

DEAR JILL

I want to be a fashion stylist...

Dear Jill,

I want to be a fashion stylist. Can you tell me more about this field?

—Ready to Impress, Miami, FL

Dear Impress,

Your "name" implies that you already have a realistic view of what's required of a stylist. You must be able to iron and steam for hours, even the 42 extra looks that the client inadvertently brought along which were already shot last week—so you need patience and strong arms. You must be able to pin/clip a pair of size 8 leather pants to fit the size 2 model who got dumped by her boyfriend and lost 20 pounds since she was booked—so you need ingenuity and strong fingers. You need shopping stamina (strong legs) and a keen fashion sense: do you buy and *live* every fashion magazine? and can you locate a pair of Manolo look-alikes in size 11 in a matter of 15 minutes, for 15 bucks? and can you tape the bottoms for the shoot and return them the next day, to the same store where you've made 53 returns in the past month, and fabricate another story about how your cousin Cinderelina didn't quite fit into this pair either?

Good, that's a start. You must also assert yourself and network with all the showrooms/designers/boutiques in your area so that Marc Jacobs would give you the shirt off of his back at the snap of your callused fingers. How do you get him to do that? You work with fabulous teams and put together revolutionary fashion editorials for the hottest mags of the moment. And you get there by testing, assisting, and wringing

every drop of creative juice out of that delicious dream wardrobe in your mind, all the while looking cute and stylish every single day.

If you are a good stylist with the energy of five hyperactive toddlers on pure Coca Cola and candy bar diets, you will graduate from bad tests to amazing tests, from crappy editorial that doesn't pay to sensational editorial that still doesn't pay, from the K Mart catalog to the J. Crew catalog, from an overdrawn bank account to a comfy nest-egg from all of your advertising clients, and from standing-room-only at 7th on Sixth to front-row seats.

Now many a jaded stylist will tell you to keep your pins in your cushion and keep your fashion sense to yourself, i.e. get a job that pays and doesn't burn welts into your hands or the soles off of your Gucci boots. Writer **Kendall Morgan** found one such soon-to-be ex-stylist, Elizabeth Berkeley (name has been changed to protect the fashion victim), who was happy to fork

over some of the bad-taste-in-the-mouth stuff stylists may find on their full plates:

- 1. The Starter:** Apprenticeships with anal-retentive stylists who insist that their safety pins all face in the same direction.
- 2. The Appetizer:** Washing out the crotches of panty hose so they can be re-used on the low budget shoot.
- 3. The Meal Ticket:** Rising before anyone else at catalog "boot camp," going to bed last, and earning a free dinner with the clients who rattle away in a foreign tongue and forget that you exist.
- 4. The Combo Plate:** Making a fashion statement pairing Buffalo shoes with Fendi for an editor who insists on including the #1 advertiser in the lead fashion spread.
- 5. The Cold Course:** This is the "fashion cold" which follows the show circuit, spreading from cheek to cheek during all the double kissing.
- 6. Fish of the Day:** There's always a bigger one, ready to usurp your throne. Celebrity offspring tend to make quick inroads, leaving today's "It" girl looking for catalog jobs tomorrow.
- 7. Just Desserts:** Goodie bags at fashion shows—a good thing...until you find yourself so desperately broke that you snatch extras off of other seats to use for future Christmas and birthday gifts.
- 8. After Dinner Drinks:** Skip 'em, as they may lead to lame encounters with over-eager photo assistants who want to suck up to you just to get jobs.

That's eight courses. What do you think? If you haven't been turned off, then *press on!* Your day in the sunny center spread of *Vogue* may be a mere decade away, darling.

—Jill



ILLUSTRATION:
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