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HIGH VOLTAGE

If the spring collections have one single message, it is that it's time to shine. From silver space-age dresses to high-gloss accessories, it's going to be one glittering season. And, as our story "The Shining" suggests, the first step to adding sheen is accessories. A crystal-accented platform, a bejeweled cuff, or a pair of diamanté sunglasses: These are the tools for total transformation.

Speaking of transformation, in another story, "High Definition," we present futuristic looks in a stronger silhouette to help you morph into a more powerful woman. (Think megawatt superstar cover girl Gwen Stefani.)

After you've transformed and accessorized to the hilt, check out "American Dream," ELLE's guide to the key pieces from spring's New York runways—from the metallic jacket to the cocktail dress. Also take a peek at "The Body Elettra," in which Lancôme's newest face, Elettra Rossellini Wiedemann, takes a turn in the season's sparkly 1920s-influenced styles. What's more exciting than the combination of a fresh beauty and a bedazzling dress? Try it for yourself!—NINA GARCIA

Crystal-embroidered silk-brocade minidress, Gucci, price upon request, at select Gucci stores nationwide. Ceramic-and-diamond cuff, Chanel Fine Jewelry, price upon request. For details, see Shopping Guide.



ESCAPE

ARTIST

PLATINUM
POP STAR
GWEN STEFANI
TALKS ABOUT
HER HIT
ADDICTION,
YODELING
FANTASIES,
AND HOW
SHE KICKED HER
MADONNA
HABIT. NOW
SHE PREPARES TO
CONQUER THE
WORLD, WITH
BABY IN TOW.
BY JOSEPH
HOOPER.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY
GILLES BENSIMON



Left: Silk-jersey dress, Vivienne Westwood, Ltd., \$550, visit viviennewestwood.com. Belt, Emilio Pucci. Enamel ring with diamonds, David Webb, price upon request. Her own necklace, cuff.

Right: Stretch-jersey dress, Chanel, \$1,445, at select Chanel Boutique nationwide. Her own necklace. For details, see Shopping Guide. Styling by Kate Lanphear with Andrea Lieberman for margaretmaldonado.com; hair by Danilo for Pantene at the Wall Group; makeup by Kathy Jeung for Smashbox Cosmetics at magnetla.com; manicure by Janet James at Pearle Management.



Silver leather dress with rubber trim, Fendi, \$3,720, at Fendi Boutique nationwide. Ceramic-and-diamond cuff, Chanel Jewelry, price upon request.



Satin cape with crystal trim, Azzaro, \$2,950, at Bergdorf Goodman, NYC. Cotton top, James Perse, \$41. Sequin tulle hot pants, Chanel, \$990. Panama hat, Stephen Jones Millinery. Python-embossed patent leather belt, Streets Ahead, \$159. Her own necklace, cuff. For details, see Shopping Guide.

Y

ou know the story: Blond Italian-American pop diva, music video eminence, and all-round material girl marries a Brit artiste and moves to England. The relationship hits some bumps along the way, but a baby boy ensues and celebrity life keeps on rolling. "It is weird that we have all these similarities," Gwen Stefani allows as she nestles

on a couch in one of the many rooms her entourage has taken in London's Landmark hotel in mid-November. With a voice that hovers somewhere between sultry and Kewpie doll, the singer has a knack for sounding about seven years old: "Madonna's had us over to dinner and stuff, and she's always been very nice to me."

Undeniably, there is scale to Madge's assault on the Old Country, everything from the horsey rural estate to the creeping mid-Atlantic accent. Stefani, by contrast, will lose her flat, half-swallowed Californian vowels when hell freezes over, and anyway, she hasn't even truly relocated to England; she and Brit rocker husband Gavin Rossdale have for the past 10 years split their time between the house in London's tony Primrose Hill (neighbors on either side are Jude Law and his ex, Sadie Frost) and a manse in L.A. But if Madonna does it bigger, it is no longer heresy to suggest that musically, Stefani does it every

"Dude, you gotta give me a call for the new record."

Just last week, Stefani put the finishing touches on her new solo album, *The Sweet Escape*, which, if industry buzz and early radio play can be trusted, is poised to make a major impact. Less self-consciously retro than its predecessor, *The Sweet Escape* employs the same working method as *L.A.M.B.*: Lock Gwen up in the studio with a blurry succession of dream-team producers all vying for that one megahit (can you spell *bananas?*), tape everything, toss it up in the air, and see what sticks. A likely recipe for disaster (which No Doubt purists, partial to human beings playing actual drums and bass, may well judge), but it works, mostly due to Stefani's feckless, reckless impulse to try anything that pops into her head. Nothing is more out there than the album's first single and video, "Wind It Up"—typically sinister Neptunes beats and Stefani, backed by a symphony orchestra, singing fragments lifted from *The Sound of Music*'s "The Lonely Goatherd." (Yes, that's right: "High on a hill was a lonely goatherd/ Lay, odl ay odl ay hee hoo.")

"Some people are freaked out by that yodel," Stefani confides. "Either they get it or they don't. But I've always had the fantasy of putting *The Sound of Music* to a beat. I used to quote all the songs like a geek!" (Pharrell, a famous musical minimalist, was less than convinced, but as he tells me later, "I just rolled with her. I wanted her to be happy.") Stefani's term of art for a tune like "Wind It Up" is a "mash-up," but, if you wanted to go all High Culture on Gwen, Dada would do as

"I REMEMBER TELLING MADONNA I WAS GOING TO DO AN '80S DANCE RECORD, AND SHE ROLLED HER EYES LIKE, 'WHATEVER.'"

bit as well. After 17 years of fronting the redoubtable rock/ska/reggae band No Doubt (she should make the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on the strength of one immortal break-up tune alone, "Don't Speak"), Stefani took the solo plunge. Her 2004 giddy confection of dance tunes *Love. Angel. Music. Baby.* went triple platinum. ("I remember telling Madonna I was going to do an '80s dance record," Stefani says, "and she rolled her eyes, because I think when you've lived through it like she did, she's like, 'Whatever.' But a lot of my influence came from her early work, like directly, like a Xerox.") That album spawned one monster single, "Hollaback Girl," a saucy cheerleader chant that taught teenage girls how to spell the word *bananas* and simultaneously established Stefani's urban street cred as a white suburban rapper comfortable with the "S" word and with pop-hop notables the Neptunes' martial beats.

"Gwen was always dope," says Pharrell Williams, producer and one half of the Neptunes. "If there was an ill black record out there, she knew what it was."

Linda Perry, the songwriter-producer who made Pink into Pink, says she barged her way onto the Stefani solo team by physically accosting the singer at the Grammy Awards in 2004. "I was pokin' on her head," Perry says, "and I was like,

well. Marcel Duchamp has nothing on Stefani, whose brain is as adhesive as flypaper, a trap for pop-culture fragments that almost randomly catch and reassemble.

In her own mind, Gwen Stefani is the Cinderella of pop music.

At any moment, it seems, the Landmark could turn into a pumpkin. "The hotel maid walked by today," she says, "and she's really pretty and she probably comes from Poland. And here I am about to spend a lot of money on room service and I was thinking, I could have been a maid." Actually, Stefani grew up solidly middle-class in Anaheim, the second of four kids in a tight-knit family headed by folk-music-loving parents (dad Dennis was a Yamaha marketing executive; Patti was an accountant before becoming a full-time mom). Teenage Gwen was mad for clothes and jumped-up Jamaican-rooted ska music, then enjoying one of its periodic revivals. In '87, her older brother, Eric, formed No Doubt and persuaded his bopping little sister to sing in the band and that, aside from a little college on the fly, would be her life: near-constant touring and a steady romance with the band's bassist, Tony Kanal. The Cinderella theme kicked in big time with No Doubt's hit third album, 1995's *Tragic Kingdom* (Anaheim being home to Disney's Magic Kingdom, after all),

Silk chiffon dress,
Dior by John
Galliano, price
upon request, at
Dior Boutique,
NYC. Double-row
gold-plate chain
cuff, Roxanne
Assoulin for Lee
Angel, \$95.
Sterling silver
bracelet, DM
LA, \$965. Her
own necklace.
For details, see
Shopping Guide.



which transformed the Southern California party band into a pop/rock juggernaut. By then, Tony and Gwen had broken up (providing the raw material for "Don't Speak") and Eric had decamped to become an animator with *The Simpsons*. But the band chugged on through 2001's *Rock Steady*, by which time all four No Doubters were desperate for a break. (Kanal has since emerged as one of Stefani's trusted studio collaborators.) As to whether the success of solo Gwen means the end of No Doubt, Stefani says she hopes not: "I'm looking forward to going back to my little musical family and trying to write a song," she says. But for the tween girls who are the core of her solo fan base, No Doubt, much beloved by young men, would fall squarely into the "No Clue" department.

With hubby Rossdale in L.A. recording with Pharrell, Stefani has turned over the London Primrose Hill house to her parents, visiting from Anaheim and eager, like the rest of her inner circle, to get some quality time with their six-month old grandson, Kingston. ("He's pretty rad," Kingston's mom says.) For nine days, Stefani has moved into the Landmark with a small army of publicists and managers, transforming one of the city's swankier hotels into a field headquarters for the first campaign of a global publicity push behind *The Sweet Escape*.

"I'm so exhausted," Stefani announces as she walks into her personal assistant's hotel room. But just because Cinderella is in a mood doesn't mean she's a diva. ("The ghastly thing about her is that she is a really decent human being," says

37-year-old woman with angular features and a trim, honed physique. And then there's the hair, which serves as a kind of Stefani mood ring, never more dramatically than in 2000 when she broke up with Rossdale (temporarily) and opted for the startling pink do that graced the cover of No Doubt's *Return to Saturn*. She's since gone back to Jean Harlow platinum, an over-the-top shade that can be seen to good effect in Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*, Stefani's chance to play her Hollywood avatar for about three minutes of screen time, hanging off the arm of Leo DiCaprio's Howard Hughes. (The movie experience seems to have slaked her once-ardent film ambitions, but she says, "If Martin Scorsese called me up again....")

Hair color notwithstanding, the past four years have been anything but a cakewalk. After her 2002 marriage to her English rocker, she learned that Rossdale had fathered an illegitimate child, now a teenager. Stefani's lyrics tend to read like blog entries from her own tumultuous Planet Relationship, so fans interpreted "Danger Zone," off her first album, as her stinging retort: "Are your secrets where you left them? 'Cause now your ghosts are mine as well." (In this instance, the fans were wrong; the song was written before the revelation, but Stefani would be shocked by its prophetic resonance.)

As for the new album's gorgeously bleak ballad "Early Winter" ("I can't fix what you broke"), it turns out that Tim Rice-Oxley from the band Keane wrote most of the lyrics and,

"I'LL NEVER BE AS PURE AS I WAS WHEN I WROTE *TRAGIC KINGDOM*. ONCE YOU'VE HAD A HIT, THERE'S NO GOING BACK, BECAUSE IT'S SO ADDICTIVE. IT'S A DRUG."

her pal Garbage frontwoman Shirley Manson.) Fame and talent aside, Stefani is the mall girl next door, one who's very in touch with her emotions. When she's up, she's up, when she's down, she cries easily, and she's particularly sensitive in matters of physical appearance. Trailed from city to city by a retinue of hair and skin and clothes handlers who have become her intimate friends ("They are as obsessive as I am and complete mad hatters," Stefani says), she is still the last word on her high-glam platinum persona that evolved over a decade and a half's worth of music videos. Today, an all-day photo shoot for another project has let her down. "I started with my hard look—my bangs—but the lighting was like Kmart—'Attention shoppers!'—so I had to revise."

Post-photo-shoot debacle, Stefani has changed into a soothingly rich green tracksuit with the logo of her clothing line, L.A.M.B., running down one side in fancy gold script letters. (She has also launched a teen-friendly line, Harajuku Lovers, her homage to the style-conscious Tokyo girls who hang out in the Harajuku shopping district.) "People always say the same things," she tells me. "That I'm smaller than they expected and that I look better in real life. Which is kind of a backhanded compliment."

True enough. The early No Doubt Gwen, the adorable ska kid with a little baby fat, has been updated into a striking

by all accounts, Stefani and Rossdale are in a positive phase of the moon, thank you very much. "But [that song] felt weird," she says. "It felt like I could have lived it and I have lived it. I mean, of course me and Gavin have problems, sometimes. Everyone does. We've been together for over 10 years. This is, like, the real deal." (For more on loving your man in spite of it all, consult "The Real Thing" off *L.A.M.B.*)

In any event, she adds, it's not like she's going into the studio these days expressly for emotional catharsis. "I'll never be as pure as I was when I wrote *Tragic Kingdom*," she says. "Once you've had a hit, there's no going back, because it's so addictive. It's a drug. I felt I was going back and getting more Pharrell, 'Hollaback Girl Number 2.'" She giggles. "As you would! It's not like being ambitious is a bad thing. And I wanted [this album] to be now, to be modern. I want it to be in the clubs. No Doubt was never in the clubs. I want to go out and hear that song pumping in the car next to me. I want bass! I want to bump!"

Room service knocks and our tea arrives. "This is perfection," Stefani says. She may be getting the hang of the England thing after all.

The next day, I follow Stefani to the KISS radio station to watch her make nice over the English (Continued on page 262)



Crepe-jersey dress,
Ennio Capasa
for Costume
National, \$1,300,
at Costume
National, NYC.
Her own necklace.
For details, see
Shopping Guide.

THERE IS NO ME WITHOUT YOU

(Continued from page 211)

say. In fact, it had been suggested to me by Growing Generations that I bring Carly a gift.

She looked at the box for a moment.

"Do you want me to open it now?" she asked.

Her question made me flinch. The nature of our relationship was brought into its sharpest possible relief: It was transactional. And the transaction between us was coming to an end. "No, that's all right," I said.

Carly shook my hand goodbye and walked back through the lobby of the hotel—back into her life as a young, single law student.

Twelve hours later, at four o'clock in the morning, Michael and I picked up our surrogate at her hotel off Sunset Strip. In the dark, we drove through Beverly Hills to the Pacific Fertility Center, where our reproductive endocrinologist, Vicken Sahakian, MD, was meeting us. (He was flying to a conference later in the morning, hence the crack-of-dawn appointment.)

We sat, Michael, Sandra, and I, in a brightly lit waiting room. The tables were covered with parenting magazines, alongside which were thick, loose-leaf binders bulging with mostly handwritten letters of thanks to Dr. Sahakian, accompanied by photographs of babies—frequently twins.

Sahakian, personable, handsome, emerged from the elevator a few minutes after we arrived. He waved to us, then disappeared into his office, presumably to check the results of the fertilization. After what seemed a long time, he emerged. His expression was grim.

"These embryos are not good," he said.

I looked at Michael. His face sagged.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"This is a poor donor," Sahakian said. "The eggs were poor quality." He was certain, he said, that Carly would be dropped from the program.

I had the sudden thought that I wanted my Fred Segal shopping bag back.

"What do we do now?" Michael asked.

"We transfer as many as we can," Sahakian said.

There seemed to be no question as to whether we should move forward. "I think we'll put four in."

By *in*, he meant into Sandra's womb. "Poor embryos" transferred into a stranger's uterus. Embryos that were half my beloved husband's. I felt nauseated as I accompanied Sahakian into the room where Sandra was lying, her lower body covered by a white sheet, her feet in stirrups.

All I wanted to do was shout, "No!" But I couldn't say a thing. I kept remembering Carly's cool grip, the way she couldn't think of any questions to ask me. I was acutely aware that I was watching something happen that I could never take back. I watched on a monitor as the microscopic embryos slid, one after the other, into Sandra's uterus.

We drove her back to her hotel, and I helped her get ready for the 24 hours of bed rest. I presented her with a gift of creams and lotions, as well as every magazine I could find. I settled her into the king-size bed in her purple satin pajamas and left the TV remote in her hand.

"Well, you never know," she said cheerfully as I prepared to leave. She was a kind, decent woman, trying to make me feel better.

Ten days later, back in New York, I found myself at the Museum of Modern Art. I knew my cell phone was going to ring, and I was as terrified as I have ever been. I wanted to be alone among people, in a place of beauty and history, a place that would somehow ground me as I received the news—whatever the news might be. I wandered through the cavernous second floor, trying to gather strength from the Cy Twombly paintings depicting the four seasons. I was looking out at the sculpture garden when my phone rang.

"Dani? This is Christine from Dr. Sahakian's office," a voice said.

"Hi," I responded, girding myself.

"I'm really sorry," Christine said. "Sandra's pregnancy test came back negative."

I stared at the Rodin in the garden.

"Dani?" Christine asked. "Are you okay?"

I couldn't speak.

"I already called Sandra," Christine said.

"Please call us if there's anything we can do."

My mind had been racing so hard that, for a moment, I didn't realize it had stopped. The constant, sick whirl I'd been carrying with me flew swiftly away. As my breath slowed, I tried to figure out what was going on. After all the trips, the money, the middle-of-the-night run through L.A., what I felt, finally, was relief. I'd been desperate, I realized, for the answer I'd just received. Desperate for the embryos to disintegrate into nothing.

I think I knew it was over then. I didn't want any more phone calls from agencies telling me about fabulous new donors who hadn't yet been posted. I didn't want my weekly "check-in" calls from the Growing Generations psychologist, who had met me once, for five minutes. I was pretty sure I wanted out, but I continued to explore donor websites, just to be sure.

I found another donor I liked. She was a book editor (a book editor!) who on her agency video was articulate, thoughtful, funny. One other couple was waiting for her, but we could be second in line. Since she was a first-time donor, she was flown to New York by the couple, who were having her medically and psychologically screened (the latter by Mendell); they were obviously going to great expense to have her checked out.

After Mendell interviewed the woman, I called to ask her how it had gone. This was a donor I thought I could go one more round with—she felt familiar. "I told her she shouldn't be a donor," Mendell said. "This couple is really pissed at me, but I had no choice."

What did she mean? What had happened?

"She had too many questions," Mendell said.

"She kept wondering about the future. About how she'd feel if she ever met the child—or if she didn't. If she had kids of her own, or if she didn't. She couldn't get comfortable with the whole thing."

On the other end of the phone, I was nodding. That's my girl, I thought. □

GWEN STEFANI

(Continued from page 222)

airwaves. It's an entourage production, but in addition to the usual handlers we get an appearance by the beguiling Kingston Rossdale, who holds court in the waiting lounge under the watchful eyes of his grandparents. "Kingston is so chill," Stefani says. "He goes with me everywhere, 'cause I'm still nursing. He's been to every studio in L.A., New York, London. He lives up to his name—total Rasta boy. He gives me real balance. You can go 100 miles an hour, but you still have to stop to hang out with him." According to Manson, Stefani functions bafflingly well at top speed. "Sometimes you hang out with her and she says, 'Oh God, I had two hours of sleep last night. I was in the studio until 4 A.M. and then up with the baby at 6.' Then she throws a big party at night."

If motherhood is sweet, the pregnancy proved to be an unexpected bitch. "I thought I was going to be one of those Mother Nature girls. I figured, I'll just squeeze it out," she says, "'cause I'm really strong and I work out and stuff." Instead, shortness of breath and a host of other physical ills made the latter part of her *L.A.M.B.* tour a nightmare. "I would be seriously crying before I went onstage. I didn't know how I was going to get through the tour, putting on nine costume changes on a stage in front of 12,000 people every night. And I didn't want people to know [I was pregnant]. I didn't want it to become the Gwen Freak Circus Show—"Watch it grow onstage."

Tonight, gearing up for her *Sweet Escape* tour, Stefani is looking the furthest thing from maternal, in a skintight sweater and clunky neck chain that I assume is garden-variety hip-hop bling until she sets me straight. It's a key, she says, formed by two back-to-back G's, her "Wind It Up" key that's featured prominently in the video with the yodeling and the lonely goatherd and an allusively related Houdini subplot with a struggling Stefani shackled to a chain fence as if underwater. "In the video," she says, "you can see the key coming out of my mouth. When Houdini used to do his tricks, his wife used to pass the key from her mouth to his mouth. It's the sweet escape. And I was thinking, The key is the music. It all kind of ties up together."

Whatever (as Stefani would say), it makes for a cool video. Her new fans are happy to follow her into the woolliest recesses of her imagination, entranced by the fabulous artifice, by the playful tug-of-war between her Jean Harlow and abs-of-steel personas, and by the evident fact that you can be a mega-pop star without the standard-issue T & A pander (especially about a zillion preteen girls who take their uncomplaining dads to her concerts). Something about Gwen Stefani seems to reconcile opposites—humble celebrity, femme jock, surrealist material girl—and has ever since the early No Doubt days when she was the girl in the guys' band touring the rock dives of America in a van. "I would 'go off' in the mosh pit," she says, "but I was always very glamorous before I do in." □