

What Katy did

When Vogue asked Kate Moss, then 18, to pose for a downbeat set of pictures, the press reacted with horror – but a new kind of British fashion photography was born. By Robin Muir

Anti-glamour: In 1993, young photographers began introducing an informal, dressed-down aesthetic to their fashion images, setting themselves apart from the mainstream. David Sims's artfully 'natural' shot of Linda Evangelista (opposite) was taken for Harper's Bazaar in America, and was influenced by Corinne Day's landmark pictures of Kate Moss (this page)



One day in spring 1993, I found myself looking at some remarkable photographs in the art department of *Vogue*. They were for "Under-exposure", an underwear story. "What to Wear Beneath Effort-Free Clothes?" asked *Vogue*. And "Barely-there Underwear, Naturally", it answered. A thin, pellucid and awkward 18-year-old called Kate Moss had been photographed in daylight by her closest friend, the model-turned-photographer Corinne Day on only her second assignment for the magazine. The prints, a dozen or so, spread out on the art room table, were defiantly "anti-glamour", like pale and eerie stills from a gritty documentary, or freeze-frames from someone's home movie. Whatever they were, they weren't fashion photographs. They were raw and natural, completely without "style", in the sense that there was nothing artificial in their conception as there always seemed to be in every other fashion story. Moss's hair was ungroomed, her make-up minimal, and the setting – the West London flat she shared with the photographer and model Mario Sorrenti – was as far removed as you could get from the exotic locations popularly associated with the fashion shoot for *Vogue*. Props were TV remote controls, nylon bedspreads and cheap bedside lamps. But, of course, they were not props at all; they were just there, as they might be in any teenager's bedroom.

They were the most fascinating fashion photographs I had ever seen – and the most unlikely to pop up in *Vogue*. They seemed effortless, like snapshots that, on a good day perhaps, you and I could take. You could do so much without a Hasselblad or a motor drive or legions of assistants. For some of us in the art room that day, fashion photography – in the context of *Vogue* – changed for ever. It certainly changed Corinne Day and Kate Moss, for when the pictures were published three months later, the press greeted them with a tidal wave of hostility. Accusations against Day ranged from child exploitation to promoting anorexia and, incredibly, condoning under-age sex. Kate Moss, who had been nurtured by Day since she was a 15-year-old beginner, never worked with her again, on the instruction of her agent. Few saw past the grimy setting to the innocent beauty in the pictures, or their humour. "American tan tights falling down Kate's legs – we were poking fun at fashion," said Day, adding wistfully, "Half-way through the shoot, I realised that it wasn't fun for her any more, and that she was no longer my best friend but had become a 'model'. She hadn't realised how beautiful she was, and when she did, I found I didn't think her beautiful any more."

The most haunting picture from that series was of Moss's stick-thin body haloed by Christmas-tree lights tacked on to her bedroom wall with masking tape. Four years on, this unassuming masterpiece joins the great works of Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, Horst and Sir Cecil Beaton as part of the Victoria & Albert Museum's collection of fashion photographs. An exhibition of 20 or so recently acquired prints, drawn from the "cutting edge" of the medium, are on show from next month.

That, four years on, Day's photograph looks so uncontroversial, is due largely to the doors that she opened for others. David Sims, Juergen Teller, Craig McDean and Glen Luchford, who ploughed similar furrows in the "underground" magazines and in the