

VOGUE

APR

THE SHAPE ISSUE

Gwen Stefani

On Glamour, Gavin
& Going Solo

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the first lady of rock

Glamorous Gwen Stefani has become the ultimate music icon with that rare thing—a good reputation. Now, as Jonathan Van Meter discovers, she's setting her sights on Hollywood. Photographed by Steven Meisel.

UNDERNEATH IT ALL

Is there anyone in popular culture as identified with her makeup as Gwen Stefani? The powdered, pale skin, the scarlet lips, those high, arched brows. Alexander McQueen blazer. Tom Ford for Gucci champagne marabou shrug. Beigé Lola hat. Stephen Russell earrings. Smithwick Dillon brooch. Details, stores, see In This Issue. Fashion Editor: Tonne Goodman.





STREET SMART

Stefani's style simultaneously evokes '40s Hollywood and early-'80s SoCal punk. It's quite a trick. Louis Vuitton navy kimono jacket and sailor pants. Fred Leighton bracelets. Details, stores, see In This Issue.

“Part of the joy of working with her is that she has this innate understanding of fashion, this cool factor. The It-girl thing”

Gwen Stefani's house in Los Feliz has a vaguely spooky quality to it. The unease I feel when I pull up in front may simply be the result of my having watched *Sunset Boulevard* one too many times. Or perhaps the damp January chill has something to do with it. In any case, when the high gates swing open, I walk up the curving, rain-slicked driveway. I am greeted at the heavy wooden door by Stefani's assistant, Pete, an affable young English fellow who is a childhood friend of Stefani's husband, Gavin Rossdale.

The house was built in the twenties, and Stefani is only its fourth occupant, which is one reason many of its original details remain unaltered. The rotunda-like entry, for example, is dominated by a dramatic spiral staircase (worthy of Norma Desmond herself) with a complicated wrought-iron railing featuring a replica of a Spanish galleon. On the domed ceiling above, there's a large fresco of once-famous conquistadors. Pete leads me through a dining room lined with dark paintings and bloodred walls, a medieval chandelier hanging over a long wooden table, and deposits me in an enormous kitchen that has been remodeled to look as if it were designed in the twenties—a sea of black and green ceramic tile bathed in warm, low light. There are candles flickering and religious iconography here and there. It's as if Stefani's entire home is a kind of Gothic take on old Hollywood.

While I wait for the lady of the house, I look at framed family photographs in one corner. There is a picture of Stefani as Jean Harlow, taken on the set of *The Aviator*, Martin Scorsese's forthcoming Howard Hughes biopic starring Leonardo DiCaprio. Though she utters only a few lines in a movie-premiere scene, a cameo in a Scorsese film on Leo's arm is certainly not the worst way to announce that she is ready for her close-up.

When Stefani appears in the kitchen moments later, her sunny presence throws the *Dark Shadows* aspect of her house into high relief. As she opens a bottle of Chardonnay, I ask about the photograph. At first she says that it's the actual Jean Harlow, and even though a moment before I had thought it was Stefani, I fall for it because she does not look the least bit like the rock star we've come to know and love. “I'm kidding,” she says. “It's me!” She seems pleased that I was willing to believe it might be Harlow. “That's the key, right?” she says. As I lean in to look at the photograph again, she complains about her makeup. “I would have done it a little differently,” she says. “I'm always in control of my hair and makeup. I was like, ‘Are you *sure* you want the lips to be that thin? Jean Harlow's were bigger than that. It's not like I didn't read two biographies and watch eighteen of her movies before I got here.’ But what are you going to do? They were in control. I couldn't say anything. It was hard.”

The makeup artist must have been a nervous wreck. Is there anyone in popular culture today who is as identified with her makeup as Gwen Stefani? The powdered, pale skin, the scarlet lips, those high, arched brows. She has a very particular, almost dated relationship to “putting on her face.” She even wrote a song about it a few years back (“If the magic's in the makeup/Then who am I?”). It's so rare to see her out of makeup that when she appeared in a recent video jumping on a bed with a naked face, looking just *pretty*, she was almost unrecognizable. The image appears to be an homage to those famous shots of a natural Marilyn Monroe, another icon who always had her face on in public and on whom Stefani has been fixated since she was a teenager. “My whole room was Marilyn Monroe posters,” she says.

Today Stefani's wearing a sleeveless T-shirt with wide red, green, and yellow stripes, and a pair of complicated new Levi's jeans, worn low and long. Lacy underthings peek out from the top of her jeans. On her feet: sweat socks and Adidas flip-flops. Around her neck is a diamond choker that spells out WIFE in Gothic, diamond-encrusted lettering—a gift from Rossdale. Her white-white hair is a marvel of structural engineering, pulled back tight on the sides and piled high up on her head in a kind of squared-off, simulated Mohawk. Like so much of Stefani's style, she does manage to simultaneously evoke forties Hollywood and early-eighties SoCal punk. It's quite a trick.

Stefani has just gotten home from an audition for Brian De Palma, the director who's partly responsible for making it seem as if something creepy lurks behind every gate in Hollywood. His latest project will do nothing to dispel that notion. He is casting *The Black Dahlia*, a film based on the James Ellroy novel, which is itself based on the true story of a young Hollywood starlet's gruesome murder in 1947 (her body was found cut in half and disemboweled). Josh Hartnett and Mark Wahlberg have already been cast in the film as two detectives. Stefani tells me that this afternoon she had to read with “some young guy named Josh,” not seeming to know who he is. She can sometimes verge on ditzy, but, to be fair, this could just be a sign that she's still sort of a stranger to the film world. “It was really humiliating and nerve-racking, but I feel like I did pretty well,” she says. “But I don't know whether I would ever even do it if they offered it to me because it's a kind of a racy part.” She amends her last thought slightly: “I *know* I'm not going to get it, because I think the character is so the opposite of me. She's really dark and naughty and slutty. And she has black hair.” This is the first glimpse I get of Stefani's self-image, which, despite her tough-girl stage persona, is surprisingly wholesome, if not prim.

Stefani claims she had never considered acting until she became famous as the lead singer of No Doubt and agents started calling. After she came off of touring for the band's breakthrough album, *Tragic Kingdom*, in 1997, she settled on David Schiff from United Talent Agency. “All I ever do is go to parties with him,” she says. “I never do movies.” Spoken like a true Hollywood starlet. At least he's getting her through the right doors. The last film she auditioned for was *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*. “It was between

GOOD SPORT

"The whole acting thing really feels like something I could do—it's just like performing," Stefani says. "You hit a moment." THIS PAGE: Jill Stuart satin bathing suit. Neil Lane Collection bracelet and ring. OPPOSITE PAGE: Carolina Herrera ivory dress with ribbon details. Keds sneakers. Details, stores, see In This Issue.





“You are truly great when you can move that culture meter, when you can make the needle jump. She’s that kind of artist”

“Gavin’s one of those multitaskers—

me and Angelina Jolie, and I’m like, ‘Oh, great. I got a shot here.’” But then, she says, “the whole acting thing really feels like something I could do. Whenever I’ve done it, whenever I had moments where it works, it’s just like performing. You hit a moment. And that’s what movies are: a series of moments.”

M

ow we are sitting in her living room, whose artifacts speak to the curious mix of interests in her life, from haute couture to Hollywood history, from reggae to rock ‘n’ roll. The room is dominated by two plain white sofas and a dark-wood baby grand piano. Above the mantel is a huge black-and-white framed photograph of Bob Marley. Next to it is a red neon heart inside a Plexiglas box, a gift from Gwen to Gavin. Nearby are John Galliano’s framed sketches of her wedding gown. And there, in the corner, are Stefani’s two Grammys, to which she can now add a third, which she won in February for “Underneath It All,” a sweetly demanding little song she wrote about Rossdale before they were married. Lying on the coffee table are stacks of art books, including *Icons & Idols*, *Great Hollywood Movies*, and a book of Marilyn Monroe photographs.

At the moment, Stefani is curled up on one of her white sofas sipping a glass of wine. Right behind her head is a series of very glamorous Herb Ritts photographs of her and her husband, propped up in frames and lined up in a row on the piano. The images are, in fact, so glamorous that it’s tempting to want to place Stefani in the pantheon with Monroe and Harlow. “Isn’t it weird how there are icons like that?” she says. “Like Jean Harlow. They screened her movie *Hell’s Angels* for us. She was really bad in it, really awkward. But she’s so magical. She comes on the screen and you’re like, When is she coming back? She’s just like this lightbulb. And it’s so obvious that she’s huge.”

Stefani could just as well be describing herself. Sophie Muller, who has directed seven of No Doubt’s videos, says she has “no idea” whether the singer’s prodigious screen presence in music videos will translate to film. “The difference between actors and singers who are great at videos,” she says, “is that

they’re great at being themselves, but an even better, prettier, larger-than-life version of themselves. Actors are often people who don’t really know who they are and really love becoming somebody else.” Muller and Stefani first met nine years ago as they prepared to shoot the now classic “Don’t Speak” video. “She came to my hotel room and I just remember that she was all sparkly,” says Muller. “She had diamonds under her eyes and she looked incredibly glamorous. I just knew that she was a big star. You could see that right away.”

At 34, Gwen Stefani can sometimes seem much younger. She still talks in the patois of a teenager, beginning sentences with “Dude!” more often than not.

Eight years ago, I briefly interviewed a 26-year-old Stefani

over the phone. I had been writing a story about women in rock, and just as I was finishing a draft, I saw a video on MTV by a band I’d never heard of. The song was “Just a Girl.” Aside from the fact that the lyrics spoke directly to my point, I was thunderstruck by this new . . . *person*. She was clearly a post-Madonna, ironic blonde; she spent a lot of time in the video pouting and batting her eyelashes but had rock-hard abs, was dressed half like a boy and half like a cheerleader, and stomped around like a bad-ass rocker chick. I thought: I *have* to talk to her.

Despite the song’s defiant lyrics—“I’ve had it up to here” is the last line, though it’s sung in a cutesy, Betty Boop voice—Stefani claimed at the time to have no idea that it would resonate with feminists and tough grrrls.

“The scene that I grew up in,” she said, “with female artists like Bikini Kill and Hole and all these more punk-rock girls, I always had the pressure of ‘You’ve got to be a feminist and you’ve got to hate guys. And you’ve got to cuss and be tough.’ And I was never like that. I grew up, like, a Catholic good girl. Total *Brady Bunch* family. That always kind of scared me, the pressure of having to be so cool

or like, fuck you to the world. But I kind of got over that and realized that, *yes*, I love to dress up and I love to wear makeup and be myself. I like being a girl; I like having a door opened for me; I like all that traditional stuff and I won’t deny it.”

Nothing has changed since then. As Andrea Lieberman, a stylist who has been working with Stefani for the last couple of years, says, “Gwen is the girliest girl I know. She’s like a giant heart wrapped in a diamond-studded bow.” Stefani’s girlishness seems to be the direct result of the fact that she has lived in the protective bubble first of her family, then of her band.

Stefani was born on October 3, 1969, to high-school sweethearts. Her father, Dennis, who is Italian, worked in research and marketing for Yamaha motorcycles, and her mother, Patti, who is of Irish and Scottish extraction, was a homemaker. Stefani has an older brother and a younger sister and brother who all live in Los Angeles and remain very close. “I was very



MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Stefani with husband and Bush lead singer Gavin Rossdale on their way to a Dior show in Paris, January 2004.

good at everything. I totally scored”

spoiled compared with a lot of people,” she says. “We weren’t rich, but we definitely had whatever we wanted.” The Stefani household was also very musical. “My parents were into Bob Dylan and were huge lovers of folk music.” Stefani distinctly remembers being taken out of Girl Scouts to go see Emmylou Harris perform at a local theater. Her parents took her to see movies and musicals, including *The Sound of Music*, which, as she likes to say, “changed my life.” Then there were the inevitable cast albums for *Evita* and *Annie*, which she would sing along to. “I don’t have a *singer-singer’s* voice,” she says. “I know what my voice is. But I knew that, physically, it felt really good.”

As it happened, her father may have been the first to really recognize that her loopy, unpredictable voice was actually rather surprising. “I remember giving my dad a demo tape of a song I wrote called ‘End It on This,’” she says, “and he would listen to it on the way to work and he played it for people. I remember two things he said to me. One was ‘Everybody’s saying that your songwriting is really good and you should just keep going.’ And the other was ‘Don’t ever take lessons, because your voice is really unique. There’s just something about it.’”

Even No Doubt was a family affair. Founded by Stefani’s brother Eric and his friend John Spence in 1986 as a ska band, No Doubt had very humble beginnings. Gwen was invited by her brother to be the co-lead singer; shortly thereafter the bass player, Tony Kanal, joined the band and they began playing small local venues. A year later, Spence committed suicide, and Gwen stepped into the spotlight. She also became the girlfriend of Kanal, a relationship that lasted seven years and whose breakup she has painstakingly detailed in several songs (most famously in “Don’t Speak”). “I was very passive,” she says. “My brother did everything. I was like, ‘I’m just the sister.’ And then after that I was ‘Tony’s girlfriend.’ And that was good enough for me! I never really had any ambitions or goals or dreams.”

When Stefani’s grandmother died, everyone in the band but Gwen and Kanal moved into her house, and it became known as the Band House, cementing the notion that No Doubt was a family. “I look back on the band, our little family, and how we made it into one. We had a lot of rules that we made up. The band was always number one.”

The group slowly and steadily gathered a sizable and very loyal following in Southern California—but there was no game plan. “We never thought we were going anywhere, really; we just wanted to see the next show. It was just a really homemade little fun thing we did literally in our garage.” Their big break came in 1990, when No Doubt got signed by Jimmy Iovine to his then-fledgling Interscope Records. “Jimmy took me aside and said, ‘Gwen, you are going to be a huge star in six years.’ I was like, ‘First of all, who the hell are you?’ And second of all, ‘I’m not going to be *in* this band six years from now. I’m going to be having fourteen children and be married.’ Then, practically

to the day, ‘Don’t Speak’ was number one around the world. It’s pretty spooky. We always laugh about that.”

In 1995, No Doubt went on tour in support of their second album, *Tragic Kingdom*. Stefani dropped out of school for a semester thinking she’d be gone for only two months. But two months turned into two and half years, and *Tragic Kingdom* sold 16 million copies. When the tour finally ended, Gwen came home to her childhood bedroom in her parents’ house in Anaheim, older and wiser and rock-star famous. She had outgrown her own life.

Three weeks before I visit her in L.A., I meet up with Stefani in London at Home House, a swanky members-only club where she and Rossdale held their wedding reception in September

2002. It is late in the afternoon on a weekday and we are sitting in a quiet, shabby-chic room with a few fussy little sofas and tables scattered about. There are a couple of middle-aged men pretending not to listen, but I can see them peering over their newspapers. Stefani’s wearing a pair of wide-leg pinstriped Gucci pants and a short little tan thrift-store jacket over a very tight Vivienne Westwood camisole and a pair of Sergio Rossi red silk stilettos. Perhaps it has something to do with her getup, or maybe it’s this old-world setting, but the first thing that strikes me about Stefani is that she is surprisingly ladylike.

While Stefani grows tired of being likened to Madonna, the comparison is irresistible. Madonna filtered her Hollywood-starlet persona through the prism of pop; Stefani has done something very similar through rock ‘n’ roll. Like Madonna, Stefani has begun to drift away from a street-punk aesthetic and into the front rows of couture shows. And then, of course, there is the English husband and dual citizenship. In fact, Gavin and Gwen were recently invited over to Madonna and Guy’s house for dinner, just the four of them.

“We do have a lot in common,” concedes Stefani.

But while Madonna’s efforts to grow up and act like a lady have always felt a bit forced, Stefani seems innately poised and well mannered. As rough-and-tumble as she gets onstage, Stefani leaves that attitude behind when the concert’s over. There are no Courtney Love histrionics, no Janet Jackson-style wardrobe malfunctions, no J.Lo diva routines. She’s a rare rock star who has it both ways.

Once again, her family seems to have protected her from the worst excesses of her chosen profession, as well as instilled in her a strong set of values. “My mom was really conservative growing up; everything was plain and simple and tasteful, and I couldn’t wait to rip my shirts and cut things up.” To Stefani, the cover of *Vogue* represents the pinnacle—more important than even *Rolling Stone*. “When I told my mother I was going to be on *Vogue*, she started crying.” Mama Stefani is also beside



MATERIAL GIRL

Madonna filtered her Hollywood-starlet persona through pop; Stefani has done it through rock ‘n’ roll. Luisa Beccaria silk dress.

“Being married
does make you feel
like a woman,”
says the singer.
“Other people treat
you differently too.
It’s kind of cool”

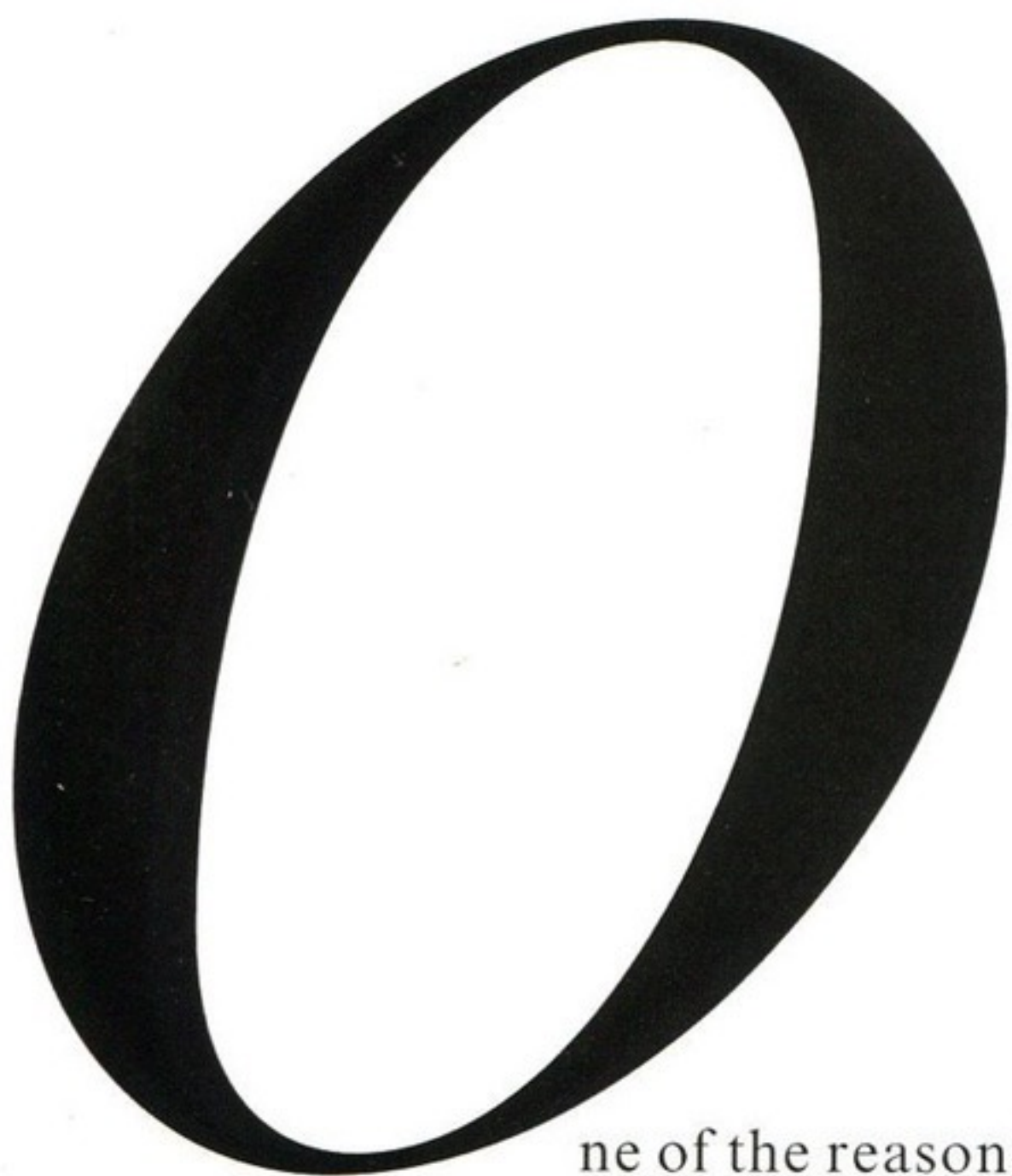
LOUNGE ACT

“She had diamonds
under her eyes and
just looked incredibly
glamorous. I knew
she was a big star.”
Dior by John Galliano
piano-scarf dress.
Cartier, Fred Leighton,
and Smithwick Dillon
jewelry. Details, stores,
see In This Issue.





herself with joy about the fact that her daughter is finally putting out her own collection, L.A.M.B., which debuted in February. "She was looking through the designs in my book, and she got really emotional." Here, she imitates her mother crying: "It's in your blood! This is for Great-Grandma!" Turns out Gwen comes from a long line of seamstresses. "My great-grandma used to start on New Year's Day, which was her birthday, and she would sew every person in her family a quilt and, like, flannel pajamas and then the next Christmas you'd get it. Her daughter, my mom's mom, made every single thing my mother wore, to the point where she didn't get to choose her own clothes until she was, like, engaged. And then my mom made our clothes. I used to be kind of bummed. Like, 'Can't I go to the mall?'"



One of the reasons Stefani's look has been so distinct from the very beginning is that she has made most of the things she wears onstage herself. When she became successful and began to tour constantly, she felt she lost her way. Then she met the stylist Andrea Lieberman. "I never really knew anything about fashion," says Stefani. "Andrea made me a lot sleeker and calmed me down. Before I would just wear everything. She matured my style."

Lieberman had been admiring Stefani from afar. "I remember when I saw her wearing Viktor & Rolf pants in a video and I was like, 'She is so fly!' She always had that mad fantastic style, but I felt like nobody had opened her up to the world of couture and designers. But she's like a kid in a candy store. Her eyes are wide-open. She loves to throw it all on and I'll come in and be like, 'There's something to be said for restraint at times.' Part of the joy of working with her is that she has this innate understanding, this cool factor. The It-girl thing."

Their "inspirational tennis match," as Lieberman puts it, led to Stefani's designing and launching L.A.M.B. And while the line is pretty much youthful Gwen-style, is there anything more ladylike and feminine than picking up needle and thread?

It's as if Stefani is trying on the role of womanhood. As she and Rossdale have been seen ringside at the shows in Paris, you get the sense that she enjoys being the *soignée* bride of an English gentleman. "Being married does make you feel like a

woman," says Stefani. "Other people treat you differently too. They have a respect for you as a duo. It's kind of cool."

It's hard not to wonder if the wedding and her subsequent married life have met Stefani's very high (and conventional) expectations, which, two albums ago, she addressed head-on. One song was titled, simply, "Marry Me" ("... I wouldn't mind if my name changed to Mrs. ..."), and in another she yearned for a "... simple kind of life/All I needed was a simple man/So I could be a wife." When I ask her about this, she says, "It's weird because when I was a little girl I was always looking at bridal magazines and drawing what my wedding dress was going to be like. But it was nothing like that. I was on tour and I came home and Gavin had literally planned the entire thing. And John Galliano made my wedding gown, chose the color, everything. It's weird because you think you're going to do all that. I can remember being on tour, crying, 'I'm missing out on my life!' But then I got home two weeks before and got adjusted. And it was very romantic because it just felt like Gavin did it all for me."

One hopes that the 36-year-old Rossdale has a healthy ego because while Stefani's star has been ever-ascendant, his has cooled off considerably over the last few years. When I ask her what he's like, she says, "He's one of those multitaskers—good at everything. He's an incredible cook. I totally scored. I'm a big, huge pig and I love eating, and I married a guy who loves to cook." Rossdale was a serious tennis player when he was young but gave it up when his coach died. "We were in L.A. at a dinner party, and this guy was like, 'You should come over to my house and




BLUE NOTE

The three-time Grammy winner is working on her first solo effort, a dance album. Teal Lanvin dress. Stephen Russell and Fred Leighton jewelry.

play tennis.' And that was it. Now he's playing in celebrity tournaments. He's a maniac. He plays like three hours a day."

It is an intriguing role reversal: While Stefani tours the world and seemingly launches one new career after another, Rossdale plans weddings, cooks, plays tennis, and buys art for their two homes. In a funny way, he's living the life that she's always dreamed of. And even though they've been together for eight years, it seems they're still getting to know each other. "We never lived together and we never lived in the same country," says Stefani. "So, all told, we've only been together for, like, two years." She laughs. "We toured so much separately. The most time we would ever spend together before we were married was like four weeks. But this whole past year, we've been together almost every day. Which has just been, like, amazing." She exaggeratedly wipes the back of her hand across her forehead and says, "Phew!" Big laugh. "We like each other!"

Between quietly taking on Hollywood, getting married, and finally designing her own line of clothes, (*continued on page 379*)

A woman with blonde hair styled in a classic Hollywood fashion stands in a hallway, looking upwards. She is wearing a long, pink, strapless gown with a ruffled skirt. The hallway has a dark wooden floor and a white wall with a decorative black metal bracket. A doorway is visible in the background.

“I love to dress
up. I like
being a girl; I like
having a door
opened for me.
I like all that
traditional stuff;
I won't deny it”

IDOL WORSHIP

Vera Wang pink
charmeuse dress.
Demner pavé diamond
earrings. Lorraine
Schwartz bracelets. In
this story: hair, Garren
for Garren New York;
makeup, Pat McGrath
for Giorgio Armani
Cosmetics; set design,
Thomas Thurnauer @
Magnet. Details, stores,
see In This Issue.

("Places, everyone, please"), Laurel is helping her into the blue bubble dress, high heels, tiara, and wisk—a stand-up, sequined high collar that rests on her bare shoulders. Minutes pass as she puts on her diamond-stud earrings. I can hear the orchestra tuning up. "I need some more sparkle," says Kristin, cool and unhurried. "You know what I'm going to do right now?" she asks me. She takes a big swig of Listerine and gargles melodically. "OK," she announces, grabbing her jeweled magic wand. "I'm going to say goodbye right before I get on the bubble. Now, follow me." She takes my hand and leads me out to the wings, through cornstalks and the yellow brick road, and past racks of costumes, through crowds of people hurrying in all directions. The stage is dark, and as big as a city block. The orchestra is blasting away.

"This is my friend Dodie," she says, and I hear a chorus of "Hi, Dodie"s. She leads me right up to the bubble apparatus, a huge circular structure that will lift her high above the stage. "Come on," she says. "You're coming all the way. In fact, the surprise is that you're going to do the part tonight." Stagehands hook her into the bubble, from which clouds of soap bubbles are starting to emerge. "This is Norbert," she calls out, introducing me to the male lead, Norbert Leo Butz, who is singing warm-up scales.

The bubble starts to ascend. "'Bye, Dodie," Kristin sings. As I run back into the wings, with the curtain going up, I hear Kristin's voice, clear as glass, saying, "It's good to see me, isn't it?" and the already captivated audience's answering laughter and applause. □

PIXIE CHICK

(continued from page 333)

Selma has been trying on dresses from his pre-fall 2004 eveningwear collection and has decided her favorite is a black, knee-length satin column with rhinestone straps that run over both shoulders, around the neck, and down the back. It's insanely glamorous, but as Karl points out, "This is a party dress! Not for a wedding! You want white?"

"No. I've had sex, so I'm not wearing white," Selma replies. Selma wants a pale, pale pink dress. Karl obliges, and a bolt of heavy pale-pink satin is brought out and draped over Selma.

"OK, I do a long dress with a coat and shoes in the same material," decides Karl. "So then it's a wedding dress that doesn't look like a wedding dress. The shoes must match. You can cut the dress after for dai-

ly use. I must say, it will look divine on her," says Karl to the band of pretty young assistants who have gathered to admire the actress. Then he adds, "The difference between you and Norma Shearer is that she was cross-eyed," and rushes to his desk, where he sketches the long pink dress and matching coat. He even draws in the shoes, a pair of pink satin stilettos with a silver heel and a diamanté camellia on the front, and a camellia leaf on the back, "because it's a last-minute decision."

After the two-hour wait, Lagerfeld has designed and measured for the wedding dress in less than 20 minutes. Just as Selma is leaving, he says, "So, Miss Selma, you have everything. The dress, the coat, the shoes. And we make it in black for you, too, with black shoes." There is some resistance to this idea from Selma: She is overwhelmed by the wedding dress and doesn't feel the need for it in black as well. But Karl insists. "So. You have the wedding. Then you change into the black for the evening. We make a new theme in Hollywood. It's never been done that a bride appears in the same dress in black. It's only funny in black. It's your 'going away' suit!"

It's settled: Selma will wear the pink gown for the wedding ceremony, which will take place in her friend Carrie Fisher's house in Beverly Hills. She'll walk down the stairs to a Frank Zappa ballad, and the place will be dripping with chandeliers and sparkles. When the sun sets, Selma will disappear and change into the identical black satin dress—with matching shoes and coat—for dinner. It seems extravagant, and outrageous, but very, very chic.

A month later, Selma is in New York to fit the wedding dress, which has just arrived at the Chanel store. Now, days away from her wedding, she is even more anxious than at her first fitting, as is typical for brides-to-be. She also wants to shop for some honeymoon and premiere outfits but is convinced that she's put on 30 pounds since her Paris fitting. She says that today she's a size 4, which reminds her that when we last met she was a size 2. But standing in the lobby of the Mercer Hotel in her little Chanel miniskirt, black ankle boots and hose, and hat, she looks as pixieish and tiny as ever. For breakfast she orders chicken sausages and coffee, saying that her other favorite foods right now are baby Thai coconuts and banana splits.

First Selma heads up to Beverley Birks's studio way up on Ninety-fifth Street. She's a private dealer in vintage clothes, many of which are museum-quality. Beverley Birks

also sells "event vintage" in Los Angeles, specifically to actresses. Selma is getting a preview of this year's best vintage frocks.

"I feel fat" is all Selma will say on the way uptown. She's convinced herself that she won't fit into any of Beverley's clothes, but she is proved wrong. Selma tries couture dresses by Triguère, Balmain, Grès, and Geoffrey Beene—and everything fits. A quick shopper who knows exactly what suits her body type, Selma decides on a retro optical-print dress by Kamehameha, a vintage designer out of Hawaii. She also goes for a red rayon faille late-forties New Look dress that fits as though it was made for her. "From the side I look perfect," she says, admiring herself in the mirror but adding that from the front she looks too big.

Minutes later Selma is heading to Chanel on Fifty-seventh Street, where the black version of the wedding dress is waiting for her. She slips it on, and it fits to a T. Karl has lengthened and streamlined it, and added heavy grosgrain ribbons at the back, which tie in bows down her spine. The rhinestone straps drape beautifully, and the look is as modern as it is timeless.

The delivery of the pink dress is arranged, and Selma skims the store for honeymoon looks, falling for the pale bikinis and beach wraps. Then she heads to Manolo Blahnik for a quick shoe stop. "All I want to look like is Grace Kelly, and all I end up with is Twiggy," she sighs, deciding on a pair of brown kitten-heeled shoes. As she leaves for her flight back to L.A., she says goodbye, and then her forehead wrinkles with worry. "Tell me, honestly," she says, "do I look fat in my wedding dress?" □

THE FIRST LADY OF ROCK

(continued from page 344)

Gwen Stefani is clearly coming into her own. Nowhere is this more evident than in her music. No Doubt's 2002 album, *Rock Steady*, was a huge success, both creatively and commercially, spawning four hit singles. After nearly fifteen years of being a freakishly successful ska band, No Doubt finally collaborated with other songwriters and producers. The result was a glittering collection of brilliant high-end pop that jumped all over the musical map. In the meantime, Stefani also cannily laid the groundwork for her solo career in 2001 when she collaborated with Moby on the ghetto-fabulous send-up "South Side" and, again, with Eve, on her single "Let Me Blow Ya Mind." Suddenly Stefani became a kind of genre-jumping girl wonder, just as at ease in hip- *(continued on page 380)*

hop, R&B, and dance music as she has been in the rock world for so long. The surprise for Moby, he says, was that "her voice has this very unique timbre and a very distinctive quality. But after spending a day with her in the studio I also realized that she's incredibly technically proficient and just a really remarkable singer. And she worked really hard."

As if to prove there's nothing she can't do, Stefani is currently putting together her first solo album, which she's calling "a dance record." To that end, she's collaborating with a stellar lineup of producers and songwriters, including André 3000 from OutKast, Dallas Austin, and her ex-boyfriend Tony Kanal. "I really thought this record was going to be easy and fun and short. I'll do a couple covers, I'll work with some really talented people, I don't have to do all the writing. It's a dance record, so it can't really be *emotional*. Well, I've written about seventeen songs, and only two of them are good enough."

Iovine, chairman of Universal's Interscope division (whom David Geffen recently called "the foremost record executive in the world today"), believes that Stefani's future has never looked brighter. "It can be as big as she wants it to be. She's a driven person, and she's tough on her music. She's got just enough insecurity to get herself where she is. There's no arrogance."

One of the things that everyone who works with her seems to agree on is that Stefani is utterly guileless. "There's no front to her," says Muller. "It all just kind of pours out. And she's always kind of in awe of her life. To have done as much as she has and still be grateful and amazed is fantastic." Or, as Iovine puts it, "She doesn't exploit herself. She's not overselling it."

I ask Iovine if he thinks there are any other female rock stars who are as big as Stefani. "No," he says. "What Gwen's got is that she *moves* the culture. You are truly great when you can move that culture meter—when you can make the needle jump—and I think she's going to move it a lot in the next five years. She just will. She's that kind of artist. I'd bet the store on her."

Let's face it: A big part of Stefani's allure is the killer body. She works out religiously, preferring old-school running and weight lifting to yoga or Pilates. Not surprisingly, she has been working out extra-hard lately, denying herself the food she loves so much, for her *Vogue* photo shoot. But after a glass of wine on an empty stomach in her L.A. living room, she has decided we

must go out and get something to eat. "I feel like if I don't eat, I might lose *one* more pound." She pauses. "But I'm *starving*." She invites me to join her upstairs while she gets ready and on our way up says, "When I'm home, I work out five days a week. It's a battle, I have to say. I have to stop myself from eating. Ask anyone around me: I have to struggle to have this hot body!" She laughs. At the top of the stairs, there's the master bedroom with a giant, dark wooden canopy bed. Over there, in the corner, is her vanity, a minimalist little moderne shrine to makeup and brushes and potions. There's an office, a guest room, and then, finally, the vast, roaring closet. It's a converted bedroom, actually, with plush white carpeting and racks and racks of clothes. "Look at how lucky I am," she says.

This is the biggest closet I've ever seen, I say.

"*Hello*. Haven't you seen Paula Abdul's on TV? She has those circular racks, like they have in stores. I was so jealous." She picks out a pair of boots (brand-new John Galliano pointy neo-Victorian) and sits on the floor to lace them up. Then she goes to the racks and pulls out a ratty yet elegant vintage cardigan with stains on the elbows. And then she throws on a sort of peacoat, and off we go.

We climb into an insanely luxurious Range Rover with a computerized dashboard. "This is Gavin's," she says. "I don't have a car right now." She pops in a CD and turns it way up. It's a demo of one of her new songs, called "Crash," reminiscent of Kelis's song "Milkshake" and just as infectious. "Japanese or Italian?" she shouts over herself. We settle on Italian, and she points the car to a neighborhood joint where she's a regular. "It's nothing fancy-pants," she says. When we arrive at the restaurant, it's packed, and we are forced to wait outside on the street. I can see that this makes her a little nervous and maybe a touch annoyed. In London, she admits, with refreshing honesty, that "there are certain things about being famous that I love, like being taken care of when I go to a restaurant. I love the attention. It's fun."

If Stefani's career is tied to her physical beauty (it's hard to imagine her maturing into a chanteuse), then there's little doubt that she's in her prime. Once we're seated, I ask her if she worries about there being a time limit on a female rock star's career. "When you get past a certain age, you start thinking about life and how much time till you die and you start panicking. I want to have a family, and I haven't even done that

yet. I'm worried that I only have a few more years to do this solo record because I don't think I'll care about this record when I'm 45. I don't know. You can't predict how you're going to feel." Then she tells me about a lyric she wrote years ago and has been trying to get in a song ever since: "Born to blossom, bloom to perish."

But for now, Stefani's immense appeal shows no signs of waning. A few tables away, there are two young girls who look as if they're about to burst because of her presence. Stefani notices them and waves. We return to our dinner, and when the plates are cleared, a waitress approaches with a note. "The little girls in the back wanted me to give this to you. They are so terrified."

"Will you just tell them that they can come say hi to me?" says Stefani. She unfolds the note and says, "Omigod. Oh. My. God." Turns out one of the girls, Jana, went to school with Gwen's niece, Madeline. A moment later, the girls appear at our table with their mother. "Jana, you are so cute," says Stefani. "How old are you?" "Eight," says her mother. "I can't believe you know Madeline," says Stefani. "It's so weird because she called me last week and she said I'm her favorite singer. For the first time!"

"Has she not said that every day?" says the mom.

"No!" says Stefani. "Because, *hello*. Have you heard of Hillary Duff? I finally made it onto her radar. I'm taking her to the Grammys, so watch TV. I'm making her a really cute outfit." (Sure enough, there was Stefani's niece in the front row of the Grammys in some crazy getup.)

As we drive back to her house, Stefani tells me that there's a videotape she wants to show me. It's edited footage of the early days, when Gwen was still the kid sister in her brother's rock band. Once we arrive, she takes me into a dark, cavelike TV room and pops it into the VCR. Suddenly, a girl appears on the screen. She has long brown hair, a round face, and schlumpy clothes. The only reason I know that it is Gwen Stefani is the voice. The eighteen-year-old girl on the TV looks nothing like the glamorous creature before me. "I don't even recognize myself," she says. She fast-forwards through the tape. "I want to show you where my hair goes blonde so you can go, 'Whoa!' OK, here it is. See. The blonde hair changed everything. We're playing at Disneyland. We wanted to do it just to say we did it. That's the dress I wore on the cover of *Tragic Kingdom* that I bought for \$14 at Contempo Casuals."

Wow, I say, I can't believe how different you look.

"Dude, that was a long time ago," she says. "Let's face it. I'm way cooler now." □

EPIC PROPORTIONS

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obesity problem. Raised in abundance, the crop is processed into corn sweetener, which is in turn used, for instance, to make soda, one of the biggest sources of excess calories in America.

Sugar has also incited plenty of controversy. When the World Health Organization called for a reduction of sugar consumption as a means to curb the obesity epidemic, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a paper criticizing the recommendation. Brownell and New York University's Marion Nestle, Ph.D., author of *Food Politics*, pointed out that this is a perfect example of just how unscrupulously close the government has become with the food industry, and why it's almost impossible to put forth a sound public-nutrition policy unless a wall is built between the two. "Recommendations to cut back on sugars may not please food companies," they wrote in an op-ed piece in *The New York Times*, "but it's time to stop trading calories for dollars."

Inroads are being made more successfully on a local level—and these may be more effective in the long run, given that some researchers are suggesting that eating habits are influenced by people's immediate surroundings. "They try to conform to their own peer group and not to the image the media put out," explains Michelle Barry, a cultural anthropologist with the Hartman Group, a marketing firm in Bellevue, Washington. Barry's firm has worked with a range of clients, from Kraft Foods to Whole Foods, and over the course of her research she's found that people's choices are influenced by social networks. For instance, she's noticed that a woman will eat ice cream after a workout if her exercise group has ice cream. If they don't, then she won't either. "It's harder to do certain things when you are in a group atmosphere. People want to be policed, basically," she says.

If this is true, then schools are on the right track. Some have stripped soft drinks and junk food from their vending machines. Others have revamped the menus with fruits and vegetables. Both strategies seem promising in that they target children and, in doing so, they help prevent the condition before it starts.

And perhaps the most effective solutions are in the home. The rise in obesity has prompted some people to reconsider how food is prepared and eaten. There's the Slow Food movement, for instance, dedicated to cultivating a diet based on natural, healthy foods, prepared with patience rather than speed. Barry has noted a similar trend on a smaller, but still significant, scale. She's found that some men and women have decided to reassess the hours they spend at work and put more effort into cooking from scratch. People are rearranging their lives to spend time at home. "All of these things are indications of people finding meaningful rituals and reestablishing rituals," says Barry. Finding new rituals (or rediscovering old ones) may entail making new sacrifices, but in the end, it may be the only way to effect real change—and give new meaning to all of our lives. □

THE BRAHMAN MIRACLE DIET

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ways of preparing sweetened-rice desserts.

We drove back to Chandigarh with the Goswamys, stayed for another day, and took our leave. We had two free days in Delhi before I flew home, and we ate extremely well. One morning at the Taj Mahal Hotel I ordered several dals, a dish of curried vegetables, and every flatbread they knew how to make. (The kitchen also sent a dish of yogurt I hadn't ordered; I guessed that they were instinctively supplementing the incomplete proteins.) It was an incomparable feast.

Back in meaty Manhattan, a new Indian vegetarian restaurant had opened up in our neighborhood, which I excitedly took as a sign from above, until I had eaten there twice. Some restaurants in the Indian section of Jackson Heights, in Queens, were better, but I am reluctant to commute 45 minutes each way twice a day to lunch and dinner. When I had the time and wasn't engaged in an endless series of lobster-soufflé experiments for my readers, I tried recipes I had learned at the Goswamys', telephoning Bala in India several times for advice. In the Manhattan neighborhood in the East Twenties known as Curry Hill, I frequently visited the great shop called Kalustyan's, founded in 1944, where a vast variety of pulses and spices can be found; a supermarket in Queens supplied the rest. Often I resorted to pre-cooked frozen and sealed, shelf-stable foil packets of Indian legumes. But between excessive travel and

my arduous professional eating duties in New York City, I was rarely able to return to the simple life of a North Indian vegetarian. When I did, my weight edged down, but since the end of October I have lost only 4.6 additional pounds. Now I'm ready to return to the Brahman Miracle Diet™ full-time for a week or two and give it a true test.

Still, shedding twelve pounds is nothing to scoff at—it's the first time I've been able to lose that much since that dark and evil day seven years ago when the FDA wrongheadedly persuaded the drug companies to take Fen-Phen off the market. How does the Brahman Miracle Diet™ work? It all seems plain enough. Here's what I think: The meals we ate in the Punjab were entirely satisfying even though they probably contained fewer calories than I am used to eating. As a result, I was rarely hungry. Why? I can think of seven reasons. Our bodies digest lentils, peas, and beans very slowly, just as they do meat and fat; this makes us feel full. The meals were perfectly balanced nutritionally. The profusion of spices and side dishes kept the food interesting. An unexpected effect of chili pepper on my tongue was to make the fantasy of a juicy steak much less seductive to me than it usually is. I loved the idea that I was losing weight. Knowing that I could eat meat any time I wanted to without running amok made me feel much less trapped than you do on, say, Atkins, where a few slips can be catastrophic. That's number six. And then there's the glycemic index.

One of the key concepts underlying the Atkins Diet™, the South Beach Diet™, Sugar Busters!™, and the Zone Diet™ is that whatever carbohydrates you eat should be the type that enter the bloodstream slowly, avoiding the blood-sugar peaks that cause the pancreas to produce excess insulin, which causes us to gain weight, among many other truly bad things. These good carbs are said to have a low glycemic index. The worst are potatoes and white bread. A Snickers bar does OK because chocolate and nuts are digested slowly. White rice is bad, but of all the white rices, basmati is among the best. The carbohydrate food with the lowest glycemic index of all is chana dal, one of three types of chickpea. Several other pulses, beans, and peas are not very far behind.

I'll let you know how it all works out. Or you can wait and buy a copy of *The New Brahman Miracle Diet Revolution*™. □