

SIMPLY SCHIFFER

At the peak of supermodel mania, Claudia Schiffer was one of the highest paid catwalk models in the world. Now, two decades on, she is still haute property. Sigourney Cantelo chats to her about the importance of family, keeping fit and her new fragrance campaign for Alberta Ferretti. Photographed by Mario Testino.

Claudia Schiffer turns 40 this year. That's actually 80 in fashion years, given that 16-year-olds rule the runway. Yet there's no mistaking her for an octogenarian: Schiffer looks better than ever. Her creamy skin is unlined, her sapphire eyes still sparkle with the energy of youth and her famous curves have given way to a sinewy strength that makes clothes look incredible. It's no wonder she is still very much in demand. Last year, aside from starring in campaigns for Salvatore Ferragamo and Yves Saint Laurent, she juggled multiple cover shoots and an appearance in the documentary *Valentino*. Her latest gig sees her starring as the face of the Alberta Ferretti fragrance campaign.

"I've known Alberta for a very long time and I've got a lot of respect for her as a designer, so when she asked me to collaborate on this fragrance, I said yes immediately. [The scent] is really wonderful. It's exactly like her clothing: very luxurious, very rich [with] soft undertones," says Schiffer from her home in London's Notting Hill. She has just dropped off her children – Caspar, six, and Clementine, five – at school and will pick them up again in the afternoon, something she always tries to do when she's at home. "I try to not travel too much. I'm in a very good position:

I can choose what I want to do and that leaves the rest of the time to be with them," she says.

Schiffer and her film-producer husband Matthew Vaughn divide their time between their London home and a country house where they take long walks, play backgammon and entertain friends. On the estate is a climate-controlled helicopter hangar that houses her extensive clothing library (yes, she is a Virgo) and a growing menagerie: Frank the cocker spaniel, Oscar the German shepherd and Roxy the Irish wolfhound ("she was a wedding gift"), along with two sheep, four chickens, three pigs, four ducks and three tortoises. Back in the city, though, it's supermodel business as usual – fashion parties, editorial shoots and celebrity interviews.

"It's the perfect job, really, if you want to work a little bit but you also want to be with your family." It's perfect now, but Schiffer admits that modelling didn't always seem like such a good fit. "I used to be very, very shy. I'm still shy," she confides. "It must have been in my genes. My mum would always tell the story of whenever [my] parents' friends came over I would roll myself into the curtains and try to stay there and be completely unnoticed," she laughs. "It's weird I'm doing this job: [it's] really more for people who love attention." ►





The eldest of four children, Schiffer was born in Rheinberg, a small German town about an hour out of Düsseldorf. The Schiffers were wealthy and well known in town (her father was a successful lawyer), yet as a young girl the future model tried to keep a low profile. “I did everything in school not to be the centre of attention. I would sit in the back row and be as quiet as possible, so that no-one would notice me.”

When she was 17, a model agent spotted her in a Düsseldorf nightclub. She finished high school and went to Paris with her mother acting as chaperone. (“She met all the photographers and showed me how to travel on the Métro.”) The plan was to model for a year, perfect her French and return to university in Germany.

“We all thought there was no way I was going to make it: I was so shy! In the studio, I hated being the centre of attention [with] the whole team staring, and I would always blush. I thought: ‘They’re going to realise they’ve made a mistake and send me back!’” she recalls with a laugh. “Eventually I got my head around [the fact] that I might stay ...”

It turned out to be a wise (and lucrative) decision. Schiffer scored a Guess jeans campaign before Karl Lagerfeld spotted her in 1990 and she made her runway debut at the Chanel haute couture show. In 1992, she signed a \$10 million cosmetics contract with Revlon. At the time, it was the biggest deal in the history of modelling. Schiffer swiftly earned supermodel status, a title that gave her power, money (she was reportedly earning US\$60,000 a show) and membership in one of the most notorious and elite sisterhoods in history.

“There was camaraderie, as well as competition,” she remembers, “but when this [supermodel] label was given by the press it felt very odd ... it’s only much later that you understand how it stood for a period in the 90s when something special happened.”

Back then, Schiffer says, everything was different. “The business was less commercial. Fashion shows were like rock concerts. I’d come off the runway and Chanel would provide me with five bodyguards to get to my car. Fashion trips used to go for two weeks. Of course, with digital [photography] today it’s much faster. Money is business and time is money.”

Schiffer still catches up with Helena Christensen, Nadja Auermann and fellow Londonites Eva Herzigova and Naomi Campbell. As for the shyness? It’s getting better with age. “I believe it never goes away, but I’ve learnt to cope with it,” she says. “I would never want to be in my 20s again; being very shy is quite a painful experience. Now I feel better about myself and how I am with people.”

Schiffer is equally sanguine about the ageing process: “Everyone is getting old: there’s nothing you can do about it. If you surround yourself

with girlfriends who are the same age then you all age the same and it feels completely natural.”

Schiffer favours a natural approach to most things. She has never had Botox and puts her lack of crow’s feet down to a love affair with moisturiser (she favours botanical-based products) and a smoke-free, water-swilling, organic lifestyle. She sculpts her lithe physique with power walks in the park, the occasional yoga class and three sessions a week of pilates – she’s a regular at Australian trainer David Higgins’s Ten Pilates studio in Notting Hill. “The movements are quite fast, to loud, fun music, and you concentrate so much on it that the hour goes by as if it was just 15 minutes,” she raves. “I’ve always hated working out. In Australia it’s natural to work out from a young age, but in Germany no-one went to any fitness clubs. I didn’t really grow up with that mentality.”

Schiffer is a believer in food-combining, a nutritional concept that recommends certain foods be consumed together for optimal digestion. The main rule is not to mix carbohydrates and proteins in the same meal. Schiffer’s typical daily menu would include quinoa toast for breakfast with jam (“I try not to eat wheat”), pasta or rice with vegetables for lunch and meat or fish with vegetables for dinner. On weekends she’s a little more lax and happy to indulge in a slow roast in the country. Indeed, family life for Schiffer revolves around the weekly escape to the farm.

“Since we got married it became our routine every weekend to go there, to recharge the batteries. It’s something we look forward to every Friday night. There are lots of fireplaces and you just cosy up or go for long walks.” She still speaks in that precise, German way, yet there is a to-the-manor-born British inflection edging in. “We arrive for breakfast in our pyjamas – even if we have friends over – no-one has brushed their teeth or combed their hair. I feel really good then, just completely natural.”

As she talks, you get the sense that Schiffer has entered a new chapter of her life, replacing the high-paced supermodel lifestyle with moments of quiet reflection and escape. Super Schiffer has pared back to simpler Schiffer. Although, as domestically blissed out as she sounds, she has not traded in her passport for pilates and play dates just yet. The business of being Claudia Schiffer will continue well into a ripe-old fashion age – she may even get a letter from the Queen.

“I haven’t made a time when I would like to retire. I really enjoy my work; I’m not going to be happy when it stops. The few days that I do work in the week I really love it and breathe it all in.” She pauses, as if doing just that, before adding: “You only live once, but you want to live your life well. Ideally, I’d like to live my life as healthily as I can so I can be here as long as possible.” ■



SNAPSHOT

Schiffer worked with star fashion photographers Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott on the Alberta Ferretti campaign. “They’re two of the very few best in the world,” she says. “It was fantastic. With Mert and Marcus it would always go smoothly. You don’t have to worry, you can really relax, because you know you’re in the best hands you can be.” Alberta Ferretti Eau de Parfum, 75ml for \$178, is available at selected David Jones and Myer stores nationally.

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