

ISABEL DUPRE



by STEPHEN FISHER

With a career spanning almost 15 years, and encompassing some of the most recognizable and well-respected brands and photographers in fashion, Isabel Dupre has managed to carve a niche for herself as one of the most talented and hard working stylists in the industry today.

Photography CHAMA

Displaying equal parts charm and drive, Isabel skyrocketed to prominence through various roles with Marie France and Elle, ultimately landing the coveted position as Style Director for Elle Magazine, working alongside Creative Director and photographer Gilles Bensimon. After a 13 year tenure she left the publication and struck out on her own once again. In doing so, she has continued to shape the traditional landscape of fashion as we know it and is constantly pushing the threshold of what is to come.

Twelv sat down with Isabel and discussed where she finds inspiration, what personal style means to her, and what is in store for one of fashion's most charming and beloved figure

Tell me a little bit about your background and how you got into fashion. I read that you were a model before you were a stylist. I was just on a holiday in Spain at the beach, swimming, and met this group of friends and started hanging out with them. One of the friends was a stylist, so she was already in the fashion business, was like, “Oh, you should be a model! Why don’t you try it?”

How long were you a model for? Not too long, like two years, two years and a half. I liked it because I was traveling a lot. I went three months in Japan and back for two months, went to Spain, Germany was a great traveling experience. I wasn’t like a big, top model, especially in France at this time when all of these girls were like super tall. I was only a shrimp. Clothes were a little too big on me, but it was a really, really good experience, and then I stopped modeling, stopped working as an agent, and then started working at a magazine as the production and casting person, and kind of always took whatever job in fashion I could find.

Was that when you worked for Elle magazine? No, in France I worked for Marie Claire. Or Marie France, actually, it was Marie France. And then I decided that I wanted to move to the States, I always had the dream about America. The American Dream. I moved to Miami, because my English was not that great, so I moved to Miami, worked in a model agency there, and started meeting a lot of people in styling.

You said that you were working as an agent at that time? Yeah, I met someone who said, “You should go interview at Elle, ‘cause I have this great contact, you should go and meet that person.” So I went up there, said, “Do you need someone?” And they were actually looking for someone French because all their stylists at that time were from Paris. They would fly to New York to shoot, and they were looking for an assistant who’d be able to meet them when they come, who lives here but speaks French, blah blah blah. So that’s how I started at Elle, and I just got stuck there for about like fifteen years. I was working at the accessories department and also assisting the stylists when they come over, started doing my own stories, and then ended up being the Style Director. You learn so much in a magazine instead of school because you’re always “in it”, always go to the shows, and it’s all you talk about all day.

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What’s a typical day like for you? There’s no typical day. Everything is different. Sometimes it’s a quiet day so I just go walk the dogs, and end up going to the dog run. It’s one of my obsessions.

Where do you draw inspiration from? What inspires you? Everything from movies, people on the street, models I work with, people I work with. More and more, when I first started, it was a very small world, it’s almost like golf, a very small world, and it just became like everyone. Now on the street you look at people and they’re coming up with great ideas. I love the street, I mean it’s New York, so what better place? Same with Tokyo, when you walk in Tokyo and you see the people wearing amazing things. Not so much fashion magazines, actually. And the shows always, a good show and a good styling.



Do you have any favorite city that you like?
You mean New York?

I mean the style and the energy of it.
I always feel like when I go to Paris, the young kids are pretty cool, and you're like, "Are they coming out of the show, or are they just like coming out of the college next door?" They're really chic. The Italians... I love the older ladies in Italy, how they dress and wear a lot of jewelry in such a chic way, no hair, no makeup, really cool. I like that. And I mean, it's everywhere it's interesting, you go to Dallas and you see people with big hair, I love it too! Why not! It's exciting! As long as there is something that's happening, I like it.

You had a wonderful opportunity of working with a variety of brands and clients. Do you have any memorable or favorite experiences with any certain individuals or brands?

I think what's amazing is going to couture, and shooting couture, and looking at those dresses, and then going back to the showroom and seeing the clients and seeing dresses. I remember at Dior, this dress was like feather with gold on it and we wanted to shoot it and they're like, "Uh, I don't know, you can't shoot if it's raining outside." "No, no, it's going to be fine." And then we start to put it on the street, and of course like three drops of rain. Going to couture, there are a lot of amazing people that you meet, and it's very interesting because it's a lot of different people, really rich or just artists with no money. I like how it's a mix of people with different tastes.

So many people at the same thing for so many different reasons.

Yes, and we all end up being interested by the same thing, and we're so different. My favorite thing is going on a trip with the whole team, and then having dinner with everyone with different ages, different backgrounds. We're all different, but we all end up having an amazing time at the dinner table, and everyone has stories and we're never bored. I love that. It's fascinating, isn't it?

I read in an interview that you're obsessed with shopping. Where are some of your favorite places to go if you need looks and pieces?

Anywhere, I mean, from Century 21, that I just discovered, I know, twenty years in New York and I've just discovered it, okay, hello! I love Century 21, and I love to go to Chanel even if I can't buy anything since it's expensive, I just look around. Barney's is fun, Sak's is fun. I'm not obsessed with vintage though. I don't like the smell.

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What are some important lessons that you’ve learned in your time working within the industry?

Never take anything for granted, I think that’s an important thing. You go up, you go down, you’re like the best thing that ever existed and you did the best cover, and then three months after, everyone hates you because you didn’t put the right jacket on the cover. Enjoy the ride, that’s a big one. Always put the suitcase on your bed when you pack it, otherwise you’ll break your back. Be patient when you travel. I think being nice with everyone is also a good thing. Some people think that they have to be snobby and just not talk to the assistant or things like that, that’s not something I learned, but I think that’s something that I find is a good evolution in this business. When I started there was a lot of snobbiness, and I remember one of the first shows I worked. They said, “just wear black, you wear sunglasses, you don’t smile, you say hi to no one.” That was like eighteen years ago. I was like, “uh, that’s not going to work.” And I started wearing colors, smiled to everyone and said hi, and it was great. That’s why Bill Cunningham started taking pictures of me, because I was the only one not wearing black. Or one of the only ones.

Fifteen years ago, stylists were relatively unknown to the general public, and due to TV and media everyone suddenly wants to become one. What effect do you see this has had in the industry?

Yeah, that’s an amazing point. When I first started, they were like, “what are you doing, stylists? what does that mean?” No one had any idea. And then the media started talking about the stylists, and we became super famous. I remember going to Milan for the fashion shows, and having people waiting for us at the exit of the hotel to ask us for our autograph. We were like movie stars, and it lasted two seasons. It was very fast, and very strange.

What time frame was this?

I can’t remember, so maybe like twelve years ago or something like that? Fifteen? I think that’s when they really started to take pictures of the stylists after the shows. But I remember this little kid. I said, “I’m nobody. Why do you want my autograph?” And he’s like, “No, no, you’re someone.” I don’t think stylists are celebrities anymore, like that was just the celebrity moment that lasted a very short time. And now it’s not really celebrity anymore, it’s more like, everyone wants to be a stylist, and it’s very hard to get an assistant who wants to assist for more than six months.

It seems like all of the TV shows that they’ve had recently, and the movies are so focused on that image...

They call it, they have a name for that, the generation... I-don’t-know-what, and people think that you don’t have to go through... that you can just become a professional.

I went to school for fashion merchandizing and everyone that I graduated with, said, “Oh, I want to be a stylist right off the bat. I don’t want to assist anyone.” And it’s like, “have fun with that plan!”

Yeah, no, you have to assist. That’s another thing I learned. I learned so much from watching the stylists and assisting this amazing, great woman who has stories, and knows the evolution of fashion. There’s a huge history about fashion, and you learn from the people who have been there through it. It’s super interesting, and it’s not just one thing. At one point I wanted to have my own brand, one of those, you know, so I made sweaters one year, and it was a total fail. All of my sizes were too small and of course it didn’t fit on me, but I loved choosing the colors and doing the shape, but that was about five percent of the job. Everything else was dealing with the factory, knowing how much you want to order, going to sell your collection, all that crap I hated so much.

The real business side of it.

Yeah, and I think with styling, they’re all creative when doing a fashion story, but you also you have to learn how to deal with the clients, organize everything, have a good relationship with the showrooms, I mean it’s not just like “hey, let’s put pants and a shirt together, and that’s it.” It’s complicated.

What changes have you seen in the industry during your time working within it?

Oh, huge. As I said, I think the biggest one is that now everyone is fashionable, everyone wants to have a look, and you can now. When I first started, I thought that to look fashionable and cool you had to go to Balenciaga, and my whole outfit would be thousands and thousands of dollars. You can still do that, but you don’t really have to. So I think because it’s more for the role, a lot of people actually are more fashionable, and there are no more rules. We were making fun the other day of how the younger generation dresses. They close their eyes, go in to the closet, grab everything and put it on, and it looks better. I had so many rules at the beginning. First of all, you would never wear gold and silver. And that was always my thing, I was like, “Why? Why can’t I put a silver ring and a gold bracelet?” That’s what everyone does everyday. Now, try to find me one rule in fashion. Give me one rule. There’s no rule. I think the rule is to just like be creative, and do whatever you can.

What’s a central element that you enjoy most about your job, and what keeps you going?

Probably the fact that I meet different people everyday, and the fact that I don’t go to the same place everyday. It’s very creative, and it’s like new. Everyday is new.



Are there any favorite pieces from your own closet?

The little black Chanel jacket, love it, never get rid of it. Some pairs of jeans that I have had for awhile, like my favorite pair of jeans. Definitely my Balenciaga motorcycle jacket. Chanel bags, because they never age, though you see so many on the street now that I don’t wear it so much anymore. My bracelet also, since my Aunt told me that my Grandmother that I never knew or met, was wearing the same bracelet all her life. I saw a picture of her and she looks like me. I find it very spooky.

Who do you believe is a new designer that everyone should be aware of or watching? Or who do you follow?

In Paris there is this guy, Alexandre Vauthier, I don’t know if you know who that is, but I really like what he does, and then Cedric Charlier. It’s hard because it goes very fast, it’s like actresses. Even if they’re really good, the turnover.

There are so many of them now on places like Style.com. It used to take me a day to go through everyone, now it takes me three days to look at three shows.

Do you have a mentor or someone that you credit with helping you along with your career?

Well, I mean, Gilles Bensimon of course. I worked at Elle for those fifteen years and we’re like a team, and we shot a lot of the magazine together, so you can say he taught me a lot of what I know.

Do you have any personal fashion regrets?

Personal fashion regrets... They wanted me to go on Project Runway and I said no, maybe that wouldn’t be a good idea, but then I don’t know, I was like, oh, TV, I don’t know, it’s scary. But I don’t know, maybe it would have been fun to do some TV. I’m pretty happy.