

f 🐦 1 Shares 💬 0

Dressing for Fame: Penny Lovell Talks Working With Taylor Schilling, Sex and the City's Lasting Influence, and More



Alexis Brunswick

Industry August 22, 2014 | 12:00PM



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

impressions from their perch above the show. In our *Dressing for Time* series, we bring you an exclusive, insider look at everything it takes to create those iconic moments captured by a million photo flashes.

Penny Lovell

As a self-professed vintage junkie, stylist Penny Lovell has an eye for fashion's finer details. The London-born Lovell made her first foray into fashion with a brief stint in fashion PR before paying her dues at British *Elle*, a job that opened her eyes to the ins, outs, and complexities of styling. Now settled in Los Angeles, Lovell counts on both loyal clients (Rose Byrne) and those newer to her coterie (Taylor Schilling and Anne Hathaway) to keep her on her toes—and strengthen her game. With the Emmys on the horizon, Lovell found time to chat exclusively with Style.com about the second-skin relationship she cultivates with clients and why *Sex and the City* still matters.

Have you ever had an “I’ve made it” moment? What was it?

For me, it's really more of a series of achievements, and there are so many of those. Like, when I met Keira Knightley on a photo shoot and she was my first celebrity client. She was very young and I was very young and had never dressed anyone, so that was a very significant moment because that's where and why it all began for me. There are a couple things—like, I've always been such a fan of designers and their creativity, and to be able to collaborate with designers on things, that's huge for me still.

When you work with a client for years, like Rose Byrne, how do you continue to keep things fresh?

I think fashion is a great thing for that because it changes all the time. What we're working with is constantly evolving. I know her better now—I know where she's at in her life, I can almost guess how she's feeling about something and what she might not want to do and what she might want to do without her even telling me. You get a shorthand really. It's a really personal relationship, it's a second skin. With the successful relationships, you do end up having this sort of very unspoken shorthand. And then I always like to pull some things that they might like and they might not, but let's give it a go. It's all free, we'll try everything on, there's no judgment, and you never know. Some things you really would never imagine look amazing, so it's always good to keep looking for things that are just a bit different, to try and see. You never know, and sometimes those are amazing, and quite often they are, actually.

When you get a new client, where does the work begin? Do you base their style off an existing aesthetic or create a new one?

It depends on the client. For instance, when I met Taylor [Schilling] last year—I'd never actually met her and she was coming to L.A. and she had to go to an event, so I had to do a fitting straight off the initial meeting. So, at that point you immerse yourself in them. You look at everything you can find on them and then you meet them. With her, you pull in as much as you can, and together there's this special alchemy that happens in that moment between. It's a collaboration, but there's a specific alchemy between the two of you.

What inspired you to start styling?

I didn't really know that there was such a thing when I was younger when I was thinking about my jobs. I basically used to work at a clothing store when I was 15 and people used to come every week and get outfits from me. I used to put outfits together, and I didn't really know that was styling then. I didn't know it was a job until later on when I hit my 20s and I was in fashion PR in the beginning. I went from being John Frieda's PA to doing fashion PR at a fashion agency that did Burberry and Max Mara. Then I got into the world of fashion editors more, so I used to work with them and do pulls for them. Also, we used to commission photo shoots for the clients. Actually, I commissioned a big stylist in London at the time, I remember, getting her to style the shoot for *Pretty Polly*, which are tights in England, and it wasn't a great shoot and we had to reshoot it. And I was telling my boss what we needed, and she's like, “You should just do it. We've got clothes, you can just figure it out, right?” So I did it. From then I realized I really wanted to do this. That was all very early 20s.

What was your first real styling gig?

I worked for the fashion director of the Sunday *Telegraph* magazine in London, and I used to give her ideas for shoots. One day, she just said, “You should do it, you should shoot it,” and that was probably my first gig and first real published work.

What stylist has always been a source of inspiration to you and your career?

In terms of inspiration, I think Patricia Field for me. I don’t think anyone of our generation or in this business can underestimate *Sex and the City*’s impact, particularly on the red carpet. It was such a playful, interesting visual. I look at it now and remember so much of it now in terms of the way those pieces were put together and how those girls’ characters were defined by the clothes in that show, and I think that has a lot of bearing on what we do.

Do you think ambassadorships and sponsorships have changed celebrity styling?

Sometimes there’s something quite interesting about one thing being set and you have to think of other things quite differently. There’s still work with the brand, there are discussions between the brand and stylists. It’s nice to work closely with a house. I quite enjoy that.

Do you find social media chatter to be helpful or distracting when working with a client? Where does “criticism” come into play?

In terms of work, it doesn’t really come into play for me. I know what’s generally going on, but I don’t specifically read it in terms of what I do for work. There are so many opinions out there, and if you listen to all of them you’ll go mad. I don’t think what I do is a popularity contest, either. I do something specific with my clients, and it’s for them to feel great and look great and photograph well, and it’s for a reason—because they’re promoting a film, attending a charity event or something—it’s not a popularity contest. I just think that if you get into that, you’re never going to win. It’s endless. Sometimes a favorite dress is another person’s awful dress. You really have to keep your parameters of what matters very clear. We’ve taken calculated risks often, we know not everyone is going to love it, but we don’t do it for that reason.

Trends / Industry: Stylist Penny Lovell Talks Working With Taylor Schilling, Sex and the City's Lasting Influence, and More

 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

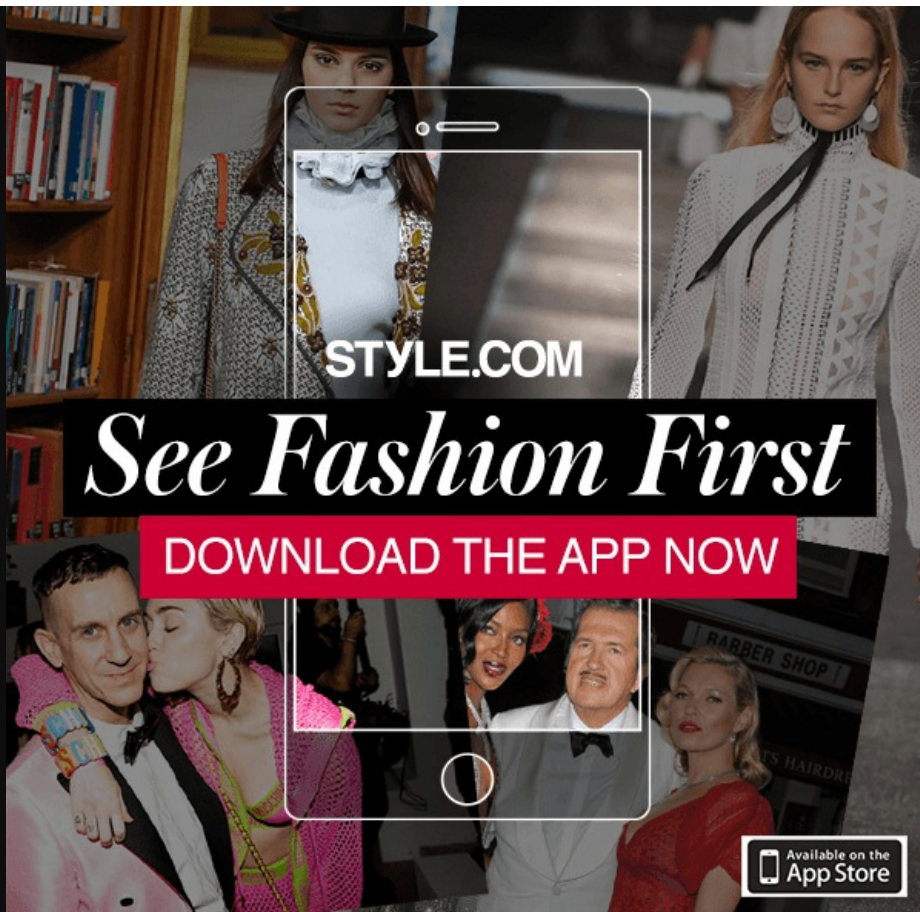
Luckyshops.com

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