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FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2014

INTERVIEWING THE INTERVIEWER: A CANDID CONVERSATION WITH KINVARA BALFOUR



Kinvara Balfour, photograph by Alex Bramall (2013) provided by Kinvara Balfour

Unexpectedly pleasant and inexorably well-dressed, Kinvara Balfour is a leading style advisor to some, a playwright to others and a wellspring of sincere smiles to just about everyone she encounters. A veteran style editor at Condé Nast (among other publications), former couturier at Tomasz Starzewski and founder of DailyCandy.com UK, Balfour's span has touched every corner of the fashion industry. Adding to an already impressive resume, Balfour is currently following in the footsteps of her late uncle, David Frost, directing and hosting the 'Fashion in Conversation' series for Apple. Top fashion icons in both London and New York (Mary Katrantzou, Anna Wintour, etc.) become the subjects of lighthearted scrutiny as Balfour disarms them with her cheerful charisma. I catch up with Kinvara after a *Fashion in Conversation* session with Zac Posen. Keep reading for the Q&A...



Kinvara Balfour and Natalie Massenet of Net-A-Porter / Fashion in Conversation series by Apple (Soho, NYC)

Through hosting the *Fashion in Conversation* series for Apple, you've had the opportunity to meet many different designers and style icons. Do these experiences affect/change the way you dress, shop or view clothes? Have there been times where you become more attached to a particular line after meeting its maker?

Yes. Always. I meet a designer--one that resonates with me--and become so inspired by their work that I want to wear all of it, all the time. I usually like to wear a designer's clothes because I love the pieces themselves, but if the designer is a really nice person in addition to being a creative genius, I want to wear their clothes even more--and I always have a more wonderful time when I do so.

In addition, I care more about these clothes when I see them on other people, or hanging in a boutique or in the pages of a magazine. It's what happens when you get to meet the people behind them. And for that reason, I am thankful so many incredible designers have agreed to be interviewed by me at the Apple store recently--because I think people really want to get to know the names behind these big brands and they end up loving the brands the more for it.



Photographs by Alex Bramall (2013), provided by Kinvara Balfour

How were you first introduced to fashion and what kept you in the creative/fashion industry? Rumor has it that you were a bit of a fashion prodigy growing up--would you make the move back to the production side or be inclined to influence how clothes are made today? If so, where would you settle (couture? fast fashion? epytomous line?) and what would you focus on (accessories? shoes? gym wear)?

My mother, Tessa, was into fashion and her sister/my Aunt Carina (Frost, wife of the late Sir David Frost) was a top model, working for the likes of Ossie Clarke and Biba. I always admired her incredible wardrobe. My three sisters and I later inherited some of it, because she had three sons--Lucky us! My other aunt, Marsha Fitzalan, is an actress and I spent much of my childhood watching her in period dramas on TV and on the stage and I would always take a special interest in the costumes she wore.

That passion for fashion was exercised the age of 16 when I entered the Lloyd's Fashion Challenge (a national competition in fashion design) and won, as selected by Vivienne Westwood. Vivienne told me my designs were so strong and so detailed, she initially thought they were by a man. I'm not sure I liked the comment at the time--I was so young and nervous--but I appreciate it now!

The whole experience was a complete surprise and a huge honor and I think that incredible endorsement alone spurred me to work with/in fashion from then on. I have worked in pretty much every area of the industry since, but have never launched my own label. It's something I'd love to do--one day--but I think I will leave it to the professionals!



Photographs by Alex Bramall (2013), provided by Kinvara Balfour

Technology has expanded its influence on fashion and the retail choices people make. Do you think style drives technology (i.e. machines that make pretty patterns with less waste) or does technology have the upper hand on dictating trends (i.e. mass-produced, affordable, fast-fashion)? Can true couture houses survive in a world where commercialism and fast fashion dominate?

I think technology only serves to help those who create fashion; as long as the old techniques remain--especially those used in haute couture... and as long as those skills are passed down to future generations in addition to those new skills learned around modern technology. Then, I think the future will be extremely interesting when it comes to fashion and design.



Kinvara and Anna Wintour during Apple's Fashion in Conversation series (Soho, NYC)

People always ask about favorites... and your Instagram shows people and things you like and enjoy. So let's venture to the other side. Can you describe the strangest or least favorite food you've encountered in all your traveling so far in 2014? Also, what is your least favorite color to wear?

Least favorite food: raw eel sushi which I was served in Japan. I'll take Japan, but they can keep their eels. Especially when they are raw.

Least favorite drink: diet sodas. I think there is nothing quite so chemical as a diet soft drink, or a diet version of anything, for that matter. I stick to regular at all times.

Least favorite color to wear is black, but I still wear it. A lot.



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Growing up, bedazzled jordache jeans and plaid flannel shirts lined the closets of the "cool kids." What's your best guess at the "next big thing" for the fashion world?

I think flares are having a big comeback. Denim jackets. Colored fur. The 'posh' parka jacket. The metallic oil slick dress. 1960s style over-the-knee boots. Sequins with tweed. The colored, transparent Macintosh or trench coat. Heeled Wellington ankle boots. Braids. Corrows. Dread threads (aka the 'silk sausages' Sam McKnight used in the hair at Chanel's recent Fall '14 show). Rasta hair. Feathers around the eyes (see Pat McGrath's *incredible* work for Alexander McQueen Fall '14; this woman is a creative genius). Broderie Anglaise. Metallic 'power' sneakers. Floral appliqué. Floor-length dresses for day. Lucky Seven baseball caps. Kendall Jenner. Lupita n'Yongo (and her brother). Japanese fashion label Sacai. Chanel's mini milk carton handbag. Anya Hindmarch's Kellogg's cereal-inspired handbags. Delfina Delettrez jewelry. Karl Lagerfeld Parfums. Baobab smoothies. Chia seeds in everything. boomf Insta-printed marshmallows. Skinade. Jared Leto. The feather down gilet. Shoes by Alexandre Birman. Josh Wood - best hair colorist in the world currently working with every top fashion house in the world, including Prada. Shoe designer Sophia Webster. London-based Chinese designer Guishan Zhang. Filmmaker Josh Cole. Fashion-maker/DJ Mathew Stone aka Art Shaman. British bands London Grammar and MSMR.

What has been your favorite trend (personal or commercial)?

See all of the above! When it comes to fashion, there are too many trends to mention; I like some and then get bored of them. Others, I wear for life.

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