

Meet the top New York stylist who loves to relax in Pontypool



■ Emma has styled, from left, the cast of Bridesmaids, Allison Williams, star of the comedy, Girls, and Glee's Jayne Lynch for magazine covers



“After Justin Timberlake, people were like, ‘I loved the stuff you did in Asia!’ ... people who, months before, hadn’t even wanted to look at my portfolio”

The BIG Interview

She spends her days dressing Hollywood stars, and has a job on one of the most influential style magazines in New York. Just how glamorous is life for Page Six Magazine fashion director, Emma Pritchard? Claire Rees found out



“FASHION is a game. A fun, sometimes glamorous, game. But it’s a game. And you have to know the process.”

Pontypool-born stylist to the stars, Emma Pritchard, is talking about her rise through the ranks of the fiercely competitive New York fashion scene.

“It can be very much like The Devil Wears Prada [the book/film based on the real-life goings on at a top US glossy]. It can be very bitchy, but the key is to stay out of that.”

“I’m lucky enough to be able to choose not to work with bad people.”

Emma, fashion director at the influential Page Six Magazine (sister publication to the must-read society page in the New York Post) and freelance stylist, has been living in the city for six years. And she’s worked hard in an industry that doesn’t let just anybody in.

“New York can have a very small-town mentality,” says Emma, 37, who arrived in the city via a successful career in art direction in Singapore. “I had to work hard to prove myself here, and start from scratch.”

“I’d had this amazing success in Asia, but that didn’t matter.”

“I’ve seen plenty of people come here after being hugely successful elsewhere and they’ve failed here. “It was tough, but I just rolled up my sleeves and got on with it.”

Born in Griffithstown, Emma studied Art, RE and English at Pontypool College of Art, then Fashion Design at the University of Wales, Newport where she loved typography and dreamed of a career in advertising.

“Back then, the job of a stylist didn’t really exist, certainly not in the way it does now.” Friends had encouraged her into a job in fashion, and she inherited a love of sewing and knitting from her mother Gaynor, a former health authority secretary. “My friends would say they’d come straight to my house if they were going to a fancy dress party!”

After graduating from university, she moved to Singapore on the advice of her



■ Scarlett Johansson “knows how to take a great picture”

lecturer who told her if she was serious about advertising, she needed to go to Asia.

“I’d never left my parents before, it was a big emotional upheaval,” she says.

“I had no job lined up and I didn’t know anyone.

“But Singapore was amazing and the ex-pat community was so helpful.”

She found work with a boutique advertising agency, eventually working on campaigns for brands like Levis, Singapore Airlines, and Nokia.

“It was all women and I was constantly breaking the photocopy. But nobody ever told me off, it was such a nurturing environment.

“I loved the cultures – how in Thailand, you can’t show the bottom of someone’s feet on an advert; and if it’s going to be shown in Malaysia, the woman has to be covered up.”

Emma’s boss, who was from upstate New York, noticed her eye for the bigger picture, and suggested she consider styling.

“It wasn’t until a year later, I was at a party with her best friend who owned a photo agency,” says Emma.

“She asked me if I was serious about styling, I said yes and she gave me all her work.”

Emma relocated to New York almost immediately in 2006, working for free, and taking on commissions for websites and a skateboard magazine.

Mamie, for the December issue of the magazine – just as a third season was announced in the US (the second series starts over here on Sky Atlantic on Monday at 10pm).

“I watched the whole season in one day,” says Emma, adding the series was so well-received because it was the ‘anti-Sex And The City’.

“It’s closer to the reality, whereas SATC was the stylised, dream version of New York.”

“I love working with actresses because they can play a part and everyone wanted Allison on their cover – we could get any clothes we wanted.”

“She’s the quintessential, very well-bred New York girl from the Upper East Side,” she adds.

“She sent me a thank you card afterwards – that never, ever happens.

“You’re lucky if people remember your name.”

Yet, when top designers open their stores to you in the middle of a hurricane, it’s a good indication that some important people remember your name.

Days before the Girls shoot, Emma was preparing to style Victoria’s Secret model Jessica White when Hurricane Sandy struck and she was evacuated from her Tribeca apartment without water and electricity.

“We have a good relationship with [designer to stars from Shania Twain to Beyonce] Mark Bouwer and we ran over to his studio and pulled what clothes we could – there was no electricity so we were using our cell phones for light.

“People opening up their studio in the middle of a hurricane for you is pretty special.”

Emma and her two assistants walked the clothes on a 10-mile round trip over the Brooklyn Bridge to make the shoot.

“People think this job is glamorous, and easy.

“They think when a celebrity turns up, they’re already in this amazing outfit.

“But there’s a hell of a lot of research, knowing what someone likes, what they’ve worn before.

“And there’s a lot of pleasing a lot of people.

“Sometimes we’ll only have an outfit for three hours – one



■ Celebrity fashion director Emma Pritchard, 37, who spends her

dress can be shot three times in a day. And then we have to make sure it gets back in one piece. If one earring disappears, it’s my name on the line.

“But I love the satisfaction of looking at a magazine and thinking, ‘I fought tooth and nail for that dress.’”

Some of Emma’s favourite jobs have been, in no particular order, putting Glee’s

manic PE teacher Jayne Lynch in a sporty ball gown, brandishing a golden megaphone – “I had the dress custom-made from Adidas tracksuits” she tells me.

She also urged the cast of Bridesmaids into tuxedos for another Entertainment Weekly cover.

Getting South Park creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker to trash a suite of the uber-fancy

working life between the showbiz glamour of New York and Pontypool, where she can switch off

Waldorf hotel is another highlight.

“You have to use a lot of charm,” laughs Emma. “Especially when you have 40 minutes to ask one of the biggest names in comedy, ‘You don’t mind wearing spotty boxer shorts and being draped on by showgirls, do you?’”

As a freelancer, she can pick and choose jobs saying she often does things “just to be

nosy” and to satisfy her intrigue for reality TV stars.

So she agreed to style the lookbook for Coco Austin, the model wife of rapper Ice-T (“an insane day”), but had to draw the line when Jersey Shore’s Snooki (queen of the worst-dressed lists) asked her to be her full-time stylist.

“I love characters. I love history, I like costumes and fun details,” says Emma, adding

one of the least glamorous jobs she did was in a rat-filled subway until midnight for a Cover Girl episode on America’s Next Top Model.

“My obsession for detail can make me almost mad,” she says. “We had to make a dress of playing cards and a swimsuit of poker chips for a casino in Arizona so we went to K-Mart and bought 200 cards and the whole thing took

six days – two days alone to cut out the cards.

“I was too scared to put it in the hold so I clutched it on the plane all the way.

“It’s always a leap of faith and you spend a lot of time fighting for your creative vision.”

Describing herself as a perfectionist, Emma says her job requires that she is “placid yet always on the ball”, in a

business that never allows you to become precious.

“My accent helps, too,” she says in her still strong South Walian lilt.

Growing up in Pontypool, Emma collected Windsmoor vintage clothes and later wore dresses made out of Tyvek boiler suit material.

“Basically, Dani Behr was my style icon. Whatever she wore on The Word [the now defunct showbiz and music show on Channel 4], I wanted to wear.

“I always wanted to look different.

“I bought a gorgeous coat in Abergavenny the other week,” she adds “and nobody here commented on it. The first day I wore it in New York, three people came up to me and complimented me.

“I think here there’s a sense of people not wanting to show off, but that doesn’t exist in New York.”

Her job at Page Six means she gets the best table in a Manhattan restaurant, but she’s just as happy in Pontypool where she spends around half of the year, recently enjoying a month off over Christmas and New Year with friends and family.

“New York is always so crazy. I love coming home to switch off.

“I could work in London but I wouldn’t want to. I’m not a fan of the city and I find the UK quite restrictive when it comes to work.

“Plus cities are lonely, so when I’m away from New York, I like coming home and looking over the mountains.”

So what could we find in the wardrobe of one of fashion’s most stylish women?

“I love coats, especially white and fluffy ones,” she says.

“I love glamour, silhouettes and proportions. I’m lucky enough to have some lovely pieces designers have sent me as a thank you.”

And the famed New York style, she admits, has influenced her approach to dressing up.

“The New York look is to be immaculate and polished, it’s very different from London where there’s more of a street style.

“In New York, the streets really are the catwalk because people walk everywhere and use the subway and that’s why

they make more of an effort. “You can be out for breakfast in the same outfit you’ll be wearing for dinner.

“I like a blow-dry and my nails are always done. And it’s true New York women don’t wear tights, it’s bare legs and a long coat. People suffer for fashion. New York Fashion Week in February is freezing and so it’s so miserable!”

Next up is working with Oscar-nominated actress and fashion darling Jessica Chastain for a magazine cover, which she excitedly tells me has just been confirmed, and while she describes her adopted home as ‘magical’, she admits she rarely plans so she doesn’t know where she sees herself next year.

“My dream client would be [film director] Martin Scorsese,” she says.

“My UK ambitions? To get my hands on Peacocks!”

And her trend tips for spring 2013?

“Stripes! Candy stripes, bold graphic stripes. We just shot a lot of Gucci resort and it was full of them.”

“Fashion is constantly evolving,” she adds.

“There are new designers all the time and I like all my work to look different – I don’t ever want to get complacent.

“You look at famous stylists like Rachel Zoe and you can tell who her clients are, because they look like her.

“I always want to use a different designer, try something different.

“I’m always trying to make sure everything I do is elegant, glamorous and sophisticated – but always with an element of humour.”

And Emma’s secret style tips? “I’m a huge fan of statement jewellery.

“A simple black dress is far more stylish with a chunky cuff, dramatic necklace or stunning earrings. It’s also a more affordable and stylish way to follow trends. Invest in a well-cut blazer, and every woman should also own a pair of Spanx and a correct-fitting, multi-function bra to smooth out lumps and bumps. And finally, if you’re trying on new clothes it should be love at first fit. If you’re dithering in a fitting room – walk away. You want gasps, not blah!”

■ Emma’s hair and make-up by Lehane Reed at Tonic, Pontypool

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