proclaimed Image Architect, the only one in the world. He works with his clients on confidence, going deeper with them than one would think a stylist would do.

“Everything that an architect does to complete a structure or project is very parallel to what I did, and what I do, for someone’s image,” [he said](#).

This is where his psychology degree comes in – he studies his clients and understands them better than they understand themselves. He knows exactly how to build them, and this knowledge combined with his unique ability to recall archives and create moments is what sets him out in the industry.

“I can always tell when a stylist is trying to pull a ‘Roach.’ It feels like the real thing, but it’s not,” Daniel Roseberry, Creative Director of Schiaparelli, [said](#).

[Method dressing](#) – a term coined by *Vogue* writer André Wheeler – focuses on using a performer’s role as inspiration, playing off the themes and motifs present in their

character. This is exactly what Roseberry referred to as “pulling a ‘Roach.’” Roach has established himself in the industry as this iconic figure.



Zendaya at the *Spider-Man: No Way Home* premiere, 2021. Axelle/Bauer-Griffin

“I could never be just a stylist,” [he said](#). But this is exactly what he was feeling in 2023 – like he had no time but to be a stylist and his Image Architect role was being pushed to the side. Sitting on his couch, surrounded by pieces of [art all created by Black visionaries](#), Roach sinks deeper into the cushions and brings his legs into his body. He wasn’t raised to be a quitter, he wasn’t raised to care what people thought. But during this time in his life when he felt himself drifting away from what he truly wanted to be, he kept thinking about what those around him would say.

“What about all the people who looked up to me? Would they see me as a quitter? Did I disappoint them?” [he said](#). But, he knew it was what he had to do.

And Roach’s semi-retirement is exactly what saved him and has allowed him to reach a state of peace with himself. Even in his most vulnerable state in his private, isolated Georgia home discussing how he felt like he lost himself, he is still exuberating confidence like no other. In silk Prada pajamas and his signature long braided hair, a nude painting of him hangs between us – bearing all of himself to me.

During his retirement, Roach has been able to learn the habit of happiness. Still working with Zendaya and another style icon, Céline Dion, he continues to create moments in the industry, not just looks.

And he is now giving his talents right back to the industry in leading a new course, the School of Style. Partnering with The Only Agency, the revamped series will focus on everything a young stylist needs to know, from fashion history to financial literacy.

“There’s no better person to be taught by than Law,” his business partner Kent Belden [said](#).

Roach is bringing in fellow industry experts, from stylists Maeve Reilley to Brett Alan Nelson, to share their knowledge in the course. The course will include these expert voices, but it will also go back to why Roach was able to be so successful: his confidence.

“To be a fashion icon is about the confidence you radiate when you walk into a room. That is the core belief that I based my whole career on,” he writes in his book.

Roach may be Instagram-officially retired, but he is still architecting his life every day, now turning the focus to the next generation.

“I made a lot of mistakes because I didn’t have a me. I want to be able to arm whoever is interested ... with everything they need to be successful,” [he said](#).

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