

L'Wren Scott: Fearlessly Chic

She's a DIY kind of woman, whether stitching up a dress overnight or readying her brand for growth. **By Bridget Foley**

ON A RECENT SATURDAY AT THE Chicago outpost of Barneys New York, a rolling rack near the front of the second-floor designer area holds the store's current L'Wren Scott offerings. Among the items are two cashmere cardigans, their genre's discreet familiarity confounded by large blocks of tiny, vibrant sequins, one berry-on-berry, the other, chartreuse-on-ivory, completely covering their fronts. This embellished riff makes not for the gaudy glitz one might expect, but high elegance with a dash of flash.

Which is an aura the designer knows all about. Scott is visually stunning, a full 75 inches of high-impact glamour defined by long, raven locks and lithe, impossibly endless limbs. Those towering assets are typically clad in one of her impeccable, now-signature sheaths and enhanced further (as if such were necessary) by gorgeous displays of diamonds: Victorian, Deco and a maybe-engagement ring of unspecified era.

Scott launched her business in October 2006, after years spent as a model and stylist. She introduced the fledgling enterprise first in Paris, and again a few weeks later with a chic dinner-cum-show at New York's then-hot, now-closed restaurant Bette, padding the requisite editorial guest list with famous women (Ellen Barkin; Christy Turlington) known at least in part for their ability to work a look, and beyond-famous men (Bill Clinton; her longtime love Mick Jagger), whose attendance left the merely fashion-employed awestruck. But a funny thing happened as cocktails were served: Scott's models stole the show, amazing in their nascent renderings of her "silhouette." The message, a deft combination of womanly sensuality and let-the-person-shine discretion, struck a nerve. Now, the clothes continue to hold the spotlight at Scott's small but star-studded luncheon shows, considered one of the hottest tickets of New York Fashion Week.

"I think that people were becoming slightly disenchanted with seeing everything everywhere," the designer says of the rapid interest in her tony offerings (typically from \$1,500 to \$3,000 for a dress) available in at 75 doors worldwide as well as on Net-a-porter and Couturelab.com, the latter, her first retail account. "I was always a fan of silhouette, something with a waistline that gave you a fabulous silhouette," she continues, appearing well suited to the darkly grand surroundings of The Carlyle hotel suite where she stays while in New York.

Plenty of sound anecdotal research factored into the project. As a stylist, Scott "supplemented people's wardrobes constantly." But the notion of designing a full collection only crystallized when she herself couldn't find a simple, knee-length black dress to wear to an event. At the last minute,

she went the DIY route, making a dress in a day and a half from "barely 2 meters of the most beautiful black crepe."

That can-do spirit runs deep, sprung from a Mormon upbringing as rich in pragmatism as it was lean on the pursuits of high culture. "I was raised to be very self-sufficient," notes Scott, whose given name is Luann Bambrough. "I did those survival treks. You go camping with me, you don't have to worry. I can make fires, get it myself, shoot it myself, cook it myself." As noted, she can also sew it herself, a skill that early on fueled a fascination with fashion, a novel condition in Roy, Utah, yet

herself in the elements of high culture. She expected to work as a fit model, but found herself squarely, often uncomfortably, in front of the camera. "I don't think I'm very good at being objectified," she offers, while stressing that she "liked the opportunities [modeling] afforded me very much. I'm not an unappreciative person."

To a girl from the heartland, life as an editorial model in Paris was about as familiar as sipping tea on Mars. Not yet able to speak French, she likened it to "watching a silent movie—you're just waiting to see whatever would happen. Because something always happened."

Mugler. While she admired him greatly and learned much about fit and construction from his atelier, he proved unrelenting in his expectations of his models, sometimes insisting that Scott wear a big, waist-cinching elastic band. "You could leave there feeling very deformed and very depressed," she says. "I'm sure I have a lot of insecurities based on that experience, which I try in my work to never, never make anyone feel."

Yet not all of Scott's working studies were of the psychological sort. "On a photo shoot, I wasn't smoking cigarettes and going through fashion magazines," she says. "I was



L'Wren Scott's fall runway.

one aided by her mother's attention to style. Scott spent hours at the pattern store perusing the *Butterick* and *Vogue* tomes, and also mining thrift stores for finds. "I could rip a seam apart and have this massive piece of stunning silk jacquard that you would never in your life find where I grew up," she says.

Eventually, she headed to Paris, possessed of a pair of traits that served her well. "Naïveté and fearlessness are two great things you have when you're young. And I had both," she says. "The only fear was telling my parents." (The teenager informed them of her Parisian plans only after purchasing her one-way ticket.)

Modeling was always a means to an end. In Paris, Scott was determined to immerse

One of her first jobs was with Guy Bourdin. At the casting at his studio, he looked at her "from under these glasses with these mad eyebrows," asked her sign and when she replied Taurus, instructed someone to book her. "He was really superstitious," she says, recalling that he once canceled a shoot when the makeup artist wore green to the set. And he was difficult. Every Bourdin shoot was "a long, drawn-out process of pain" that didn't get going until the photographer had reduced a model to tears. "The second the model started crying, we'd take the picture," she recalls. "After a particular shoot, I remember thinking it wouldn't happen to me. I wouldn't be the one who cried." She never was.

Scott worked frequently as well for Thierry

reading the paper. I wasn't going to school at that point. I had to feel like I was learning something every day. And I would be very into the stylist, very into the clothes. I would look at the construction. I became very obsessed with how clothes hung on a hanger, how they were made."

After nine years, Scott felt that "everything was shifting from Paris," and thought it time to leave. She bypassed New York for Hollywood, where her career as a stylist took off. Once there, Helena Christensen introduced her to Herb Ritts, who booked her immediately for a *Rolling Stone* cover—it would feature Jim Carrey in a spoof on the Coppertone ads in which a dog tugs at a child's swim pants. Photographer and stylist clicked immediately,



and the relationship lasted from about 1996 until Ritts died in 2002. Scott continued with editorial while developing an impressive roster of private clients, and costumed several films, as well.

All along the way, she banked information that would prove essential in developing her fashion collection, including insight into how women view themselves. "I've never met anyone, no matter how beautiful, who hasn't had their own special set of [body-image] issues," she says, noting that the pressure on celebrities is fierce due to "an intense expectation to be perfect."

Scott recalls the angst of her own first red-carpet appearance, the occasion for which she couldn't find that perfect black dress. It was the 2004 Golden Globes, and Jagger was nominated for (and won) best song. "Of course I wanted to go to be with him and support him, but at the same time, I was completely terrified," she says. "I got to the end and stood there for two seconds. I thought, Oh, my god, this is so scary—thousands of flashbulbs, people screaming his name and then some people are screaming your name. It's a weird feeling. I said, 'I'll meet you inside.' I just ran."

"NAIVETE AND FEARLESSNESS ARE TWO GREAT THINGS YOU HAVE WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG."

Yet the incident wasn't without humor. Asked if Jagger had given her any advice in preparation for the red carpet, she instead recalls his request, deadpanning: "Can you wear flat shoes?"

Scott neither hides nor flaunts her relationship with Jagger. But nearly a decade spent with so recognizable a superstar has provided insight into the tribulations of celebrities who long unsuccessfully to live beyond the incessant glare of the media. As she sees it, such woes are largely self-inflicted. "There are people who make calls, who get dressed up to go through the airports to have their picture taken. Some people court that. They need it. I go to great lengths to protect my private life. I think we do a pretty good job of keeping private."

Scott is similarly discreet about her clients, even if by now it's no secret that Nicole Kidman and Barkin are on the list. "I was working with people who trusted me to help them do something that I had time to do that they didn't," she insists. "I would never betray that."

Rather, she builds upon the knowledge gleaned from those relationships for the L'Wren Scott collection, and is now positioning her brand for growth. Though it's too early to talk specifics, a project with Lancôme is in the works, as is a Web site that will eventually include e-commerce. She fancies opening stores—"bricks and mortar are very important in getting your vision across"—as well as a foray into the contemporary market. And—oh, yes—should the right suitor come calling, she would consider investment in the house of which she now owns 100 percent.

All of which are good bets to be realized. "I was raised to be an achiever and a worker," Scott declares. "If you're L'Wren Scott and you decide to do something, you do everything you can to succeed." ■