

Diary of A Fashion

For fashion designers, models, fashion editors, publicists, celebrities, wanna-bes and hangers-on, February's Fashion Week in New York City is *the* place to be. Forget what the models are wearing; some of the most noteworthy incidents take place off the runway. Our spy, Syl Tang, reports.



Ready, set, go! Cutting the ribbon on Fashion Week at the Mercedes-Benz reception to benefit the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation. Diane Von Furstenberg, Alek Wek and Tommy Hilfinger were on hand

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5 6:54P.M. LANE BRYANT AND KISS ROCK THE RUNWAY AT ROSELAND

"I can't say fat; they're 'healthy!'" a staffer says, "but there's a whole lot of woman!" It is indeed the year of the healthy woman. A film called *Curves* is coming out about the industry. "No more diet articles" says *YM*. Lane Bryant, once a full figure mall horror, is now a chic clothier, and they're making their comeback in Roseland's enormous 3,000-person open-floor concert space. Apparently, it's also the year of old rockers. Ka-boom! The pyrotechnics are set off as Gene Simmons takes the stage! He's older than my father is, and he's taking off his shirt. A breathtaking Carre Otis, with Marcus Schenkenberg on her arm as an accessory, struts confidently down the runway in tiny LB lace panties. From his seat, society reporter George Whipple (he of the impossibly bushy brows) is raucously singing aloud. Apparently, he wants to

rock and roll all night. A six-tier bleacher of photographers goes berserk as Anna Nicole Smith lumbers down the runway. As she swerves, the models coming toward her are nearly knocked off the runway into Roseanne Barr's lap. Roseanne squeals. "Anna ate her millions in settlement," mutters the designer next to me.

9:36P.M. NIPOTINO RESTAURANT & LOUNGE OPENING THROWN BY CAST OF OZ AND HOMICIDE

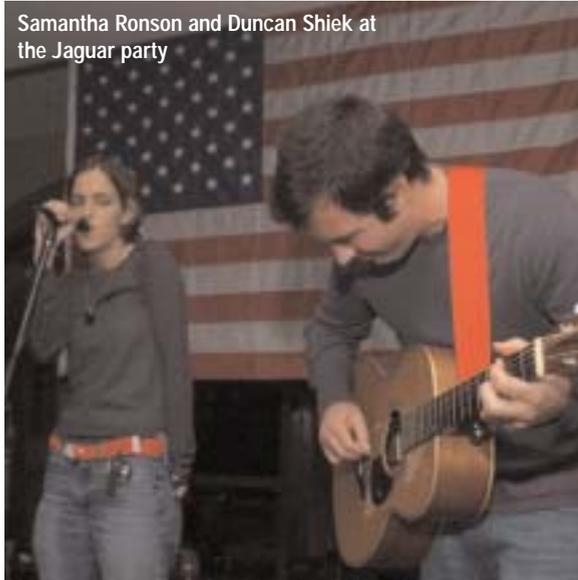
Producer Tom Fontana has parlayed his TV money into pizza. Very small pizza. His tiny fireplace restaurant has added a backyard tent for the night for a very summer town, makeshift chic vibe. Rumor has it that *Law & Order* and *Oz* actor Chris Meloni is somewhere inside. But no one knows for sure because Fashion Week has turned the casual restaurant opening into a zoo. Confused 20-something, Polo-wearing financial types from New Jersey who came to idolize Richard Belzer and angle for free beer are distracted into



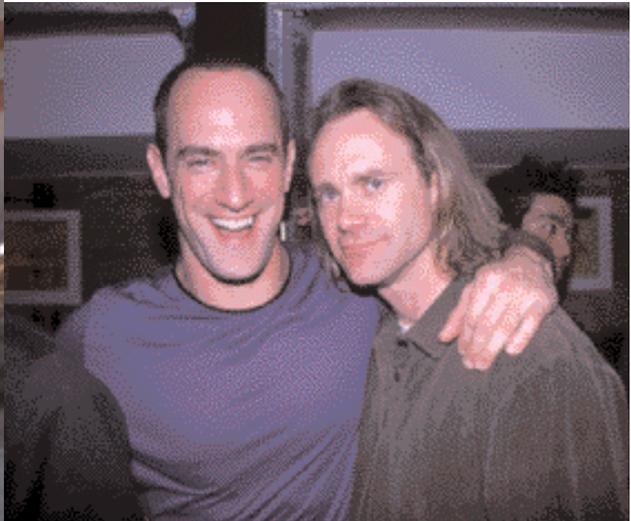
A Betsey Johnson-clad model poses next to the new Jaguar X-type

Week Insider

Samantha Ronson and Duncan Sheik at the Jaguar party



Christopher Meloni (*Law & Order*, *Oz*) and Lee Tergesen (*Oz*) at Nipotino



ogling teen Russian models tucked into a VIP booth. I try to talk to one to find out what he thinks of Fashion Week. He stares at me, afraid of my quirky Moschino skirt, surprised by the fact that I speak in complete sentences. He mumbles that he works at Prudential and that he doesn't know anything about fashion except that his new wife works for Ann Taylor. Seconds later, I watch as he slips off his ring and makes a beeline for the youngest of the Russian girls. "She must be about 14," he says as he winks at his drinking buddies. Evidently, Fashion Week is even interesting to guys who aren't in it for the clothes. And throughout the week, I am asked by cab drivers whether I am a model.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7 10:47P.M. JAGUAR'S X IN THE CITY LAUNCH WITH GOTHAM MAGAZINE

Remember the scene from *Ghostbusters* where they talk about how bad it will be if they cross the streams? This party is the social equivalent of that occurrence. There are fashion and entertainment people. Then there are business people. The latter buy *Page Six*, they don't appear in it. However, the Jaguar showroom is such a big place that everyone in Manhattan has received an invitation. "Human interest stories? I don't have any. Humans aren't interesting," my rock star friend snarls at a reporter from the *Post*. In another corner, my friend Veronica is hitting on celebrated male model Tyson Beckford, but she clearly has no idea who he is. She grabs two glasses of champagne and corners him. "Do you want one?" she says. "No, thanks," he politely declines. "Are you on a diet or something?" she retorts. He edges away towards his friends in the corner where Betsey Johnson is being photographed with Jaguar models in her designs. "Who does he think he is?" she complains to baseball player David Wells, whom she also does not recognize. "Well, he's in *Vogue* most months," David replies gently. Samantha Ronson and Duncan Sheik are playing one of their tunes. A drunk guy in a suit yells out an obscenity. "That's the married guy who lives next door," whispers my mortified friend Megan.

Gary Flom, Lulu Johnson, model and Betsey Johnson at the Jaguar Party



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9 6:42P.M.
MENSWEAR DESIGNER FRANCIS HENDY'S
AFTER-PARTY AT WINDFALL LOUNGE

It's definitely the haves and have nots this year. The Whiskey launch at the W Times Square has gift bags with PJs in them. Meanwhile, the smaller events barely have an open bar. Denise, doing dual duty working both Francis Hendy and Windfall, has done her best. She whispers to me, as the Guinness girls circulate, "See that model Patricia? She's 14. We've had to have shifts babysitting her!" Minutes earlier Patricia was in the bathroom applying maroon gloss as her friend fawned over her, "I wanted that color!" I couldn't resist, so I handed her the new HipGuide lipgloss made for me by 3 Custom Color. She looked perplexed, but quickly tucked it in her pocket. Scott, the head of SubZero Models, tells me he wants to go on record: "Why doesn't Ralph or Calvin or Donna use black models in runway?" I ask him if SubZero specializes in minority models. Scott, who is black himself, deadpans, "I only book white models, actually."

10:24P.M. RON BERKOWITZ'S 30TH BIRTHDAY
AT THE WHISKEY, THE NEW W HOTEL

Ron Berkowitz is the head of Berk Communications, a PR firm that mostly specializes in restaurants. His events are a fun, but frequent, making them more the cream of "social NY" but not necessarily "celeb NY." However he is close with the folks at the W and the Whiskey is the hottest place for Fashion Week. Refugees from Bryant Park descend in droves. "I just saved some girl's life!" says Bojan, a 25-year-old doe-eyed med student from L.A. "Some girl closed the bathroom door on her finger and wouldn't open it back up again! Blood everywhere!" He's waving his hands dramatically. When he sees me taking notes, he says, "Oh, you can't use my last name. Use Eric's (he points to a friend who lives in NY and works in fashion), he needs the publicity." Before I can answer, he's conferring with his friends from Connecticut whose heads are volleying, "Are those models? Man, you were so close to closing that deal. She looked like Carmen Electra. Maybe she knows you have a small penis." His friend pulls me aside; "I only host him so that when he gets his prescription pad, I can get carbon copies for the drugs."

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 11 3:21P.M.
CUSTO BARCELONA RUNWAY SHOW,
BALLROOM, 295 LAFAYETTE AT HOUSTON

Emilio Cavallini's show has just let out on the other side of the building and people are pushing to get into Custo. Mark Silver, from Factory PR, tries to keep control of the shoving crowd. Behind

me on line, a couple of loud Europeans who have just started a fashion 'zine complain in that too-loud way that is a dead giveaway that they're crashing. It's the don't-you-know-who-I-am phenomenon. (For the record, everyone and their mothers crash these parties.) I plop into the front row across from the sullen, former MTV VJ Ananda Lewis. "Has her show been cancelled yet?" asks the German editor next to me. They're very serious about seat assignments here. "Are you from Bloomingdale's Direct?" a pretty blond named Rachel asks a woman next to me. No, she says she runs a French e-tailer and didn't confirm. Rachel lets her sit there until "they're coming in." By the time the show begins, the woman has been moved twice and eventually loses her seat altogether.

Actress Marley Shelton comes in, as does Oksana Baiul.

P. Diddy checks out Luca Luca

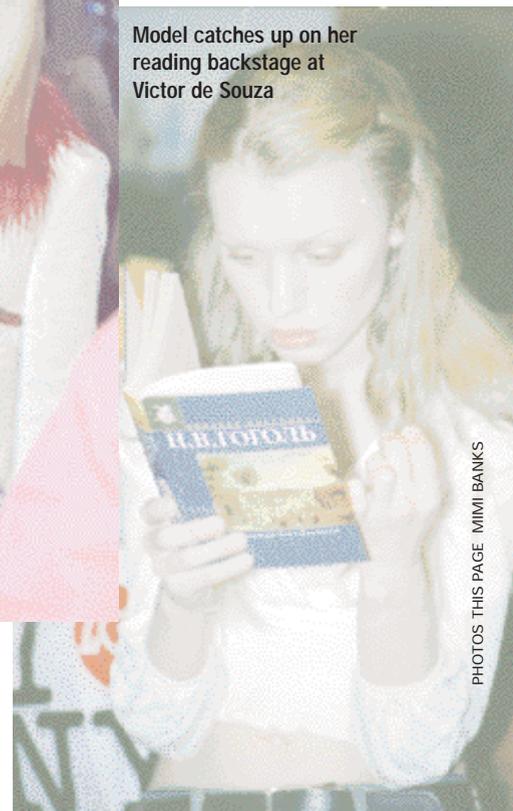


Tina Louise is hounded by the press at Vivienne Tam

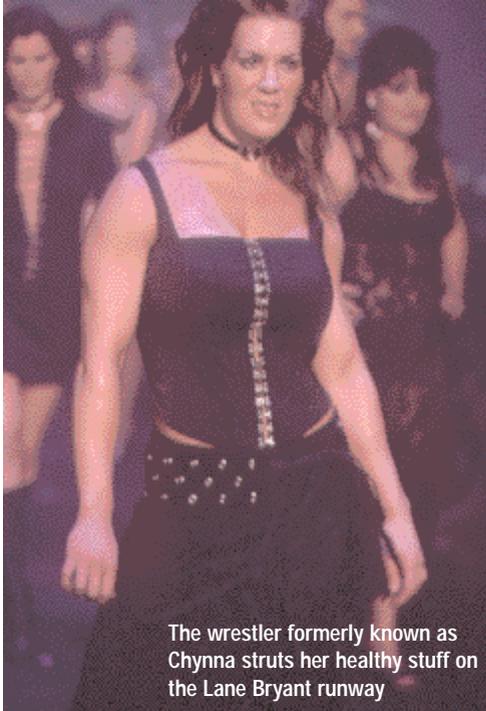


HipGuide lip gloss for emergency touch-ups

Model catches up on her reading backstage at Victor de Souza



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: MIMI BANKS



The wrestler formerly known as Chynna struts her healthy stuff on the Lane Bryant runway



Nicky & Paris Hilton at Luca Luca

MIMI BANKS



Syl Tang and Narcisco Rodriguez

MIMI BANKS

MIMI BANKS



Vivienne Tam before the show

Custo Barcelona is the Guess Jeans of the new millennium. The clothes are Crayola bright with clashing patterns, sequins, wool mixed in with leather, tassels. Flashy. Cool. The look is Faye Dunaway gone British urchin meets 1970s housecoat prints. Mark looks overworked. He has three shows this week and celebrities at all of them.

7:35P.M. THE RED EVENT FOR EDITORS BY FOODWORKS

The event is a haven for editors, which is why the junior staff of every fashion magazine here. Since Fashion Week is a nightmare of guest lists and status, The Red Event is a blessing to industry workers. Thrown by Foodworks and the NY Fun Factory, the Red Event is designed with the sole purpose to woo the editors with good champagne and pounds of chocolate. The plan is to catch the editors' ears when they're most open to listening to new ideas. In this case, as caterers for the magazine parties to come the rest of the year. I tell a junior editor about my TV project. She gushes that she wants to be a TV presenter. "Can I follow you around this week? I'll carry your makeup," she says. She's beautiful, all dewy skin and glossy hair. I ask her why she's never made the jump. "Oh, I get the headshots and then I never follow up by sending them out." She introduces me to a casting director/stylist friend of hers. He is holding court. Designer after designer flocks to him. "Syl is following me around this week," she tells him, conveniently changing her circumstances. As an award, he gives her a coveted invite to a show. "How do I get another one?" she whispers to me.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12 7:21P.M. LUCA LUCA RUNWAY SHOW, BRYANT PARK THEATER

P. Diddy. The Hilton sisters. Susan Lucci. One-ball Steve from *Sex and the City*. Donald and Melania. Frederic Fekkai. Siberian supermodel Irina Pantaeva. Kimora Lee Simmons. Salman Rushdie. Oksana, again. This is the front row of faces across from me at Luca Luca. Our photographer Mimi, on her first gig with me, shrieks "Wow, this is huge. Who are you?! Who do you know? Your Rolodex must be amazing!" Luca Luca is so celeb-attended because it's the most glamorous show. The clothes are pure 1940's Hollywood movie star, feminine and expensive looking. White furs that can only be worn by women who can afford to throw them away if they get dirty. Silk cream Fortuny pleated one-shoulder dresses intended for *Vanity Fair's* Academy Awards after-party. "Look. There's Isabella Miko. Has that girl done anything since *Coyote Ugly*? That's Monica Lewinsky next to Frederique from Victoria's Secret," says the talk show host [can't say who] behind us. "Who died and made her worthy of the front



Plum Sykes at Narcisco Rodriguez

MIMI BANKS



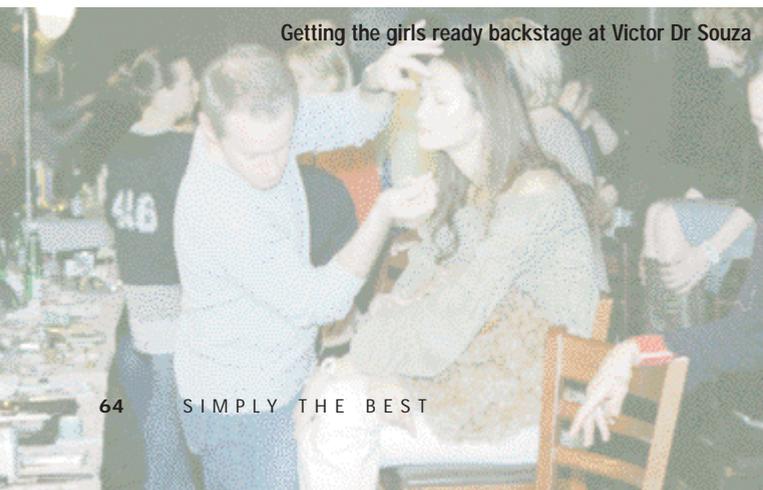
Designer and *Sex and the City* wardrobe stylist, Patricia Field



Frederique VanderWall and hunky friend, take their place next to Monica Lewinsky at Luca Luca



The Donald with lady love Melania Knauss front row at Luca Luca



Getting the girls ready backstage at Victor Dr Souza

row?" she carps. New York is a funny place. The rest of the country might think Monica is infamous, but in New York she has somehow become an untarnished celebrity.

9:41PM. BUDDHA BAR PRESENTS VICTOR DE SOUZA, 393 LAFAYETTE AT SERAFINA

There are so many characters at Victor de Souza's independent and intimate showing that I don't know where to look. Across from me is a man dressed in a green padded suit, like Puff the Magic Dragon minus the head, and a woman with a big hole in her shirt exposing her left breast. I ask her about it. She tells me that she went to stay at the ranch of some wealthy friends outside of Santa Fe. The ranch is several hundred acres and in sorority girl fashion, they had filled the truck with Barcaloungers and mint juleps. She shows me a lighter with a fish on it that she calls the "trout lighter." "It was my breast pocket," she says. "As we're driving through the high plains desert, suddenly there was a loud bang. And no it's not the tire! Basically my breast shoots out a mad flame!" She asks me if I want her to make me one. I politely decline.

10:32PM. NARCISO RODRIGUEZ'S MOJITO PARTY AT ISLA

"You know those hobby horses with the sticks? That was me, running down the street in my five-inch stilettos" Diane, who owns Isla, pantomimes by galloping in place in her satin and lace Blahniks like a mad woman. Her leather McQueen top flaps. She grabs my wrist in a killer steel grip, "They were an hour and a half early! I was wearing a towel!" The smile never leaves her face as she plops a cream-filled guava in my mouth. Paying tribute to Narciso Rodriguez, the tiny Cuban restaurant is a fashion power establishment's who's who. Fashion writer Plum Sykes calmly smokes cigarette after cigarette, never removing her aviator leather jacket and fur wrap. *Vogue's* Camilla Nickerson chats up designer Narciso's father, Tito. He looks happily muddled. "You know, my parents really struggled. They immigrated here for a better life for us. My first season in Milan I got to fly him to Italy. To get to do that, it was so wonderful. He just sat there with tears rolling down his face as the show started," Narciso says. Narciso Rodriguez is so ... normal. Personable. Nice. Emma, from Marc Jacobs, yells in appreciation. She's removed her shoes. "They're vintage Narciso," she says, "1999!" She has put on his new Fall white sandals. "Oh, Narciso!" She hugs him fiercely and squishes his head until it disappears into her breasts.

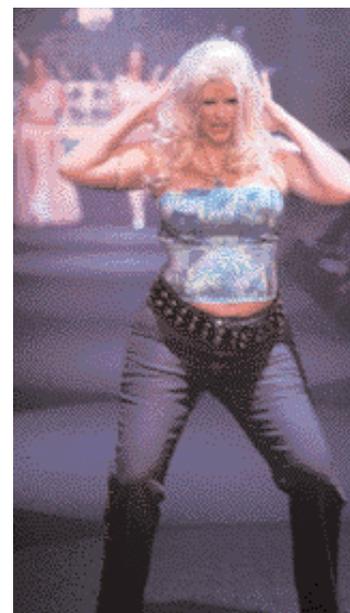
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13 11:48PM. ROBERT VERDI'S OPENING OF CANDY WITH FULL FRONTAL FASHION

Expectations run high as the party has been written up in today's *New York Post* as the event of the evening. DJ Lady Bunny, the legendary drag queen from Queens who launched Wigstock, is spinning every gay anthem possible, primarily

"It's Raining Men." Partygoers chomp down on mini Twix. The theme could be Candy and Dandies. Known for being a dandy, Patrick McDonald, a frequently photographed subject of the *New York Times* "Style" section, is holding court at the couch next to us. "Monica!" he yells as his good friend Monica Lewinsky comes in the door. Cindy, an unemployed bottle blonde, asks Cator Sparks, the darling of the beauty PR industry, "Is that Marcus Schenkenberg?" He looks askance at her fake Versace cut off tee and belly ring. Before he can tell her she doesn't stand a chance, Patrick McMullan comes over with his camera crew from Metro TV. Cator poses obligingly, showing off his red boots. As the night winds down, Marc Packer, who owns nearby spots Tao, Rue 57, Harley Davidson

Hotels is next to me. She takes pity on me and says they're sending the coveted pajamas to me by courier. When they finally open the room, I am standing next to a journalist from one of the travel mags. He says "At Oscar de la Renta, no one from standing room got in." I shift unhappily in my Blahniks until he drags me into two empty seats in the front row. Some shunned editors stare resentfully at me as I pull open my goody bag that contains a Rowley signature watch.

From left: The Red Event hosted by Foodworks is a pitch party for editors; Siberian supermodel Irina Pantaveva at Vivienne Tam; on the runway at Luca Luca; Anna Nicole Smith gives it her all at Lane Bryant.



Café, and Noah Tepperberg of Suite 16 come in quietly to check out the competition.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14 10:24A.M. CYNTHIA ROWLEY RUNWAY SHOW, BRYANT PARK GALLERY

As at Luca Luca, I sit front row. But this time, I learn what it must feel like to be a nobody. Earlier in the week Winnie at Siren PR had been upselling Cynthia Rowley's show, "And you should come to the after-party at the Royalton. Alan Cumming is coming and so is Isabella Miko." I giggle to myself thinking of the talk show hostess' comment from earlier in the week. Winnie e-mails me to confirm and says to speak to Allison in her office. When I call, Allison tremblingly says to me, "Um. Cynthia's upset ... after-party ... she had a fit. Close friends only." I am getting uninvited from the party portion! Relieved, since I felt pressured to fit this event in, I say "no problem." She exhales, "But come to the show!" But when I arrive, my name is not on the list; when they radio backstage, all I receive is a standing room ticket. Maggie Leigh, PR Director for the W

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15 VIVIENNE TAM SHOW, GALLERY BRYANT PARK GALLERY

Despite her young, hip clothes, Vivienne Tam is now a fashion veteran. She has consistently beautiful, wearable clothes and she's proven herself year after year. As a result, her shows have a loyal following of recognizable names: Irina Pantaveva, Tina Louise, Patricia Field and Michael Kors, all of whom are attacked by press today. And then occasionally, there is one off-the-hook celebrity; I see a really young head of brown hair go by surrounded by security guys. It's impossible to see who she is through the clothes, which being part of a shaman theme are covered in jade and *Clan of the Cave Bear*-type furs. I ask a man with a wire earpiece, "What do you have to do for a living to wear that thing in your ear?" He says, "you have to work for the service." "The secret service!?" I say. He nods. I ask him who's here. He gestures with his head towards the girl with the brown hair without unclasping his hands. I ask him, "What do you do if she wants to smoke a big fattie in the bathroom?" Not even a smirk from him. He replies, "Ma'am, it's just my job to get her home to her parents." ♦