

STEP INTO MY PARLOUR



By Shaun Proulx

SHAUN PROULX TALKS TO ISAAC MIZRAHI

Yikes! Stepping into Ultra Supper Club off a relatively sane Queen Street West last Wednesday evening is instant sensory overload. The space is packed and it's too loud to even think. Looking around, most eyes are trained to one corner, where flamboyant fashion designer **Isaac Mizrahi** is giving an on-camera interview.

To say his presence has caused a commotion would be an understatement.



Fresh off his success creating affordable clothing for Target in the United States, Mizrahi is in Toronto to celebrate the launch of his line for Fairweather. His interview finished, handlers take the designer through the crowd to a roped-off area at the back of Ultra, where he'll now do off-camera interviews. Although my time with him is slated for 8:10, it's almost another hour before we actually chat.

Waiting isn't pretty. A multitude of media folks are packed in together, impatient for their turn. An editor of a local glossy becomes so belligerent with a PR person he is told by security to leave. The crowdedness is exacerbated by the fact that we're also stuck in the middle of the path to the club's washrooms and it seems like the whole place suddenly has to pee. The resulting constant pushing and shoving, plus being ordered by security to move further back grates fast. Then, as my turn to sit down with Mizrahi finally arrives, I overhear his people ask him if he wants to take a break and grab some dinner. Shit.

Luckily he declines, and I'm waved in past the ropes for some face time. Dressed in a black suit with a black GAP polo shirt underneath, his bare feet in Nike sneakers, Mizrahi sports a sparkling diamond anklet on his left leg that is impossible to miss. A man who exploded upon the fashion scene in the late 80's, he continues to survive in the cutthroat industry, while also forging ahead as a creative bon-vivant despite tremendous career ups and downs. Besides still designing clothes, he

hosts a talk show on the Style Network in the U.S. and acts as an awards show red-carpet commentator. The chatty Mizrahi shared his thoughts with me on what it's like to be finally doing what he really enjoys, also recalling a moment in time with his infamous mother, and a certain scandal involving Scarlett Johansen's breast.



How are you coping with this pandemonium?



I'm fine.



You like this?



I love it.



What's your sign that you can enjoy this?



I'm a Libra, what's yours?



Leo.



Oh a Leo! I love Leos.



It's been fun to watch all your new successes, especially after you ended up shutting your label down years ago.



Thank you. I have to say, though, success is very relative. This is a very personal success. You know, when I first burst on the fashion scene in 1987, I was like a great thing for me, those first five or six years. But then later it just became stale. I wasn't doing what I really wanted to do.



Which was what?



What I discovered later: A whole *multitude* of things



You're sure doing a multitude of things now.



For better or worse, it pleases me. It also has its moments of terrible, sad despair, you know? But for the most part it feels right. I was trapped in that world, so I wasn't as successful as you may think. You know what I mean?



The illusion was there.



That's right, the illusion was there.



You're in the media all the time; a documentary is produced about you ...



Blah, blah, right, right, right. I feel like I've been in the media since, just as much if not more.



When Chanel pulled their financing of your label, when that happened, did you count yourself out? Did others count you out, do you think?



I don't remember. I never counted myself out – who would? Who would count themselves out? That made me sad in some ways. That made me sad, you know, because I loved the people I worked with, I loved the people in the fashion business, all those people I was with who helped me. All those great friends. But I was also excited because I thought 'Hurray, I'm going to have more time to write scripts I want to write. I will have more time to develop a talk show', which I really wanted to develop.



The show you're doing now.



That's right. I also feel much more relevant as a designer now because I'm doing exactly what I want to do. All the clothes are very, very relevant in the market. The couture thing for Bergdorf Goodman, that's a *thrill*. And I'm doing menswear for them now.



There is a god. So there's Stella McCartney and Karl Lagerfeld doing lines for H&M, and we've got you doing lines for Target and Fairweather –



Excuse me. You have ME at Target and Fairweather, followed behind me - in flats, while I was in platform shoes - by *them* at H&M.



Colour me corrected.



(Laughs.)




Is this the democratization of fashion? Why is a woman going to spend \$7000 on one of your dresses when she can get something for a couple hundred with your name on it somewhere else?



Because she really understands it, that's why she'll pay \$7000. Because she has to have it, right? But it's not for everybody.




My friend and I are co-producing a documentary and we just happened to have picked up *Unzipped* not long ago. I wonder if you have any regrets about it years later.



No, I don't regret it. It was before any of that reality television, before anything, right? I love it. You don't like it?




No, I love it too. I've seen it about four times.




What would be regretful about it?




You exposed so much of yourself at such an early time in your career life, for one thing.



I think if you have a sense of humour about yourself, it's all fine. I think also, frankly, if you have a strong enough sense of self you understand that that was a public version of me. My mother said the greatest thing in the world, years ago when it first came out. Because she's in the movie, right? We were walking down the street, having a fight, actually. We were fighting about something. As usual. And this young lady came up to us and said, 'Oh my god, Isaac Mizrahi, I love you love you love you,' and then turns to my mother, 'Oh! Mrs. Mizrahi! I feel as though I know you!' And my mother goes, 'WELL YOU DON'T.' Like that. I was like, 'Oh, hurray!'




I remember in the movie when you find out that another designer is also doing a Nanook of the North theme ...




Yes! Yes!



That was one personal, raw, vulnerable moment you showed the world.



But I go through that all the time. I had this one idea for my couture collection that I was so excited about? And I said to Julio – this fellow who is the design director of my company – I said, 'It's going to be about this one thing,' and he said, 'Oh, someone did that already'. Nooooooooooooo!




Tell me about your talk show.



I love it!




You've got the gift of the gab.



Well, that. But also, I get very bored, very easily. So with this show, things go by very quickly and it's so exciting. I'm finally not bored.



Give me one classic style tip for the masses.



One classic style tip ... *(Thinks.)* Black. I'm sorry. Black. Because who isn't a little fat? You know? If you must be picture perfect, black. Unless you're Kiera Knightly.



Speaking of movie stars, have you enjoyed your red carpet gigs?



I love it! (*Grabs my arm.*)



Are you touching me with the same hand that touched Scarlett Johansen's breast?



(*Giggles.*) Yes, this is the hand. I have to say, I really enjoyed the Golden Globes. That was really fun, but I didn't realize I was being so controversial while I was doing it. I was just having a lot of fun and being myself. I said to Scarlett Johansen, 'Oh, what kind of underwear do you have on?' and she goes, (*coyly*) 'Not much!' and I said, 'Oh, come on, you're wearing a bra,' and I did this! (*Grabs my chest.*) I did this! Then she smiled, and in the moment she enjoyed it.



But then all of a sudden –



But then all of a sudden it became a controversy! But I have to tell you that I think, you know, 70% of the people liked it, and 30% of the people didn't.



Thanks for this Isaac. I was looking forward to it all day.



Thank you, too. And I love your sweater, by the way.