



FRONT ROW TELL-ALL

Ex-mag editor bombshell *new*

ATTENDING THE ready-to-wear shows twice a year in New York, London, Milan and Paris was considered one of the great perks of a fashion-magazine editorship and it was something I looked forward to immensely.

The privilege of being a first-hand witness to the genius and artistry of the world's top designers could never be overestimated. No matter what problems you were coping with in the office on a day-to-day basis, all would be forgotten when the much-coveted invitation from, say, Prada arrived.

Attending meant a month on the road, a great deal of it spent in traffic jams, endlessly discussing clothes and models, and wondering if there would be any time to eat. But what you were truly feeding off was the creativity of the designers, fuelling yourself with inspiration for the magazine for the next six months.

There were always a lot of people scanning the rows to see who was who and who was seated where. Traditionally, everyone always looked terribly chic and pulled together, but not particularly ostentatious.

But, as the internet increased civilian access to a previously closed set, the journalists, editors and buyers became part of the show. Lenses were being trained on them and it was important that they rise to the occasion. For those in new media, including independent bloggers, their image and what they wore to a show was as important as the occasion itself.

There were now two runways at the fashion shows – one inside and one out. Dressing to the nines and being photographed on your >



ANDREW H. WALKER/GETTY IMAGES.





Exclusive extract ✨

As editor of *Vogue* Australia, **Kirstie Clements** lived and breathed fashion for 13 years. And while her second book is called a "novel", it is clearly a thinly veiled exposé of the world of fashion magazines, bloggers and the Paris catwalks.

launches book

Who's in the front row? The occupants of this powerful position often get more attention than the clothes. Here (from left) US *Vogue's* Grace Coddington, Anna Wintour and Virginia Smith, with actresses Nicole Kidman, Rooney Mara and Naomie Harris at the Calvin Klein collection for Spring 2014.





way to a show that you may or may not have an invitation for could launch entire careers.

I had been attending the RTW [ready-to-wear] since the early nineties and, in previous years, what I wore was more practical than anything else – black cashmere sweaters; tailored pants or skirts; a warm, classic coat; a white shirt, if the weather was unseasonably warm; flat shoes or sandals; a new-season handbag. Done. I was a journalist. I never wanted to be noticed and I still don't. I trusted – or, at least, hoped – that my track record was enough.

But my fashion editors now had to stress endlessly over what they were going to pack, as it seemed their professional reputations could be ruined if, God forbid, they wore the wrong Givenchy shoe.

It was vaguely depressing, or perhaps just ironic, to watch a very talented and seasoned fashion editor pick her way – bemused and invisible – through a throng of street photographers who were busily snapping a young counterpart at another magazine, someone who had questionable styling ability, but was dressed in new-season Isabel Marant.

Those individuals who were more focused on the clothes on the runway than on being in the spotlight themselves were starting to appear just a little passé. I could see the key to success was to focus both on the runway and on oneself, but that seemed exhausting to me. I used my Twitter account to follow news feeds, as opposed to tweeting “OMG Kate Moss is in the house!!!” or posting photographs of my invitation to the Chanel show.

IT WAS 2011 and I was paying a visit to the office of *Chic's* fashion director, Marie, to check on her packing progress, as we were due to leave for the shows in two weeks. She was modelling a new Proenza Schouler shoe that had just arrived from Net-A-Porter. The shoe had a lethal 15-centimetre heel and she insisted it would be a good, super-comfortable day option.

“I WORKED IN THE FASHION WORLD – I LIVED IN THE REAL WORLD.”



Below: Now fashion journalists steal the show, Anna Dello Rosso, the editor-at-large and creative consultant for *Vogue Japan*, is the centre of attention with her outrageous outfits.

My personal assistant, Katie, appeared in Marie's office and let me know

the CEO wanted to see me. He would always make me feel as though Marie and I were taking off on vacation for a month after having stolen the corporate credit card. “How long will you be away? Do you think you should be away for that many days?” He acted as if I had invented the RTW schedule for my pleasure. He had no idea how gruelling the month was.

I knew from experience that by the end of the jam-packed circuit and after a probable bout of food poisoning from a par-cooked duck, no one, not even the French, wanted to be in Paris for the final 10 days.

The implication was that I would be out of range, like I was headed for the darkest jungles of New Guinea and that the magazine would grind to a halt, apparently forgetting that we had these new-fangled gadgets, like iPhones, that kept me in touch with the office 24/7. (Actually, after one bill of about \$10,000, when I had committed the ungodly sin of using my phone and calling my deputy regularly to check on business, they had shut off the global roaming anyway.)

FINALLY, WE WERE there. The show began and the few lucky models that

had been deemed the most beautiful women in the world began to stride out sulkily. “Gee, they're thin this year, no?” I murmured to Marie over my shoulder.

“Not especially,” she replied, too busy taking in every detail, except their weight, and happily clocking that *her* arch rival, Carla, was two rows back from where she was sitting. “Well, wearing a quilted puffer jacket belted over a swimsuit would be challenging for a normal woman, wouldn't you think?” I continued, but Marie wasn't listening.

It would take a model to be a virtual walking skeleton to draw even a small gasp of shock from the crowd. And, normally, by the time I'd been to New York and then London, I too became inured to the girls' extreme thinness. I managed to disassociate from it so effectively that I could divide the world into two: the fashion world and the real world. I worked in the fashion world – I lived in the real world.

IN OUR FINAL week on the circuit, in Paris, stuck in traffic on our way to a showroom appointment, we, as usual, discussed the finer details of what we had seen so far. These were the moments I truly loved my job, fully appreciating and talking endlessly about the sumptuous collections staged by houses such as ▶

