

Dressing for Fame: Cher Coulter on Navigating the Red-Carpet Game and One Model's Enviably Wardrobe



Alexis Brunswick

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With an impressive CV that includes stints working backstage at fashion shows for the likes of Alexander McQueen and Hermès when she was just 14, as well as a degree in fashion design from London's Central Saint Martins, Cher Coulter is a rare breed of fashion stylist. The deeply passionate Coulter has cultivated a portfolio of scene-stealing looks and a uniquely cool aesthetic among her coterie of clients that includes such A-listers as Nicole Richie, Rosie Huntington-Whiteley, and Elizabeth Olsen. Coulter took a break from her busy schedule to talk to Style.com about what happens if she disagrees with a client, the stylist who continues to inspire her, and whose wardrobe she'd like to steal.

—Alexis Brunswick

Why did you start styling?

For me, I think it goes hand in hand with design. When I first moved [to L.A.], I actually came out here with clothing designs of things I had been selling in London, and I just fell into styling. But after I graduated from Saint Martins, I did both. It's all fashion, and the more qualified in the more areas you can be, the better.

When did you feel as though you'd made it?

I don't know if you ever do. But I remember when I first went on a press tour with Orlando [Bloom] for *Pirates of*

the Caribbean and thinking, *Oh, God, this is a really big deal, being in the same room as people like Johnny Depp.* I also won a Hollywood Stylist Award a couple of years ago, and I felt like that was good to get recognized. But sometimes I think, *Oh, my God, have I lost it? Am I losing it?* That's the thing with fashion, it's very up and down. You've got to maintain credibility. You've got to keep fashionable, haven't you?

How do you balance what the client wants and what you want for the client?

You've always got to do what the client wants ultimately. I think as long as you feel as though you've had some sort of creative input, there's compromise all along the way. Even if you're doing an editorial, there's compromise—you've got to use advertisers, you've got to do this, you've got to do that. Unless you have your own blog, it's never 100 percent you.

Do you ever disagree with the client on a look?

I'm pretty obvious when I don't like something. Sometimes there are too many choices, and I'll be like, "Look and see these pictures and sleep on it and wake up in the morning and see what your gut reaction is. What leapt out more to you in the night? What dress does your mind keep going to?" That's a really good test. But there have been a couple of times when people have worn things that weren't my first choice. But ultimately, I've pulled all the clothes. Normally, what can sometimes happen is that I just want it to be even more fashion, and at the end of the day, sometimes the person wearing it is like, "Well, you aren't the one who has to walk out there and be up for criticism." That's why I never push someone into doing something they don't want to do, because it will backfire...and then they'll just hate me.

Do you prefer editorial work or red carpet?

I think variety is the spice of life, and ultimately you need to do a little bit of everything. I like to do an ad job as well when there are parameters where they might say to you, "We just want white swimsuits." And then what you do is focus in on white swimsuits and you have to find the best swimsuits. I like research. But then I also like working with a brand like J Brand. I worked on their Pre-Fall collection. I like going in there and getting into the designer's head and aesthetic and then looking at the real subtleties in that collection and styling it. I like that as much as working with a celebrity on the red carpet.

What do you think is the most underrated part of your job?

How much work goes into the prep. I don't think anybody ever gets that. I can spend two days solid on Style.com looking for gowns. Of course, I'll start with the designers that I like the most and I'll put those all into files. And then I send those to each PR and they'll say, "I don't have this, this, and this." So then I'll say, "Well, what do you have?" It's such a back-and-forth with each designer. And what's really important to me is to make sure there's representation from the client's favorite designers. So maybe I can't get the Stella dress, but I got you these Stella pieces instead. They need to know that I've approached everybody.

When clients have brand partnerships or act as ambassadors, does that make the job easier or more challenging?

It's better. And I am part of getting to that place. I encourage someone to go to [the designer's] show, I encourage them to go to any event they do. I think that's all very important. Designers become close with celebrities, and I think ultimately you can get pushed out as a stylist because they forge friendships and stuff. But you're also the person who has the objective view and can be a third eye.

Are there any stylists who inspire you?

So many stylists are great. I think Camilla Nickerson is the one. Her attention to detail is amazing. She's worked hard, she gets to work with the best photographers, she gets the best clothes, but she'll always put them together with

really good flavor. I like how her work isn't just straightforward pretty. There's always something out there about it, and the details are spot-on. I think she's brilliant.

If you could swap style or wardrobes with one client, who would it be?

Rosie [Huntington-Whiteley]. I'd swap wardrobes with her because she has the most insane wardrobe. She has the most amazing vintage, the most amazing Isabel Marant. She has every girl's dream wardrobe.

Photo: Roger Kisby/Getty Images

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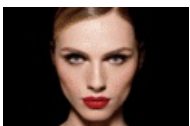
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