



In the World of Anna Wintour

In her first interview with a German magazine, the legendary *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour gives a rare insight into her personal life, talking about her friendship with the late Karl Lagerfeld, her children, Angela Merkel's suits – and her feelings about *The Devil Wears Prada*

The fashion world's most iconic editor resides at One World Trade Center, the glittering 540-meter tower built on Ground Zero. Her second assistant greets us in the Southern Lobby and takes us to the 28th floor. Here, two women from Wintour's press team meet us in the hallway and lead us through a glass door into a large communal office space. Beige carpets, neon lighting. Anna Wintour's glass-fronted office lies at the end of a corridor.

She gets up from behind her mahogany desk (designed by Alan Buchsbaum) and stretches out her hand to greet us. She seems friendly. She smiles. She is wearing a classic Anna Wintour look: a fitted calf-length Prada dress in multicolored floral silk, three strands of colorful beaded necklaces by Bottega Veneta, an Apple watch, and, of course, her trademark bob, where every strand of hair lies precisely in place. Her other trademark, a pair of Chanel sunglasses, lies on her desk next to an iPad and a laptop. Her office is decorated with black-and-white photographs of her two children, Bee and Charlie, and *Vogue* prints of stars like Lupita Nyong'o and Christy Turlington. From her window she can look down onto the streets of Lower Manhattan. The view is breathtaking. Before we start our interview, she wonders aloud if she has ever spoken to German media before. No, she says, this must be her first time. She leans forward.

You became a global legend when the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* became a box-office hit in 2006. It was based on a book written by a former assistant of yours. She created the infamous character of Miranda Priestly, a cruel boss who liked to wear Prada.

It was fiction (*shrugs*).

Did you watch it?

My daughter and I went to the premiere. We both wore Prada, and we both thoroughly enjoyed it.

What did you like about it?

It was fun. Miuccia (Prada, *editor's note*) and I would have lunch and talk about it. If people want to invent things and put their own ideas of who you might be out there, it's totally fine. It's just not something you can worry about at all. I think it's really, really important to know when to laugh and when to walk away.

Does it bother you that many people see you as unapproachable? Some papers have even called you "nuclear Wintour."

You can't think about it, unless it's something so outrageous that you have to deal with it. I come in to work every day and do the best job that I can. I try to be respectful to everybody who works with me, to my audiences and readers. I'm very fortunate to have this amazing platform and I have a responsibility to use it. So I can't worry about trashy tabloids.

How would you describe your leadership style in your own words?

That's a hard one to answer. I like to be direct, I like to be straightforward, I like to be clear. Having worked with people who didn't make such fast decisions I feel that's very important: If you work with someone who is very clear and communicative, you understand what they're saying and even if you don't agree with their decision, you know what it is. I think that's helpful for the people working with you.

How do you choose the people you work with?

I like people who disagree with me. I like to have lots of different opinions in the room. I like to surround myself with people who

are interesting. When I'm interviewing someone for a position, I always think: Am I going to be pleased to see this person when they walk into my office? Those are my criteria.

A lot of people who come to see you are very nervous about their outfit. Do you judge what they're wearing?

Well, one notices. But what people wear is about self-expression. It's interesting to me when I get a sense that they're not dressing a certain way because I'm interviewing them, but because they're dressing for themselves. That this is real and authentic.

Do you think people might perceive you differently if you were a man?

You mean that there would have been fewer caricatures? Possibly. But I work in a world that so many women work in. I think the fashion world is, frankly, very female-friendly. Look at Karl Lagerfeld. He had more caricatures made of him than anyone, and he was a man!

Karl Lagerfeld died on February 19. His death seems like the end of an era.

Karl was a standard unto himself. He defined what it means to be a twenty-first-century designer, and he did it with humor and joy. It's doubly painful to have lost him because he never fell out of love with his work or with the world, and his death marks the end of the era of craftspeople who could do it all. Karl was the living soul of fashion: restless, forward-looking, and voraciously attentive to our changing culture. He recognized earlier than most that ready-to-wear wasn't just couture-lite but the vibrant center of the new, accomplished woman's lifestyle. At a time when his peers were seeking shelter in fashion houses, he branched out alone as perhaps the world's most dazzling freelancer, designing multiple labels with electric energy. I've joked that Karl was a one-man superbrand, as distinctive as the Chanel suit he imbued with a second life.

You two were very close. What did he mean to you, personally?

Through decades of adventures and misadventures, he was a true and loyal friend. I've worn his beautiful clothes at the most important, emotional moments of my life: at my wedding, at my children's weddings, when I received a damehood from the queen, at the memorial service for Franca Sozzani (*editor's note: the former editor-in-chief of Italian Vogue*). It was partly because of how much I loved his designs, how well they expressed who I was, and what I hoped to be. But partly it was because of Karl. Putting on his exquisite dresses or perfect suits made me feel close to him, and secure in the comfort of a friend at crucial moments. What helps me now is knowing I'll still find him there even when he's gone.

Anna Wintour, 69, is arguably the most powerful woman in fashion. Over the course of her reign at *Vogue*, she has been involved in shaping the careers of designers, models, and photographers, as well as actresses and pop stars. She is a consigliere to some of the greatest designers of our time: Valentino, Donatella Versace, Marc Jacobs, and, of course, the late Karl Lagerfeld. She has also nurtured the talent of designers like Victoria Beckham, Michael Kors, and Erdem Moralioglu. A quiet force behind the scene, she has encouraged big changes at major labels, like reinstating John Galliano at Maison

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Margiela after his fall from grace. Very often, she privately previews collections with the designer before the rest of the industry gets to see them at the shows. It is very common that designers will adjust their collections or even design certain pieces with her in mind.

With a print circulation of 1.2 million, *Vogue* remains the industry's bible, but like other magazines in the digital age, it has faced declining advertising and reader shares, as well as staff cuts. Wintour, who has also been the artistic director of Condé Nast since 2013, was rumored to be leaving *Vogue* last year. The publisher's CEO Bob Sauerberg put an end to the rumors last summer by saying, "Anna Wintour has agreed to work with me indefinitely."

You come from a British media family, your father, Charles, was the editor-in-chief of the *Evening Standard* in London. When you were young, he actually foresaw that you would be the editor of *Vogue* one day. How did he know?

My father was a passionate Fleet Street journalist; at one point, he was putting out 12 editions a day: an early morning edition, an edition for racing, one with just classified ads, another one for real estate. Maybe he was projecting himself onto me a bit when he made that prediction, but I certainly never needed any persuading. I loved his work. My younger brother Patrick is the diplomatic editor of *The Guardian*. Our father's life had a big influence on us.

You grew up in London in the 1960s. What was that like?

In postwar Britain, the idea that a duchess could sit down with a hairdresser for dinner was unheard of. In the late sixties and seventies, all rules broke down. Everything was exploding and changing. Models and designers were becoming superstars. We had the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. The cinema was wonderful. Creatively, it was a very free time. I loved this mix, how all these different worlds were coming together. Growing up, I was immersed in culture and history, and great reporting.

Despite this cultural excitement going on around you, you later left Britain for the US. Why?

Britain was still very much a society in which you were dominated by your accent, by where you went to school and who your parents were. To some degree, this continues to exist. What I love about New York is that it's a choice to come here. Nobody asks who your dad is.

You can define yourself, rather than being defined by your background.

Exactly. Pretty much everybody here is from somewhere else. In the early eighties, I worked as fashion editor for *New York* magazine. At that time, there were many men in charge who weren't comfortable with fashion, design, or lifestyle stories. They were happy to have this young girl there who knew about all these things, so they kept giving me more and more to do.

You became editor of *American Vogue* in 1988. You were 38 at the time. Who showed you the ropes?

Alex Liberman, who was the editorial director of Condé Nast, noticed my work and talked to me some time before I decided to make the change. He was a great foreseer of culture, very interested in the high and the low. I worked with him every single day for a year and a half as creative director of *Vogue* before I briefly went to London to edit British *Vogue*. He taught me so

much about the company and about what *Vogue* stands for. Our chairman, S. I. Newhouse, was also very involved. You felt you weren't working for a corporate giant, but for a family who was passionate and just a phone call away. It sounds crazy but it felt very personal.

It must have been a very different time. Were there many women in positions like yours?

Condé Nast, with magazines like *Glamour* and *Architectural Digest*, is geared towards a female audience, so the organization wasn't as sexist as many others. There were many editors-in-chief who were female. But I remember that journalism overall was a heavily masculine world. Women were relegated to fashion and lifestyle. When we were first covering the presidential campaign, we sent a female reporter, and she was one of only a handful at that time. During the last election, when Secretary Clinton ran, it was all women.

As a British woman, how did you envision the American woman who reads *Vogue*? What did you want her to dream about?

I was very interested in bringing the world to American *Vogue*. We did a lot of trips and traveled to Russia, China, Japan, and India. I really wanted to make the magazine a global destination. I felt it was exciting to talk to our readers about all these different cultures. We just launched an app called *Vogueworld*, which is another extension of that. It looks at street style all over the world. Fashion used to start with couture and then filter down. Now, the influence can come from where you live, and from all over the world. Someone can look fantastic on the streets of Nairobi as much as on the streets of Berlin.

We heard you had a secret Instagram handle. Is that true?

Well, it wouldn't be secret if I told you (*laughs*).

Since 1995, Wintour has been chairing the annual Gala at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. A glamorous fundraising event for the museum's Costume Institute, it brings together Hollywood, the New York social scene, politics, and culture. The Trumps, the Clooneys, and the Kardashians have all been there; pop icons like Beyoncé, Rhianna, Lady Gaga, and Madonna have performed for the guests. To maintain a sense of exclusivity, Wintour keeps a tight cap on the list. It has been reported that 550 people made the cut last year. It is the most sought-after invitation in the fashion and entertainment world.

Wintour's involvement with the so-called Met Ball is a job she executes with an astonishing attention to detail. Everything seems to be signed off by her: the guest list, the choice of each year's co-hosts, the seating arrangements, the dressing of staff as well as many of the red-carpet choices. Last year, single tickets went for 30,000 dollars, the tables went for about 275,000 dollars. According to the *New York Times*, Wintour has raised more than 145 million dollars over the years. Her contribution to the institute is so significant that it was renamed "Anna Wintour Costume Center" in 2014.

What does the Costume Institute and its Met Ball mean to you?

I do it because I love it. The exhibition is conceived by the curator of the Metropolitan Museum, Andrew Bolton. It's a collaboration. I want to make sure that those who support the Met so

generously are given an experience they will hopefully not have anywhere else. When our guests come to the Met they can be more creative in their dress than at other red-carpet events, like the Oscars. It's also a great platform for *Vogue*.

Do you advise the celebrities on their dresses?

We're always happy to help and give an opinion. But a lot of guests are very comfortable choosing what they want to wear themselves. Or they come with a designer. I stand in the receiving line and get to see everybody. You never know what you will get to see.

Are there any taboos?

I'd rather nobody came naked (*laughs*). Apart from that: no. Fashion is self-expression. It's about individuality. Why would you want everyone to be the same?

You've created an iconic look for yourself: a perfectly trimmed bob and a pair of dark sunglasses. Is it true that you get your hair done twice a day during Paris fashion week?

No, just once.

Why do you wear sunglasses indoors?

I don't wear them all the time. But when I do it's because I have a headache. Also, I have bad eyes and it helps me during the shows when it's very bright.

Can you tell us about your daily routine?

I get up between four and five. I work out and do a lot of reading. It's my thinking time. I'm not a late-night person. I sleep a bit more on the weekend.

While running *Vogue* for 30 years, you also raised two children. Bee and Charlie are both in their thirties. How did you manage to balance your work and your family?

They understood from an early age I had a job where I had to travel. When they were little I'd just take them with me. I would also involve them in my work. I'd tell them what I was doing, explain who the characters were and why I had to be there. I also knew that there were times when I just had to be there for them: I would go to every single one of Bee's basketball games and every single one of Charlie's tennis games. Of course, my work is important, but my children always came first and will always come first.

What did that mean for your work schedule?

I was very strict on the weekends – weekends were for the kids. You learn to know that if you go home at a reasonable time every night it's all going to be there the next day. You don't have to stay until midnight. I also think it sets a good example to the people you're working with. It's important to have a personal life and to enjoy your family and friends. It helps you to do your job better. (*She pulls out her iPhone and scrolls through her photos. After a while, she leans over her desk and shows us a picture of her newborn granddaughter, Ella.*) My son has just had his second daughter! (*beams*)

Anna Wintour has taken a close interest in women's issues, covering them in her pages, and supporting women in politics. In 1998, she made Hillary Clinton the first First Lady to be featured on a *Vogue* cover. Her successor, Michelle Obama, has been on the cover three times. Shortly before the last presidential election, Wintour hosted a big fashion-show fundraiser where designers made T-shirts in sup-

port of Hillary Clinton. In an unprecedented move, *Vogue* endorsed her publicly.

The #MeToo movement was widely covered in *Vogue*. Last year, the magazine found itself in the middle of it when the *New York Times* published an exposé about two photographers who had worked with Wintour for years. More than a dozen male models and assistants accused Mario Testino and Bruce Weber of sexual harassment. (Both deny the allegations.) Condé Nast has since suspended working with them. A new code of ethics was passed: It bans the hiring of underage models and requires images involving nudity or sexually suggestive poses to be approved in advance by the model. It also recommends that a model should not be alone with a photographer.

What did you think when you heard about the allegations against Mario Testino and Bruce Weber?

It was a very difficult time, not just for the fashion industry, but for many industries. At Condé Nast we already had a code of conduct, but we examined it in a global context. We interviewed many people in the company to see what we could do better, or if any mistakes had been made along the way. I take full responsibility for not being more aware of what was happening. The behavior as it was told to us was completely unacceptable.

Do you feel that #MeToo has changed the industry much?

I do. I think there is more to be done, but there's been a big call to action in many industries. I think it was remarkable how many women senators and representatives were elected recently. So many young people voted, who didn't vote in 2016, unfortunately. I think a lot of it has to do with this generation.

Are you still in touch with Hillary Clinton?

Of course!

How is she doing?

You know, Secretary Clinton is a very strong woman. I think that she's endured a great deal in her life with great dignity and pride. She's certainly someone I have great respect for.

Have you ever met Angela Merkel?

I wish! I'd love to meet her.

What do you think of her suits?

I think it's very authentic. She looks like Angela Merkel. I'm glad she has this signature look. She looks very in control about who she is. I don't think she's trying to be somebody she is not. I admire that.

Would you ever consider going into politics yourself?

I have my hands full here (*puts her hands on a stack of Vogue magazines*).

Last year, you were seen sitting next to the Queen of England during London fashion week. What did you two talk about?

How long we've both been doing our jobs! (*Laughs*)

Behind the story: The interview was conducted by *ZEIT-magazin* editor Khuê Phạm and freelance writer Elisabeth von Thurn und Taxis. Between 2011 and 2017, von Thurn und Taxis wrote a column for American *Vogue* and was employed by Anna Wintour as style-editor-at-large

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