



How Tan France Defines Success

Netflix's *Queer Eye* may have made him famous, but the stylish Brit says he felt like he'd "made it" even before the show. In his new memoir, Tan opens up about his past and shares his best fashion advice.

BY TOMMIE ETHINGTON

Q: Why did you want to write a book?

A: Honestly, when I was first asked to write a book, I thought, *Oh, I don't really have a story to tell. I wouldn't even know where to start.* But then I thought about it more and realized the story of the South Asian boy who is gay and who was raised in South Yorkshire, England, hadn't been told. And the story of how that person got to the point where they are on a major, global show definitely hadn't been told. With those two things combined, I knew there was a

story in there somewhere. Once I got to writing *Naturally Tan*, I was more and more grateful every day because I realized that I had an opportunity to connect with people like never before.

Even more so than with social media?

It's hard with social because you only ever get to give a snapshot of your life, and with Twitter, you only get a certain number of characters. Even on *Queer Eye*, I never know how my scenes are going to be edited. I'm the most guarded of all of us on the show, and it's because I want to be able to control how my story is told. This book gave me an opportunity to say what I want to say, my way.

A big part of your job on the show is helping people to feel more comfortable in their own skin. How do you boost your confidence?

I've become a bit more Americanized since moving to the States 11 years ago, and that means that I practice self-love, which most Brits do not. I take time each day when I'm brushing my teeth to look at myself in the mirror and think, *I'm never going to feel completely perfect and that's normal, but what are the things I like about myself and what are the things I want to project today?* I focus on those areas and try not to acknowledge any negativity. I remind myself of these positive affirmations throughout the day. It works really well for me, and I think it could work for a lot of people.

When season one of *Queer Eye* was released last February, it became an overnight success and all of you, all of the "Fab 5," were catapulted into the spotlight. Was that difficult to handle?

We had a couple of hours of PR training at Netflix before the show aired, but that definitely didn't prepare us for how big our show got. The hard parts are the loss of your privacy and people feeling like

they have a right to know everything about you. But I live in Utah and have a very grounded life. I still have my husband, who I hope I will have until the day I die, and I get to go back home to a life that is very much the same as it always was. I live in my little house; I go to the same grocery store; I walk my same streets. I think if I had made a major shift in my life by moving to New York or Los Angeles or going to parties every night or taking up drinking, I would have become someone that I'm absolutely not, and that would have been a real shock to my system. But the way I maintain normalcy is by actually staying normal and sticking to my normal routine.

A lot of people would say you've made it, that this is what success looks like. Do you feel that way? What does success look like to you?

I feel so arrogant saying this, but I'm still going to say it: I actually felt like I had already made it before the show. My version of "made it" is not fame. I had pretty much retired before I got *Queer Eye*, so I was financially comfortable, and I had somebody who loved me, somebody who I'm completely enamored by and obsessed with. I was happy and felt good about my life and where it was going. Everybody has a different version of what they think success is; for me, it was comfort in being able to do what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it, and having someone who truly does love me for everything that I am.

So, you came out of retirement for *Queer Eye*?

Well, I'd been [retired] for not even a week. I had sold my business and was making plans for what I would do in retirement, which was to relax because I had worked every hour that God had sent me since I was 15. Instead, I work now more than I ever have, but I'm truly grateful because I honestly do love it.

Each chapter is named after a clothing item or accessory. Why did you want to structure the book that way?

Pretty much every clothing item I featured has meant something to me. I can tie a story to each piece because I've been obsessed with fashion and style for as long as I can remember. So it made sense for me and who I am, but I also wanted [the book] to be very reflective of what I do for a living. By tying each chapter to a particular piece of clothing, people can go, "Okay, I really struggle with jeans, so I'm going to go to this chapter, and I can refer back to it and see what advice is given." I've been working in this industry for a long time and I've got some wisdom that I can share, and so I wanted it to be informative about my life but also informative about how you can improve your wardrobe.

Do you ever purge your closet?

Oh, yeah, but there are certain items that I've had for years and years and years. If a fond memory is attached to something, I keep it. If it's just a "blah" thing, I'll let it go. If I'm almost positive I will never wear that trend again, I'm probably going to get rid of it. Unless it's something I've worn to a special occasion. Everything I've worn on *Queer Eye* or for press, I keep that now. I just store it away and hope that, one day, I'll open those boxes up with my kids and say, "Oh, my gosh, this was from season one."

Or they could wind up in a museum—you never know.

You never know. I have given quite a few pieces to charity auctions, but that's the only way I'm getting rid of show items.

When it comes to clothes, are you a spender or a saver?

Honestly, I'm still a bargain shopper and was even before I got the show. My husband finds it ridiculous, but if I spend a lot of money on something, I'm mortified. I feel like I was robbed, so I don't tell people. But I am the first one to scream it from the rooftops if I got something for \$5. I have pieces in my closet that are really inexpensive—that cost under \$50—that I appreciate more than some of the designer pieces that were gifted to me.

What's a skill that's unrelated to your career that you'd like to learn?

I would like to learn how to cut hair.

Maybe Jonathan Van Ness [Tan's co-star on *Queer Eye*, in charge of grooming] could help you!

He could, but he's incredibly busy. He's got a full-time job and [his podcast] *Getting Curious*, and he's learning to figure skate. And I can't afford that boy. He would charge a fortune at this point. He's very successful.

Good point. Where does your interest in hair styling come from?

I've wanted to know how to cut hair for a long time. From a very young age, I was fascinated by it. I'd be fine doing women's hair—it'd probably be a lot more fun—but I want to know how to do my hair, not that I'd be able to cut my own, but I would still love to know how to do it.

So many people talk about how great your hair is—it's one of your staples. Who does it for you now?

Thanks so much. I've been going to the same guy for years; every now and then, when I'm out of the country, like right now, I can't use him. I'm mortified because I haven't had my hair cut in about three weeks, and usually, I go about every seven days. But I've been using the same guy for years in Salt Lake City and he's wonderful. I can just go sit in the chair, and he knows exactly what to do. I don't even need to say a word.

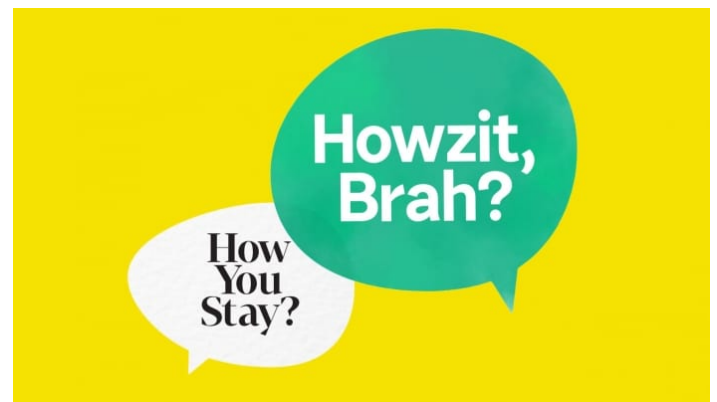
*Tan's memoir, **Naturally Tan***

(<https://static.macmillan.com/static/smp/tan-france-memoir/>), is out now. You can also catch him on his book tour (in select cities). This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

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