

19.03.11

THE STYLE PAGES



THE RISE OF L'WREN SCOTT

*Model, muse, fashion designer
– and the woman who
tamed Mick Jagger*

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Designer L'Wren Scott arrives at the fashion shoot carrying a big, black crocodile hold-all, and casts an appraising eye over the jewellery lined up for her to wear. They're serious rocks – Cartier, Tiffany, Leviev – serious enough that they warrant their own security, burly men who lurk by the door looking, well, burly.

"Jewellery?" she says casually to the stylist. "I have jewellery..." and she opens the bag.

Not many people arrive at a fashion shoot with their own jewels: chunky Victorian gold cuffs, ruby chandelier earrings, delicate Georgian and Edwardian bracelets. But then not many people are sporting a socking great ring on their engagement finger, with a diamond as big as your thumbnail, given to them by Mick Jagger. (He's very good with jewellery apparently, is Mick.)

"We're kind of dating..." is all she will say on the subject, with admirable understatement and a coy smile. Together since they met on another fashion shoot in 2001, where she was the stylist, the length of their relationship has earned Scott – who, at 44, is 23 years his junior – the nickname the Loin Tamer.

"I've never in my life been hired for who I know, only for what I can do," she says in a soft American accent. "That's always been very important to me."

And make no mistake, this is no vanity line: what Scott does, she does very well. Penélope Cruz and Amy Adams both wore L'Wren Scott dresses at the Oscars last month and were widely deemed to look gorgeous in them.

Scott has come a long way, literally and metaphorically, from the small town in Utah where she grew up, near Salt Lake City. One of three children adopted by Mormon parents, she was named Luann Bambrough, only becoming L'Wren when she moved to Paris. The course of her life seems largely to have been driven by her height: now 6ft 3in in her stockings feet, by the age of 12 she was only three inches less than that, so she had to start making her own clothes because nothing in the shops fitted. Fashion-mad, she cut up and remade vintage designs, got her mother to buy *Vogue* patterns for her to run up, made dresses for her Barbie dolls and even took commissions from school friends. She says her childhood was great, yet if reports are to be believed, she ran away to Paris at the age of 18. Did she?

"I think I kinda mighta..." she says. "I didn't really feel that I was going to be able to achieve my goals in life if I'd stayed there. ➔"



PAGE 57: **sheath dress, £884**, and **scarf, £320**, Harrods (020-7730 1234)

RIGHT: **strappy dress, £908**, net-a-porter.com; **shoes, from £1,010**, Roger Vivier (020-7245 8270)

OPPOSITE: **sequined cardigan jacket, £2,276**, **bow shirt, £406**, and **black jeans, £244**, all Harrods, as before

All clothes, L'Wren Scott spring/summer 2011; all jewellery, Scott's own





Blouse, £685, Barneys
(00 1 888 222 7639),
and trousers, £790,
Harrods, both by
L'Wren Scott

Stylist's assistant:
Charlie Lambros
Hair: Gary Glossman
Make-up: Emma Kotch

'NO ONE DID THE DRESSES I WANTED. THEY WERE FROU-FROU OR TOO SHORT. THEY DIDN'T WORK FOR ME'

I think that when I called my parents they said, 'Paris, Texas?' I was like, 'Not really...'

She knew she wanted to work in fashion, and with the encouragement of photographer Bruce Weber, whom she'd met when he was shooting in Utah, she got herself a passport and went there. She knew no one and spoke not a word of French. Her parents were shocked that she'd managed it, "that I got it together and just did it. I think they were probably secretly proud, but terrified for me."

It must have been a nerve-racking time. "No. It's really strange. I was so excited. I think I would have felt much more scared not to do it. My family couldn't really afford to pay for the education I wanted, but they would pay for the education they wanted me to have. I wanted to be in fashion. I've always thought if you want to do something, just do it. I really was a pretty determined person."

Her first catwalk appearance was for Chanel, and she worked as a catwalk model for eight years, absorbing as much information about fashion and how clothes were made as she could. She was a muse for Thierry Mugler, and her legs formed the hands of a clock in a famous David Bailey advert for Pretty Polly. In the mid-Nineties she upped sticks again and moved to LA, where she styled shoots for Herb Ritts, with a bit of costume design (Ellen Barkin in *Mercy*, Nicole Kidman in *Eyes Wide Shut*) on the side, as you do. More recently, she did Jagger's wardrobe for the Scorsese film about the Stones, *Shine A Light*. Many of those early styling commissions are now friends, including Kidman, Renée Zellweger and Demi Moore.

Then, in 2005, she launched her eponymous line. It helped that her mother had taught her to sew because she thought children should be raised to do everything, from survival skills to crochet and needlepoint.

"It was part of where I grew up, culturally, that it's important to be educated. You don't just watch TV or play games." Family holidays didn't involve planes, let alone the private jets

she's probably more used to now; they involved driving to the Grand Canyon or Monument Valley, stuck in the back of the car and being underwhelmed by the wonders in her own back yard. What her parents mainly gave her was a work ethic: ask her why she bothers working at all and she looks appalled.

"I work because I love it. And I think I do have to work. I'm a worker. It's a personality thing. I can't imagine myself just hanging out, arranging the flowers."

Instead, she designs, and not just clothes but jewellery and accessories as well. She was the woman behind the extraordinary cascade of diamonds Nicole Kidman wore to the 2008 Oscars (a necklace whose diamonds took her four years of banging on De Beers' door to put together). It was largely born of irritation that she would find a designer skirt or a dress that she liked, then panic when after a season or two she couldn't get it any more. She'd call shops that might have old stock, desperately trying to find a new version of an old favourite. She wanted to be a designer who gave that continuity to other people who, like her, yearned for it. She also wanted to design the sort of clothes she wanted but couldn't get. Like what?

"Like a simple black dress, to the knee. There was nothing, anywhere. Nobody was making it. They were either frou-frou or too short. They didn't work for me and they didn't work for my clients, either. I was constantly making clothes for them, supplementing their wardrobe."

She sewed most of them herself and fitted them on herself, on the basis that only if she understood what worked on her would she be able to make clothes that worked on other women too.

"I didn't have a fit-model waiting in an atelier with 20 stitchers and 10 pattern-makers. I didn't want anything extravagant; I would have hated that. If I can do something myself, I like to do it myself. I do all the fittings myself. I go to the workroom. I go to the factories."

Scott has always been enviably sure of her

own ageless, classic style. In spite of having 42-inch legs, she abandoned miniskirts when she was 25. "I don't think it was an age thing. I think I subconsciously decided that a different length suits me more."

And her style clearly has resonance: according to Holli Rogers, buying director for Net-a-Porter, her clothes sell like hot cakes.

"We always have a great response to L'Wren Scott," she says. "Her collections have a level of sophistication and cut that speaks to our customers' needs."

The downside is that Scott is now becoming a victim of her own success. She spends all her time in factories in the industrial wastelands of France and Italy, and being the CEO of a business, a role she finds daunting. "Every cheque, every penny I have to be responsible for because it's my money. My big joke used to be 'my life as a factory worker'. Friends would ask where I was going and they'd be like, 'Why?' But who else was going to go for me?"

The only way she feels sure she can deliver what she promises in terms of fit and quality is by doing it herself. "I take it personally. It's good to cast your eye over things even if your business is a billion-dollar empire. It's not a control freak thing; it's because I care."

She still tries every design on in her own size as soon as they've finished making it and says that the biggest compliment she can receive is when a friend goes out and buys one of her pieces – she almost never gives them away for the simple reason that she can't afford to.

She's a classy conundrum, is L'Wren Scott: extremely likeable, she could at the very least capitalise on her A-list mates, if not exploit them, but she doesn't. She's a former model who confesses she doesn't like modelling, prefers to be behind the camera. A woman who says family is the most important thing in the world to her, yet who has never had children. You might think she's lucky to have Mick; I beg to differ. It's the other way round. ■