

# She who must be obeyed

*Let's face it, a lot of people in the fashion industry talk an awful load of b\*\*\*\*\*s. But not stylist and Off The Rails presenter Sonya Lennon. Of course, she enjoys fashion, but she is no fashion victim, and her sound, no nonsense and witty wardrobe advice is a breath of fresh air and must not be dismissed. Here, she talks Kate Middleton, the scourge of the maxi dress and so-called celebrity 'designers' with*  
CYNTHIA BIFOLCHI.

#### WHICH CELEBRITY DO YOU THINK DRESSES THE WORST?

I'm not a fan of fakery, or any sort of synthetic addition, be it fake tan, hair extensions or fake eyelashes. I think there's too much piled on to some people, particularly young girls who are overcooked, when actually they have beauty and youth on their side and don't need it. I would steer away from any celeb who piles it on too heavily. I would much prefer the winsome beauty of Kirsten Dunst or Cate Blanchett.

#### WHO IS THE BEST DRESSED IRISH CELEBRITY?

Well if I can, I'd have to say my *Off The Rails* co-star Brendan Courtney. Saoirse Ronan is amazing; she's really evolving into a figurehead of style. Lately, she's been wearing things that are just incredible, she's very ethereal and natural.

#### HOW DO YOU THINK IRISH STYLE STANDS UP AGAINST OUR INTERNATIONAL COUNTERPARTS? DO WE HAVE A REPUTATION FOR BEING STYLISH?

I think our fashion exports are making people sit up and take notice. There are also a lot of unsung heroes like right-hand women and men of major fashion houses who don't get their name in lights, but are a really important part of the global fashion industry. Like Marc Jacob's right-hand woman is from Dublin - it's fascinating. I think the new generation of Irish designers are going to make a huge impact.

#### ANY UP-AND-COMING IRISH DESIGNERS TO LOOK OUT FOR?

Joanne Power is a recent graduate from Central Saint Martins. I tried on her collection and was really impressed. Beautifully tailored yet slightly quirky basics.

#### THE FASHION JURY IS OUT ON KATE MIDDLETON. WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF HER STYLE?

Hmm, she's grand isn't she? [laughs] She's fine. I think people's fixation taps into a desire for accessibility. She wears a lot from the high street and people feel they can wear what she's wearing, and it's not too challenging or too out-there. I find her style a little bland and I think she dresses too old for her age, but she's a royal and a queen-in-waiting and is in a professional role right now. Saying that, if she wears something quite dramatic, the simplicity of her hair and make-up makes her look fantastic.



**WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON CELEBRITY FASHION RANGES?** It depends on the range. Mary Portas is fabulous and her range of shoes for Clarks is a no-brainer, she knows what she's talking about. But this voracious appetite for celebrity has filtered into every aspect of our lives and sometimes it's a good thing and sometimes it's not. Like Lily Allen immerses herself in it and her range is very much influenced by her sense of style. There are plenty of 'celebrity designers' that don't do a whole lot in designing their ranges, and it's really just a commercial deal.

**WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A FASHION VICTIM AND A FASHIONISTA? IS THERE A FINE LINE?** I can't use the word fashionista. I mean, come on, *Sex and the City* is long over! I think a fashion victim is someone who picks trends over style, and that's a dangerous game, because many times I'd look around a room and see five or six women wearing the same thing. Can they not see they are all dressed the same? That's the downside of trends. The upside is that if you incorporate them subtly into your wardrobe, they give it a contemporary edge, without making you look like you've fallen face first into the vat of it.

**SO HOW DOES ONE AVOID THIS?** A big example of this was the aviator jacket. There was such a hoo-ha made about it. You walked down Henry Street and every second person was wearing one. Tell yourself, if this piece is all over *Vogue* and all the magazines then of course it will be replicated in every shop and will date quickly. I would steer clear of the press pieces and go for the more diffused versions so you'll get a little bit of endurance out of them.

**ANY TRENDS YOU'D LIKE TO SEE BANISHED TO ROOM 101 FOREVER?** I think there's a tyranny of the maxi-dress; partly because it's ubiquitous and partly because it's seen as a fashionable 'camouflage unit' when it really doesn't work that well unless you're Gisele. It can be a frightening garment!

**WHAT IS THE MAIN RULE YOU LIVE BY WHEN IT COMES TO FASHION?** You have to consider whether your choices suit your body. A mistake people make is wearing things because they like them despite how they make them look. Also, lack of practicality would not deter me from something.

**FASHION OR FUNCTION - WHAT'S YOUR PRIORITY?** If I chose function it would mean I'd be wearing tracksuits and furry socks, so I'm going to have to say fashion.

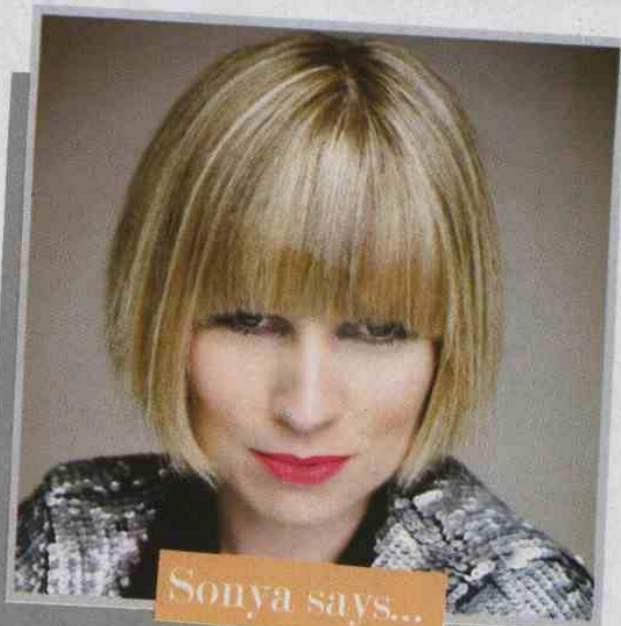
**WOULD YOU EVER ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE STYLED, AND IF SO, BY WHO?** I have allowed myself to be styled in the past.

Sarah Rickard has always done a really nice job. In the beginning, I would have been anal about it, but I just ran out of time so through practical issues I had to give in a little. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's not, but I would be very vocal about it. I'd say I'm a nightmare to dress! [laughs]

**YOU HAVE LITTLE TWINS, DO YOU EVER GO OTT DRESSING THEM A LA GWEN STEFANI?** No, never. I think kids should be kids and wear clothes they can roll around in the muck in. They're out of them in such a short space of time that I wouldn't spend a lot on my kids' clothes. It doesn't make any sense to me. Funnily enough, though, my little boy has a hat obsession. He has loads, from little pork pies to skater ones. He's hilarious. It's nothing to do with me, it's all him!

**WHAT ARE YOUR DRESSING ON A BUDGET TIPS?** It's worth spending a bit of money on the workhorses, like a really good pair of slim-fit trousers, a good day dress, something you'll always wear. It's the cost-per-wear approach. Then you have an intrinsic value on that item and you're unlikely to give it away in a fit. Keep those pieces simple and then let the accent pieces, the trends, fit in with them.

**WHAT TIPS DO YOU HAVE FOR SOMEONE TRYING TO BREAK INTO THE STYLING BUSINESS?** Grow a pair! [laughs] It's a very different landscape from when I started 20 years ago. Now everyone wants to do it. I think you need to really want it and to keep on it. Don't be afraid of rejection and just keep on trucking. Work hard, keep your ears open and your mouth shut a lot of the time, even



**THE A/W 2011 MUST-HAVE PIECE**  
The shoe boot. It's still going strong and it's a good way to get the androgynous look without wearing flats.

**THE A/W 2011 MUST-HAVE ACCESSORY**  
Earrings. They are back in a big way. Not Pat Butcher style, but fun, vintage-inspired statement ones.

**THE A/W 2011 MUST-HAVE BEAUTY PRODUCT**  
Make-up wise, a deep burgundy lip is essential.

**THE STYLE ICON**  
The amazing Iris Apfel. She's such an inspiration. Her sense of enjoyment of clothes even into her nineties is just incredible and something I would try to strive towards. One of her brilliant quotes is "I've never met a colour I didn't like".

**THE DESIGNER**  
Can I say two? Sonia Rykiel and Yves Saint Laurent, even though they're out of my price range!

when you want to open it! Be familiar with your industry globally and understand how you can ply your trade country to country.

**FINALLY, HOW BIG IS YOUR WARDROBE?**  
Funnily enough, I'm not a hoarder; there are only certain things I'll hold onto. I'm quite discerning in what I keep and what I give away. I don't have a big appetite for clothes. I don't tend to buy a lot of things. I buy quite delicately. It's not like I have acres of clothes. I have a moderate sized wardrobe, I'm sure there are plenty of women in Ireland who have bigger wardrobes than I have.

*Sonya Lennon is the face of the Dublin Festival of Fashion in association with the Evening Herald, which runs in venues across the city from the 8th until the 11th of September. On the 8th, Sonya will be holding an exhibition of pieces from her own wardrobe in the old Waterstones building on Dawson Street at 6pm; dff.ie*