

# VOGUEVIEW

editor: Sally Singer

## style counsel

Imagine you're a designer with talent dripping from your fingertips—but no business savvy. Gucci wants you. Prada wants you. *You* want Elizabeth Pearce. Robert Sullivan takes a meeting with the fashion lawyer.



PEARCE IN A CALLAGHAN SKIRT.



HUSSEIN CHALAYAN



BALENCIAGA



VIKTOR & ROLF

### the clothes



ALEXANDER MCQUEEN



### the clients

ALEXANDER MCQUEEN

THE DEPENDENTS: FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: DESIGNERS HUSSEIN CHALAYAN, NICOLAS GHEQUIERE, AND VIKTOR & ROLF.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEX SANDERSON; HAIR: PETER GARY FOR L'ORÉAL; MAKEUP: GAVIN BRIGGS FOR IMG; MODELS: GIANLUIGI GEMELLI FOR GUCCI; MEGAN; ZANE WHITE; CHALAYAN AND MCQUEEN; NICOLAS GHEQUIERE; VIKTOR & ROLF; BALenciAGA; ELIZABETH PEARCE; OUF MANNING; ALEXANDER MCQUEEN; PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVEN MELLER



## the bag

BETSY'S BAG OF TRICKS: HER PRADA BRIEFCASE AND ALL ITS CONTENTS.

KEYS TO HER LONDON HOTEL ROOM.

FOREIGN CURRENCY.

WOMEN'S WEAR DAILY AND THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

A PARIS ZAGAT AND HOTEL GUIDE.

HER AMERICAN PASSPORT.

ticket

YOHJI YAMAMOTO WALLET FITS PASSPORT AND PLANE TICKET.

2000 PARIS RESTAURANT



A DIOR HAUTE COUTURE INVITE.

ALMAY EYE-MAKEUP-REMOVER PADS.

OSCOLLOCOCCINUM TUBES.

LIP BALM, GLOSS, EYE CREAM, AND TOOTHPASTE.

MOLTON BROWN TRAVEL KIT.

FRANKINCENSE MOISTURIZER.

ROSE WATER AND LAVENDER AROMATIST.

VIRGIN ATLANTIC'S TRAVEL KIT.

**W**hen you hear that someone is a fashion lawyer, your first question is: What's a fashion lawyer? Does a fashion lawyer come down to the courthouse when you are booked by the fashion police? Does a fashion lawyer have to pass a fashion bar? And is the fashion bar in London or in Tribeca or maybe Antwerp, where it keeps on being raised? Does a fashion lawyer wear a funny wig and argue cases before the highest fashion courts in the land? And if that is the case, then do the justices of the Supreme Fashion Court wear their hair in bangs with shiny robes?

For the answers to these and other fashion-law-related questions, we, the fashion jury, turn to examine Exhibit A, which is a recent scene from the life of Elizabeth Pearce, fashion lawyer extraordinaire, who for the purposes of this testimony is seated at the desk in her hotel room in London, the Sydney Hotel, at approximately 2:00 A.M. See her perched before her laptop, in arm's reach of a sea of financial statements, with access to a mountain of paper relating to the particular fashion deal at hand, and only hours away from the final signatures. Unfortunately, we, the fashion people, can't really discuss the components of said fashion deal, due, of course, to the rules of fashion lawyer-client privilege.

At this very moment in her London hotel room, it cannot be said with any certainty what Betsy Pearce is working on: It may be modeling-contract negotiations ("Model negotiations—I can do those in my sleep," she says), or it might be some giant fashion deal, like the one that occurred when Alexander McQueen was purchased by Gucci.

We likewise cannot discuss the clients involved with the deal that she is working on there in the hotel room, though we were able to call to the stand a few of her clients. McQueen testified that he was impressed by her examination of the culture of his business—"the vital elements that make the individual company successful," as he put it. "Betsy has an amazing intuition," he said. Viktor and Rolf stand up for Pearce not only as a professional but as a nonprofessional, too. "Betsy is not only a very devoted attorney," they say jointly. "She has become our confidante and friend."

But what is irrefutable, what we can say with absolute authority and without the risk of objection from Pearce herself, is that, in the Sydney Hotel late at night, while in the midst of deal details, Betsy Pearce is wearing her pajamas. Specifically, the pajamas she

"She understands the fashion business because she wears fashion, which is better than a man in a gray suit," says Pierre Rougier

won in a settlement that was so out of court that it was in the aisle of a plane. They are the pajamas that the flight attendant gave her when she was confronted with a fashion lawyer who had been promised and not given a special reclining seat that the fashion lawyer was counting on, given the number of meetings (with designers, contract people, financiers) the fashion lawyer has in a European fashion capital on an imminent fashion day ("I had 49 meetings in Paris last week," she says, barely exaggerating). She loves the pajamas.

"My designer of choice is British Airways," she says.

Later, when she is up and gone from the hotel, when she is out of London and done with Paris and preparing to leave New York for London again, she reflects on the pajamas and the attire of the fashion lawyer in general. "The nice thing about what I do," she says, "is I can wear anything I want."

On a clear, crisp New York day, at her loft in Tribeca, what Betsy Pearce wants to wear to work is a black Gaultier shirt, a pleated skirt with a woolly suede belt by Ghesquiere, boots by Martin Margiela,



and black tights with the feet cut off (a staple, apparently). There is no giant briefcase, and what she is running around the huge loft looking for is very non-three-piece suit: big, almost furry (but actually more fluffy) gloves by Yohji Yamamoto. "I love these," she says when she puts them on. "They're like Tribbles."

**S**he jogs down the stairs and catches a cab to Shoptin's General Store, the old haunt of Greenwich Village artists, writers, reporters, and, apparently, fashion lawyers, where, over a bowl of oatmeal (another staple), she is coaxed to please tell the fashion jury the arc of her career. She first attended high school in Minneapolis, where if subpoenaed she will admit to having worn pink cable-knit Dean's sweaters and "really straight-leg Levi's, the low-pocket version." She proceeded to Brown University, where she majored in American Civilization and met her husband, a creative director. Then she ended up in Washington, D.C., to work as a management consultant, a job that did not completely satisfy her, and not just because of our nation's capital's general lack of fashion

sense. "You analyze the numbers, and then you are out," she says. "To me that was completely ignoring the philosophical nuances."

Looking for a change, she went to law school at Columbia. "I loved law school," she said, and you can just tell she did, what with all the hard work she got to enjoy (another staple). She clerked for a federal judge in Manhattan for a year and then ended up at Cravath, Swaine & Moore, in litigation, where she discovered that she is not particularly litigious. She eventually landed at the firm she is with now—Levine, Plotkin & Menin, which specializes in media and entertainment law, and also, thanks in part to Pearce, specializes in fashion. Levine, Plotkin & Menin is based in New York. Pearce is based in London, if she can be said to be based anywhere.

Breakfast with a fashion lawyer is a tutorial on what's happening with the business of fashion at the moment. Pearce is a fashion-business specialist, a person who, if you had a fashion line, for example, could help you finance it, make it grow. "Most people don't understand how unbelievably difficult it is for an individual designer to get his designs out," she says. "There's not a sensible profit model." And Pearce is not just thinking about the little names in fashion. She's thinking about the big names, too. With regards to the difficulties involved in restructuring a more established designer's business, she speaks knowingly. "They could buy his name and do whatever they want with it," she says. The fact is, the fashion world has seen successful designers operate their design businesses unsuccessfully, and, with a kind of missionary zeal, Pearce is out there to create new business models. She's thinking about the things that perhaps the average non-fashion lawyer might not think about—such as how to contract a designer's contribution to a fashion house, whether it be in the manner of a client-ad firm relationship or in some newly imagined way. The bottom line, according to Pearce, is that she wants to help. "You know there's a lot of creative people for whom running a business is not their thing," she says.

She claims (and testimony from people who have seen her in action confirms) that her negotiating style is cooperative and nonconfrontational. Pierre Rougier, fashion publicist extraordinaire—who himself represents Nicolas Ghesquiere (for Balenciaga) and Viktor & Rolf, to name two, and who has had the legal expertise of Betsy Pearce beside him as he's moved to work with Vidal Sassoon on its upcoming attempt to relaunch itself as a high-beauty brand—said this: "She has an overview, and an understanding, which is totally rare. And, of course, she understands the fashion business because she wears fashion, which is better than a man in a gray suit."

But there is no question that if you are in the business of coming up with, for instance, really cool wool thingies and you are facing a giant conglomerate that wants to buy you out, then you would want to have Betsy at your side. "I can be pretty ferocious," she says. In the course of her work, Betsy faces her own occupational hazards. "You know, my clients are not all Mother Teresa. This is fashion!"

Her payoff is in fashion-lawyer-type dollars, naturally, but she also enjoys the benefits of a ringside seat to the perpetual show that is the fashion world, which is a big thing for someone who talks about fashion like a fan. "It's really just a joy for me to be a part of the process. I mean, this is a business of magic." She adds, "To me, work is a joy. I love work. My joy is bringing around really bright, talented people and helping them from A to B... It's not just about how much money. If it were, I'd be a film agent in L.A."

She has her laments, however. "I wish more people thought about what they wear," she says. "Most Americans don't want to stand out because of their clothes. Most American women just want to be beautiful. I have always seen clothes in a very different way—as costume. Who do I want to be today? To me, it's not about being view ▶ 106

beautiful. It's about being an individual; it's about showing something inside. It's the person who, when she comes, you can't wait to see what she's going to wear. It's not about labels at all."

And how does she feel today? To answer, she points beneath the table at Shopsin's and directs the jury to her ankle, where there is a tattoo of the Greek god Mercury. "Mercurial," she says, adding, "When I got this, the tattoo guy wanted a picture, so I ripped a page out of this phone book. This is basically just the FTD florist guy." With that she sprints off to another cab.

Sometimes fashion lawyers go on vacation. When they do, they go far away with their husbands. They go to places where there are no fashion people and no lawyers. "We just get a guide and we say, 'Take us to the place that you've never been,'" Pearce says. And when they get there, they stay for weeks at a time, and sometimes they wake up in a stone shelter in some barely inhabited mountains staring at a handful of yak yogurt and wondering why they didn't die the night before. Sometimes, though, fashion lawyers just go to fashion shows. You're actually more likely to see them among yaks than at the shows, since they're usually in meetings during fashion week. But recently, during the runway shows in New York, Betsy Pearce took a little time off to go see Narciso Rodriguez and his fall 2001 collection.

At the show, she's in the middle of a Chelsea industrial space,

and she's talking to a friend from P&G, who is in from Cincinnati on a hair-products deal. And then she's saying hello to her friend Pierre Rougier, who is running around elegantly frazzled on behalf of Rodriguez. And then chatting with Tom Binns, the jewelry designer, whose earrings she happens to be wearing.

"They're just like a drop of rain falling off your ear," she says. He smiles and kisses her, as opposed to just any other lawyer. It should be noted that, frankly, Betsy is not so excited to see the clothes; like many fashion people she isavoring the sea of pre-fashion-show faces. "I'm here to see Pierre," she says.

But then the music starts and the models come out, and the fashion lawyer is suddenly agog.

She shouts back over her shoulder, standing on the edge of the crowd. Her opinion is changing. "I don't like dresses, and these are dresses that I like," she says. "I haven't bought a dress since about four years ago—Helmut Lang."

The music continues to throb; the people in the front rows are nodding their heads. There are blacks and taupes and sparkles and wools. Black stretch-wool tulle and a white matte satin-jersey dress; there are sequined cottons, leather sheaths.

"And the belts are great," she says now. She is shouting still.

And then the show is wrapping up, and she turns around one more time to make a closing argument. She shouts, "I love the clothes!" □

"This is a business of magic. It's not just about the money. If it were, I'd be a film agent in L.A.," says Pearce

## closet case jodie becker

By day, she's a mother who coheads a nonprofit organization. By night, she's the events coordinator at Joe's Pub, her husband's NYC nightclub. How does she wear two different hats—and still look so chic?



JODIE BECKER IN MISS SIXTY JEANS AT JOE'S PUB.

■ **Uptown oomph:** My fashion inspiration comes primarily from the women of the Harlem Renaissance. Whether onstage or at church, these women dressed with sophistication and attitude—always simple and pretty, but with a certain toughness. I love Zora Neale Hurston, who always wore a man's hat tilted to the side. I try to emulate that level of glamour in my day-to-day life. I'll wear a luxurious skirt, sandals, and a beautiful bag and feel mysterious and elegant.

■ **Much clutch:** I own about 50 bags—mostly clutches and vintage purses. I'll never spend

find was actually passed down to me by my mother: a square snakeskin clutch with stitched-leather trim.

■ **Club kid:** High school was not a good time for me. My club look consisted of fake pearls and flipped hair. I also had a pair of fur leg warmers that I wore over purple Gloria Vanderbilt jeans. Very *Flashdance*. Fast-forward to my club look now: a pair of Sigerson Morrison heels, slim pants by Joseph, and a blousy Chloé top.

■ **Playing footsie:** I love the shoe designer Jean Michel Cazabat. His sandals are sold at Calypso in New York City and in the Hamptons. I have a pair of his black flats that I wear with capri pants. My all-time-favorite shoe store is Sigerson Morrison. I stopped in the other day and bought a navy-blue pair with pink topstitching and a pair of pale-pink slingbacks. Both have a pointed toe and low heel, which is perfect for me

and at Joe's, where I book bands and deejays.

■ **Heat:** I plan to wear a pair of yellow culottes by Susan Lazar all summer long. Also a pair of baby-blue culottes by Christine Ganeaux, my Miss Sixty jeans that fit perfectly, and many miniskirts! I can't wait to wear the miniskirt trend, but I'm not doing it with heels: strictly sandals!

■ **Baby booty:** My little girl, Georgia, is only one and a half, but her look is very distinct. My husband and I laugh about it; we say it's "Third World meets Red Cross." Her Nepalese nanny has this way of dressing her! The other day Georgia had on orange cargo pants from Old Navy, a green striped dress, a T-shirt that says I LOVE CULEBRA, running sneakers, a leopard-print jacket, and a hand-knit scarf from Calypso Enfant. She has a pair of cashmere booties, a pair of gold-and-black Indian slippers, and a pair of bearding boots that she