

INSIDE STORY A close-up look at the Australian Front-row seats to crimes of fashion

Staff reporter **Nick Leys**, a man who thought haute couture was a new Hawaiian shirt, joins a real VIP at Fashion Week and finds it's not all bubbles and canapes.

I AM not Anne Hathaway. This abundantly obvious fact has been made clear to me several times a day over the past seven days as I have taken a seat in the front row of Australian Fashion Week and witnessed the parade of flesh, fabric and freaks, the pastiche of air-kissing and attitude from both the cream and the rancid of the fashion industry. Every single time I have taken my seat on the front bench at the Overseas Passenger Terminal, I have thought about Anne Hathaway, her character in *The Devil Wears Prada* and her bum, how small and delicate it must be, how narrow and perfectly formed, how easily it must be for her to park it on such a tiny bench, crammed in with a hundred others.

I survived Fashion Week and it was all due to Kirstie Clements. Meryl Streep got Anne Hathaway, the editor-in-chief of *Vogue Australia* quips. "I got this big, boofy bloke."

The first rule of Fashion Week is nothing ever starts on time. "They won't start without me," Clements says rather too calmly as our car negotiates rush hour, cross-town traffic to get to a multi-storey car park in Kings Cross.

"They will be late anyway and they won't start the show if I'm not there."

We are 28 minutes late for one of the most anticipated shows of fashion week, Dion Lee, and the editor-in-chief of *Vogue Australia* isn't sitting in the front row because I had nothing to wear. That's the first time in my entire life I have uttered that phrase.

I always have something to wear; I am an Australian male. I have wear suits that smell vaguely of a 1001 nights worth of beer and tobacco. I have a mountain of T-shirts, some of which

don't have stains on them. I have jeans, board shorts, ties, skivvies and a Newtown Jets jersey, none of which will cut it at Fashion Week.

This is why women are always late, of course — the perpetual task of working out what to wear. It takes time to put something on, realise you look like an utter gibberer and take it off again.

Finally I decide on a grey tweed suit, tailored in Vietnam and displaying only one cigarette burn; from several hundred metres on a dark night, it might just look fashionable.

And now we are very late. Our driver, a fashion-week veteran, is wearing Phillip Lim but cornering like Steve McQueen, hitting ramps at speed as she



Flowing: a model struts at Pizzuto

tears down the car park levels. Lee's show is on the bottom level and, as the car is thrown into a vacant spot, music can be heard thumping through the building. This usually signifies "it's on".

"They won't start without me," Clements says once again, this time adding just a little urgency to her mantra and walking not so nonchalantly.

She leads us into what transpires as the backstage area where models are lined up, frocked up and made up, waiting for the signal to hit the catwalk. Then all hell breaks loose.

Stage managers start to chatter urgently into headsets. "She's here, she's here, she's backstage, Kirstie Clements is f---ing backstage."

Clements ignores them, wheeling past make-up tables and heading in the direction of the music, somewhere behind a black shroud.

A hand appears and it is accompanied by the accented voice of Miro Kubicek, Fashion Week's uber door bitch.

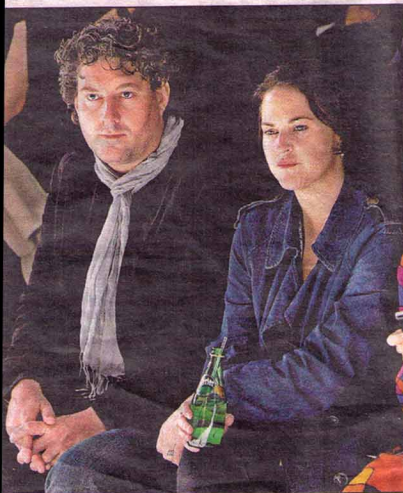
"Kirstie, come here quickly," the Czech-born ex-model says as he guides her by the elbow to her seat. The show can now begin. But it doesn't.

"See, I told you they won't start without us," Clements says. "I wonder if we can send one of them out to get us coffee," she then muses, tongue firmly in cheek.

The second rule of Fashion Week is appearances can be extremely deceiving.

Wayne Cooper is not a designer, Nicola Finetti is a man and a woman can wear a boob tube and miniskirt, made from bubble wrap and almost get away with it.

No matter what you think of Cooper, Australia's geezer bad-boy of the fashion industry, or his clothes, most would consider him



someone who designs for a living. He seems to me to be pretty successful at it. Sitting in the bar at the Park Hyatt and not in the front row of Cooper's show last Monday, Clements tells me this is the case.

Wayne Cooper is not really a fashion designer and he should be in Fashion Week," she says between sips of pinot. The quettes, the team of young fashion types who work for Clements, nod in agreement and screw their noses at the thought of clothes.

Derivative, dull and boring seems to be the general consensus from the troupe, who have boycotted the show for this reason and as a sign of condemnation at Cooper's violent bust-up with his wife, Sarah Marsh.

Anyone attending, I am told, is likely there to collect the new Black-

Berry being handed out in gift bags. Cooper's show, as it turns out when news filters through to us, causes even greater derision from the Vogue team.

Not only did Marsh and the couple's children attend the show, but so did his new squeeze, model Heidi Houghting.

"This is in bad taste, all agree, and the style of the show can only be read as an insult to anyone who takes the fashion game seriously."

Duran Duran's Notorious is the theme and a backdrop at one stage declares that a woman's dress should inspire a man to rip it off. It's hardly a clever message from a bloke trying to convince the world that the assault on his wife was just a bit of a misunderstanding.

As for that bubble-wrap outfit, it makes Cooper's philosophy about ripping off dresses something of a conundrum.

rag trade's frock stars and wannabes



That's me on the left: Reporter Nick Leys with Vogue editor-in-chief Kirstie Clements at Karla Spetic's show last week (left); the powerhouse front row at the Little Black Dress Show — Charlotte Dawson, Sarah Murdoch and Alex Perry (above), and some of the mainstays of the prized seats — Kristy Hinze, The Sartorialist Scott Schuman and Jennifer Hawkins (below right) Pictures: Anthony Reginato, Sam Moco, Ella Pellegrini

The *Vogue*ettes were all in agreement: if you took this admittedly attractive girl home, the impulse might be not to disrobe her but to sit on the edge of the bed popping the night away.

THE third rule of Fashion Week is some people will simply never get fashion. Fashion Week and I reached the critical part in our relationship at the Romance Was Born show at the Sydney Theatre Company on Thursday.

RWB's designers, Luke Sales and Anna Plunkett, are known for their quirky and innovative style and attention to detail and it was a visually arresting show.

Dollies and Pearls, Oysters and Shells fulfilled expectations; tears were shed such was the emotion at intricacy of the outfits. I thought it was hilarious, as if *SpongeBob SquarePants* had

lobbed at Fashion Week, consumed hard drugs and turned his hand to design. Bad act and crochet should never mix.

"It was an extraordinary show, the details, the ideas," Clements tells me when she sees my obvious confusion with the event. "So far ahead of anything else we've seen. They need to be in Paris where they would be embraced. It was couture as good as Galliano."

Clements knows fashion and, as she wipes away the tears, she looks at me with pity, a look that says: "This guy just doesn't get it."

And she's right. In the end, I am like Hathaway and comfortably walk away from the fashion world. Like art, I might not know much about fashion but I know what I like (Jets jumper and boardies). The Devil might wear Prada, but she would be a lot more comfortable if she unbuckled her belt.



KRISTY HINZE



SCOTT SCHUMAN



JEN HAWKINS