



Big Screen Classics

Velvet Goldmine

Velvet Goldmine

Director: Todd Haynes
© [UK/Eire]: Channel Four
© [Rest of World]: Velvet Goldmine Productions,
Newmarket Capital LLC
Production Companies: Zenith Productions,
6Killer Films
In Association with: Single Cell Pictures
For: Newmarket Capital Group,
Goldwyn Films International, Channel 4 Films
Executive Producers: Scott Meek, Michael Stipe
For Single Cell Executive Producer: Sandy Stern
Co-executive Producers: Chris J. Ball, William Tyrer
Producer: Christine Vachon
Co-producer: Olivia Stewart
Zenith Executive in Charge of Production:
Chris Catterall
Killer Executive in Charge of Production:
Pamela Koffler
Development for Killer Films: Eva Kolodner,
Katie Roumel
Production Accountant: Sheryl Leonardo
Production Co-ordinator: Wendy Lilly
Unit Manager: Wendy Broom
Location Manager: David Pinnington
1st Assistant Director: Waldo Roeg
2nd Assistant Director: Andi Brown
Script Supervisor: June McDonald
Casting: Susie Figgis
US Casting: Laura Rosenthal
US Casting Associate: Ali Farrell
Screenplay: Todd Haynes
Story: Todd Haynes, James Lyons
Director of Photography: Maryse Alberti
Camera Operator: Joe Arcidiacono
Focus Puller: Simon Finney
Clapper Loader: Zac Nicholson
Grips: Richard Broome
Digital/Optical Effects: Peerless Camera Company
Special Effects: Evolution FX
Effects Lighting: Neon Effects
Computer Graphics: Sam Tootal
Editor: James Lyons
AVID Effects: Brad Katz
Production Designer: Christopher Hobbs
Art Director: Andrew Munro
Production Buyer: Trisha Edwards
Prop Master: George Ball
Costume Designer: Sandy Powell
Costume Design Assistant: Debbie Scott
Wardrobe Supervisor: Clare Spragge
Wardrobe Assistants: Sunita Singh,
Josef Kowalewski
Wardrobe Trainee: Gareth Duggan
Hair/Make-up Designer: Peter King
Title Design: Bureau, NY
Original Score: Carter Burwell
Musicians: Venus in Furs (Bernard Butler, Clune,
Paul Kimble, Jonathan Greenwood, Andy MacKay,
Thom Yorke)
Musicians: Shudder to Think (Stuart Hill, Nathan
Larson, Kevin March, Craig Wedren), The Wylde
Rattz (Mark Arm, Ron Ashton, Jim Dunbar, Don
Fleming, Thurston Moore, Steve Shelley, Mike Watt)
Music Supervisor: Randall Poster
Music Maven: Jim Dunbar
Choreography: Lea Anderson
Sound Recordist: Peter Lindsay
Re-recording Mixers: David Novack, Sound One
Supervising Sound Editors: Eliza Paley,
Paul Soucek
Sound Effects Editor: Michael W. Mitchell

The screening on Wednesday 14 January will be introduced by Professor Sarah Street, University of Bristol, and Co-investigator of the Film Costumes in Action project

Designing costumes for films set in the past is challenging, particularly when the period in question is within living memory. When Sandy Powell saw in the late 1990s that a film was being made about the 1970s Glam Rock era, it was a design opportunity she couldn't miss. In any case, director Todd Haynes had her in mind for *Velvet Goldmine* because of her outstanding designs for Derek Jarman, Neil Jordan and Sally Potter. Growing up in the 1970s Powell was steeped in the decade's music and fashion trends. The music of Marc Bolan (her 'first idol'), David Bowie and the shimmering sequins and glitter of the Glam Rock era's fashions were a world with which she was completely familiar, and she drew on her memories when assembling *Velvet Goldmine*'s rich array of costumes, fabrics and sheer sartorial exuberance. For Powell, working on the film was a deeply personal experience: 'That time in your life and what you're soaking in has a lasting effect on you, you're like a sponge, when you're that age. At the time we were seeing things we'd never seen before with glam rock, and then punk, and all of that. It was new stuff and rules being broken. And so that's how I came to *Velvet Goldmine*, and of course I did the research but a lot of it was just based on how I'd felt at the time, and what I remembered.' Her early training was with dancer and mime artist Lindsay Kemp who choreographed David Bowie's shows, and this formative experience led her to design for fringe theatre in the early 1980s and to working with Jarman.

Although loosely based on David Bowie, Angie Bowie and Iggy Pop, *Velvet Goldmine* is not a biopic but uses the essence of their look and sound for its own characters and narrative about the sudden disappearance of Brian Slade (Jonathan Rhys Meyers), a major Glam Rock star. Arthur Stuart (Christian Bale) is a journalist researching the mystery which involves looking back on Slade's rise to fame and volatile relationship with American rock star Curt Wild (Ewan McGregor). Other key characters are Mandy (Toni Collette), who is married to Slade, and promoter Jerry Devine (Eddie Izzard). These characters provided Powell with ample scope to use colours, fabrics and costumes which typify the era including deeply saturated crushed velvets, lustrous satins, sequined jump-suits and jackets, platform boots, shiny black 'wet look' coats and feather boas galore. But rather than strive for strict accuracy Powell's approach was to draw on her memories as she plotted costumes for the actors. Her method is to work closely with the script to visualise its atmosphere and characters. Once the actors are cast, she thinks in greater detail about their costumes, using their physicality, shape and colouring as keys. Rather than produce drawings Powell prefers a mood board approach and is a firm believer in collaborating with directors, cinematographers and production designers. Colours are very important in her work, and these are vital to *Velvet Goldmine*'s evocative recreation of the 1970s. Todd Haynes also approached the film as a period piece of Glam subculture and was inspired by visual references found in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Performance* (1970) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). It was the first of several collaborations with Haynes: Powell went on to design costumes for *Far from Heaven* (2002), *Carol* (2015) and *Wonderstruck* (2017). Like many of Haynes' films *Velvet Goldmine* is an exploration of queer identities, channelled through references to Oscar Wilde; Slade's relationship with Wild, and journalist Arthur's experience of family rejection as he discovers his own gay sexuality and turns to Glam Rock as an inspiring and supportive community.

Cast:

Ewan McGregor (*Curt Wild*)
Jonathan Rhys Meyers (*Brian Slade*)
Toni Collette (*Mandy Slade*)
Christian Bale (*Arthur Stuart*)
Eddie Izzard (*Jerry Divine*)
Emily Woof (*Shannon*)
Michael Feast (*Cecil*)
Janet McTeer (*female narrator*)
Mairead McKinley (*Wilde housemaid*)
Luke Morgan Oliver (*Oscar Wilde, aged 8*)
Osheen Jones (*Jack Fairy, aged 7*)
Micko Westmoreland (*Jack Fairy*)
Damian Suchet (*BBC reporter*)
Danny Nutt (*kissing sailor*)
Wash Westmoreland (*young man*)
Don Fellows (*Lou*)
Ganiat Kasumu (*Mary*)
Ray Shell (*Murray*)
Alastair Cumming (*Tommy Stone*)
Zoe Boyce (*girl on subway*)
Jim Whelan (*Mr Stuart*)
Sylvia Grant (*Mrs Stuart*)
Tim Hans (*Manchester teacher*)
Ryan Pope (*Arthur's brother*)
Stuart Callaghan (*boy in record shop 1*)
James Francis (*boy in record shop 2*)
Callum Hamilton (*Brian Slade, aged 7*)
Lindsay Kemp (*pantomime dame*)
Carlos Miranda (*pianist*)
Emma Handy (*Mod girlfriend*)
Matthew Glamour (*Mimosa*)
Daniel Adams (*Curt Wild, aged 13*)
Brian Torfah (*bartender*)
Joe Beattie (*Cooper*)
Sarah Cawood (*Angel*)
David Hoyle (*Freddi*)
Winston Austin (*Micky*)
Ivan Cartwright (*Cecil's friend 1*)
Peter King (*Cecil's friend 2*)
Justin Salinger (*Rodney*)
Roger Alborough (*middle age man*)
Peter Bradley Jr (*30s style singer*)
Jonathan Cullen (*reporter 1*)
William Key (*reporter 2*)
Vincent Marzello (*US reporter 1*)
Corey Skaggs (*US reporter 2*)
Nathan Osgood (*US reporter 3*)
Nadia Williams (*teenage girl*)
UK-USA 1998©
119 mins
Digital

Velvet Goldmine's characters permitted fantastical play with the era's period styles. Brian Slade's wardrobe loosely resembles Bowie's metamorphosis from the sharp, tailored suits of the 1960s Mod era to androgynous brocade dresses. This is followed by close-fitting, abundantly sequinned silver and brightly coloured space-age suits which recall the visual spectacle of Bowie's Ziggy Stardust years. Mandy's costumes also provided an opportunity to show shifts in style as the era progresses, and like Slade she embraces the full opulence of Glam Rock. Curt Wild's costumes are grittier, featuring tight, reflective shiny black trousers, more flesh and body glitter to reflect his more aggressively masculine, punk-influenced style. Slade's manager Jerry Devine's costumes, despite being based on the dark suits and formal attire associated with business, embrace the period's visual eclecticism such as combining a striped jacket, geometric patterned tie and shirt with an opulent fur coat and heavy, gold jewellery. The film's costumes are spectacular, so much so that by the end one perhaps gets used to seeing a surfeit of glamour. But the ways in which they are nuanced, following the characters through different phases of their lives, ensures that their distinctions are clearly marked.

Powell was awarded a BAFTA in 1998 for *Velvet Goldmine's* costumes, and she was nominated for an Academy Award the same year, only to be beaten by herself when she won the award for her costume designs for *Shakespeare in Love*. She commented in the *LA Times*: 'I had two nominations in one year and I won for the wrong one.' Despite its eclectic, sartorial sumptuousness the budget for *Velvet Goldmine* was small, but Powell used this challenge to the film's benefit. Many of the costumes were recycled, such as a pink négligée worn by Mandy which was originally designed by Powell for Tilda Swinton in Derek Jarman's *Wittgenstein* (1993). Clothes for Brian Slade's crowds of fans were also required to display the era's fashions. Powell's designs were made without cost by the London costume hire company Angels. In exchange, she sourced vintage clothes for their rental stock.

When first released the reviews of *Velvet Goldmine* were mixed. It gained subsequent popularity however in the VHS era. Haynes recalled that the film 'had the hardest time... it's the film that means the most to a lot of teenagers and young people, who are just obsessed with that movie. They're exactly who I was thinking about when I made *Velvet Goldmine*, but it just didn't get to them the first time around.' The Glam Rock era is currently going through another revival in fashion trends, bringing *Velvet Goldmine* to new audiences.

Sarah Street, University of Bristol, November 2025

References

Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Costume Design entry on Sandy Powell:

<https://www.bloomsburyfashioncentral.com/film-and-television-costume-sandy-powell>

Interviews with Sandy Powell:

<https://the-talks.com/interview/sandy-powell/>

<https://www.cutlerandgross.com/blogs/news/in-conversation-with-costume-designer-sandy-powell>

<https://teamdeakins.libsyn.com/sandy-powell-costume-designer>

<https://www.marieclaire.co.uk/news/celebrity-news/sandy-powell-costume-design-16922>

<https://fashionfollower.com/costumes-of-velvet-goldmine/>

Website on Toni Collette's films:

https://www.tonicollette.org/projects/1998velvetgoldmine/#google_vignette

Website of *Invisible Women: Bringing women filmmakers from archives to screens*

<https://www.invisible-women.co.uk/post/spotlight-sandy-powell#:~:text=Once%20again%20working%20to%20a,Powell>

Become a BFI Member

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

