

Dressing for Fame: Erin Walsh Talks Kerry Washington, Red-Carpet Make-Believe, and the Art of Collaboration



Alexis Brunswick

Industry July 7, 2014 | 01:28PM



If celebrity status is conferred in red-carpet appearances, then no actress today can compete without the help of just the right stylist. As Kerry Washington once told *Glamour* after she noticeably upped the sartorial ante, “There were a couple of actresses whom I felt were having the upper hand careerwise—because they knew how to work that red carpet.” A carefully crafted collaboration between stylist and client, the perfect look can create an indelible impact on agents, casting directors, and those of us watching from the sidelines. Straight from the epicenter of all things celebrity, we’ve asked some of the industry’s top stylists to share their experiences and impressions from their perch above Tinseltown. With our *Dressing for Fame* series, we bring you an exclusive, insider look at everything it takes to create those iconic moments captured by a million photo flashes.

Erin Walsh

When Kerry Washington began making sartorial waves on the red carpet last year, the effort was nothing if not strategic. Her understanding of the power of the red carpet—and those viral images—quickly shot her into the fashion stratosphere, with stylist Erin Walsh knowingly by her side. Walsh, who also counts Sarah Jessica Parker, Kristen Wiig, and Maggie Gyllenhaal as clients, continues to garner attention with her impeccable, take-notice looks that allow her actresses to stand out and shine through. Here, Walsh talks to *Style.com* about shooting in Irving Penn’s studio, the Samuel Beckett approach to styling, and the power of make-believe.

—Alexis Brunswick

How did you get into styling?

I fell into it, really. I went to NYU for theater and was planning on becoming an actress. But after graduating and realizing that I was absolutely terrified of the business logistics (ahem, rejection), I immediately looked into other options. Ironically, everything I feared about the acting world is innate to this business as well! I had always loved writing, and thought maybe I could write for a magazine. I got a job in the fashion department of *Vogue*, thinking I could transfer to Features if things went well, but after my first time on set—in Irving Penn’s studio—it all just clicked. It felt right.

As the intro to ‘Dressing for Fame’ mentions, your client Kerry Washington talks about how actresses who know how to work the red carpet can have the upper hand careerwise. Why do you think that is?

You would have to ask Kerry for her opinion, but I do think that social media and the media in general have gotten completely insane. By being in the spotlight, you’re a part of [the insanity] anyways, so it certainly behooves you to manage the way you are seen. It gives you a certain degree of control in an arena that can be really overwhelming. Everyone has an opinion (albeit plenty of uninformed ones in this peanut gallery). It helps to do what you can to keep the reins in your own hands.

How do you think you’ve been able to help transform Kerry’s red-carpet personality?



We are a team! Period.

When dressing someone for promotional appearances vs. red carpet, what do you take into consideration? What helps you decide on a look?

I think there isn’t really a difference in what goes into press and red carpet. If you don’t apply the same thought process and consideration, I don’t really see the point. I think every look should always start from a point of ease. You should feel comfortable to look comfortable. A red-carpet version of yourself is elevated, same as press looks,

but it should still start from the same canvas. You're not dressing dolls, you're dressing people, with character, points of view, and personalities to represent. It begins and ends with my clients, not me. I repeat, it's not about me. I always take my ego out of it. I like to listen, hopefully inspire, and fill in the pieces, making things a little magical by exaggerating the terms of reality. Red carpet should be a place for make-believe, but it has a personal context. In more specific terms, you should look like yourself.

You style men and women for the red carpet. Which do you find more challenging?

I think it depends on the person, but there are definitely more possibilities with women, if only because of design logistics. Perhaps working with men can be more challenging in this respect because you have to find ways to be creative within a smaller box of options.

When working on editorial spreads, do you find it inspiring or challenging to work with other people? How do you stay true to your vision?

I love collaborating. You learn so much by listening. Obviously, you come to the table with a vision and ideas, but I find you learn the most by at least trying the ideas that others have to offer. If you know the story you want to tell, you keep that thread and try what works around it. It's a very Samuel Beckett sort of mentality of throwing shit on the wall and seeing what sticks. But there is always a certain amount of risk involved in experimenting, especially considering the way the media feeds on these things. In any case, life is too short to not listen to those around you, and to try and find new ways to dream.

What are the day-to-day challenges you encounter with styling?

Logistics. The amount of merchandise trafficking around and getting things where they need to be—and on time! Getting everywhere on time, when there are only so many appointments you can fit into a day. Letting go of things after they happen. I am a perfectionist but also a realist, and in this business you would go mad quite quickly if you focused on all the “could have beens.” Keeping grace under fire—I like to pride myself on staying calm. Freaking out never helps. It's only fashion, after all. There is always a way to fix it.

Photos: Courtesy Photo; Film Magic

Trends / Industry:

 SHARE

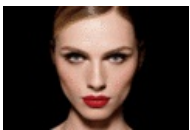
 TWEET

 COMMENTS

MOST POPULAR



How Valentino Became an Unlikely Street-Style Phenomenon



Andreja Pejic Talks Contouring, Caitlyn Jenner, and Why all



That Girl: An Oral History of Betsey Johnson

LATEST ARTICLES



Tom Ford's New Routine, and More of Today's News



Gucci and Calvin Klein's Go-To Model Isn't Your!



3 Reasons to Get Excited About Nude Nail Polish

FROM OUR PARTNERS



Inside Jennifer Lopez's Amazing NYC Penthouse

People.com



13 Trends to Retire
in 2015

Allure.com



10 Street Style-
Approved Ways To
Make Jeans and
Heels Feel Fresh

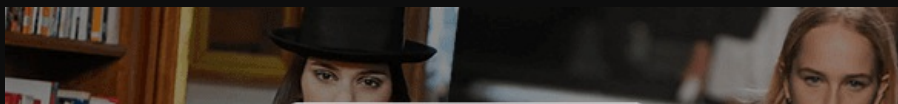
Luckyshops.com

BE IN THE KNOW

Get the latest fashion news, trends, street-style snaps,
runway coverage, party reports, and more from Style.com.
straight to your inbox!

E-mail address

SIGN UP





[Contact Us](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Press Center](#)

[Advertising](#)

[Reprints](#)

[Careers](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Google+](#)

[Pinterest](#)

[Instagram](#)

[Tumblr](#)

© 2014 Condé Nast. All rights reserved.

Site by [AREA17](#)

USE OF THIS SITE CONSTITUTES ACCEPTANCE OF OUR:

[USER AGREEMENT \(EFFECTIVE 1/2/2014\)](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY \(EFFECTIVE 1/2/2014\)](#).

[YOUR CALIFORNIA PRIVACY RIGHTS](#). THE MATERIAL ON THIS SITE MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED, DISTRIBUTED, TRANSMITTED, CACHED OR OTHERWISE USED, EXCEPT WITH THE PRIOR WRITTEN PERMISSION OF CONDÉ NAST. [AD CHOICES](#)