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THE REIGN *of* COOL

Gwen Stefani talks to *Emma Stoley* about making fashion in the fast lane

THE COURT OF GWEN Stefani, it has to be said, is not unlike that of a modern-day Marie Antoinette. There are the loyal subjects to consider, stylish types of all fashion bustling around in a controlled frenzy of organizing and delegating. Instead of ladies-in-waiting holding fans or champagne glasses, her crew is clutching clipboards and iPhones. There is the room itself, a magnificent high-ceilinged atelier tricked out in black-and-white-striped uphol-

stery, mirrored walls and banquettes running the length of the picture windows (the headquarters for Stefani's fashion line, L.A.M.B., in New York's SoHo). And there is Stefani, resplendent amid the chaos in her signature sartorial finery: platinum-blond hair swept back into a slick, immovable ponytail, huge false eyelashes, poppy-red lips and an immaculate all-black outfit, with the pièce de résistance being a pair of towering black-and-white checkerboard heels. The requisite bling shows up >





as a diamond necklace spelling out “Stefani,” which swings around her neck. The scene even comes complete with an heir apparent, the aptly named Kingston, who runs in at one point to test out his new throne, a black-and-white-striped mini-chair that his mother had made just for him.

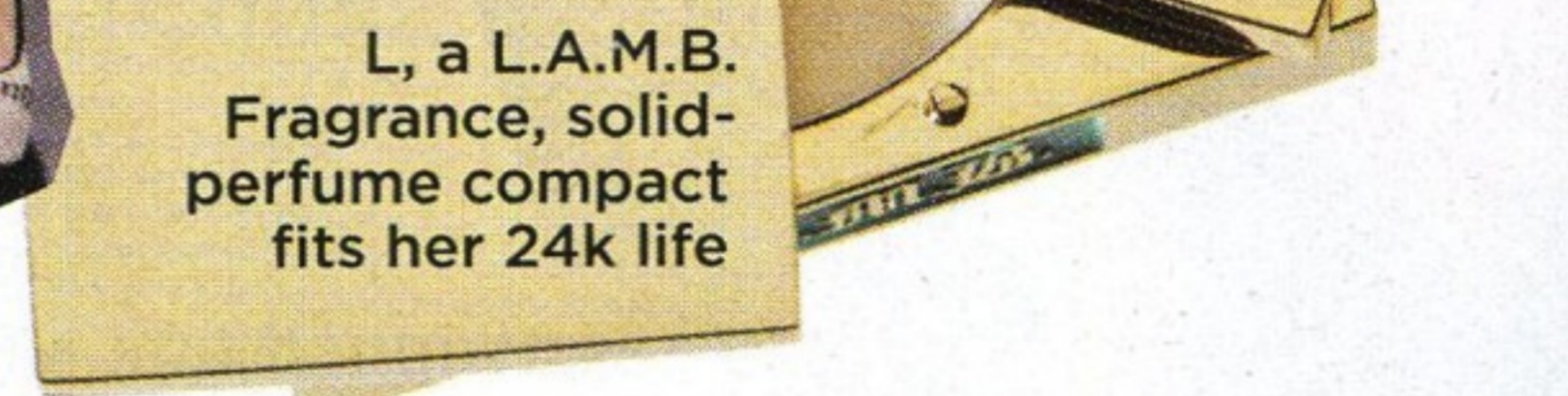
It is the day after Stefani’s Spring ’08 ready-to-wear collection at New York Fashion Week, and the woman of the hour is trying to catch her breath and reflect on the show before plunging back into a hectic tour schedule. She exhales and widens her expressive eyes, made even larger today by dramatic makeup.

“I can’t believe it,” she says finally, with a relieved smile. “I feel like it was my most focused show yet. The first few times, I showed everything I had, but *this* time, I tried to keep all that casual stuff out of my last selection. Doing this collection was all about a return to my roots. The pieces have a really nostalgic feeling. It’s inspiration taken from when I was young: the uniform of my youth—checkers, houndstooth and plaid—clothes I wore when I first discovered who I was as a teen.

To [recreate] that look in such an evolved, sophisticated way brought me to tears. Especially when the models first stepped onto the runway.” She laughs. “Then, I was, like, ‘Get over it!’”

Nostalgia, of course, has been a hallmark of Stefani’s style since she first arrived on the scene in 1992 with her band, No Doubt. Back then, she was channelling a So-Cal ska girl and dabbling in reggae sounds—a musical genre and lifestyle that still inspires her. She has often spoken of being influenced by silver-screen sirens from the heyday of Hollywood glamour, from Jean Harlow (whom she played in Martin Scorsese’s 2004 film, *The Aviator*) to Marilyn Monroe, as well as more contemporary muses such as Deborah Harry. “I’m so into her right now,” she says of the Blondie front woman. “But a lot of the young kids don’t know who she is. It’s incredible how ahead of her time she was, on so many levels.”

Much like the person to whom she is most often compared, Madonna, Stefani likes to try on personas like so many gowns from the dress-up box. But in spite of the many homages and refer-



L, a L.A.M.B. Fragrance, solid-perfume compact fits her 24k life

ences, the Gwen of today seems a creation all her own.

She’s become adept at juggling the many facets of her fabulous life: singer, actor, designer, mother, wife and, most recently, fragrance designer (her first scent, L, a L.A.M.B. Fragrance by Gwen Stefani, bowed in early 2007).

“The simple reason that I started L.A.M.B.,” Stefani explains, “was to have something really creative in my life other than music. ‘Cause I don’t know what’s going to happen. I want to be prepared for the downfall. You never know. I’m very passionate and I never get tired, but I never thought I was going to get this deep so quickly. And that I was going to be sitting in this showroom overlooking Broadway. I pinch myself every day, every second.”



The L.A.M.B. Spring '08 fashion show, hosted by Stefani and baby Kingston



“WHEN THE MODELS HIT THE RUNWAY, IT BROUGHT ME TO TEARS”

This theme of being grateful for her charmed life is something Stefani often comes back to. She credits her mother—who appears in a moody black-and-white photo on Stefani’s inspiration board, along with Sophia Loren, a young Elvis and Priscilla and a beehived Barbra Streisand—with playing a huge role in her talent. She sees the clothing line as being “a connection to my mom because we always sewed together.”

Of touring, she says, “It’s awesome. It’s incredible being in a different country every day. It’s my favourite thing about my success—being able to go to China, for instance, and you have this stereotype in your head of what it’s going to be like, and it’s not like that at all. It’s this big eye-opener. You feel like the world is so big, yet so small. We’re all so different, yet the same, and music is so powerful, it transcends any of that.”

When asked which part of the creative process she most enjoys, she answers without hesitation. “It’s really when I first get the initial idea and go to the costume houses and get inspiration. And my second favourite part is seeing that come to life in the drawings. Then, the potential for what it can be. It’s the same with music; I’ve always been about the demo, you know what I mean?”

In spite of the palpable air of euphoria in the room today, there’s a touch of melancholy about Stefani, which she explains thus: “It’s a big crossroads in my life—[I’ve] come to the end of a chapter doing those two dance records, and having the baby for a year now. This tour’s almost over with, and I’ll never do these kind of songs again.” She laughs a little wryly. “I love being in my tour bubble. I’ll get home and go through my depression phase: ‘Where is everyone

and who am I?’ Right now I don’t hold the keys or money; I just follow the person in front of me and go.”

After her world tour is over, Stefani will—as incessantly reported by *People* magazine—be busy taking care of baby number 2. Add to that her confirmed return to the studio for an eagerly anticipated No Doubt reunion album—and Stefani is embarking on another round of new beginnings. “I’m so excited about going back,” she gushes, “going home and [recording] with those guys, seeing what we can do together after having a break from each other after all these years.” Somewhere in there, she’ll work on her next perfume—there are five in the pipeline, with one for Harajuku Lovers, her diffusion fashion line. She’ll also spend time with Kingston (Stefani describes motherhood as “beyond your control of love”) and husband Gavin Rossdale, with whom she seems to have a secure, old-fashioned marriage.

But this regal dame isn’t fazed by the number of things on her plate. “It’s not daunting to me,” she says with a warm smile. “I’m in a rush, but I’m not in a rush like I used to be. I’ve already accomplished everything I wanted to.” □