

# TRULY ORIGINAL

BEFORE GOK, TRINNY & SUSANNAH, AND RACHEL ZOE, THERE WAS CARYN FRANKLIN MBE: STYLE GURU, FASHION EXPERT, CATWALK COMMENTATOR, TV TRAILBLAZER AND 'AGENT OF CHANGE'. IN A NEW IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW WITH *STYLE BIRMINGHAM* EDITOR SARAH DREW JONES, CARYN LIFTS THE LID ON HER 30 YEARS IN THE OFTEN WEIRD BUT ALWAYS WONDERFUL WORLD OF FASHION

**W**hat Caryn Franklin doesn't know about the world of fashion isn't worth knowing. A leading journalist, broadcaster, commentator and, as she says, 'agent of change' since the early 1980s, Caryn knows fashion inside out, especially how vital it is to women's self-confidence. On the eve of *The Clothes Show Live*, with which she's worked for 26 years, Caryn shares a few secrets and hopes for the future of fashion.

### *On the fun of fashion*

I came to fashion in the '80s when it was all about discovering who you were and celebrating all that you could be, not following trends. Fashion then was about personal statement and styling. It's hard for people under 40 to understand, but there was no mass market high street and very little promotion of what was happening on the catwalk.

**London Fashion Week is completely different these days.** I still go to it but not with the same intention to cover everything because you don't have to be there to see it all! It used to be that you couldn't take any of your own pictures: only official photographers, and their pics went to a handful of high fashion magazines who wouldn't write anything about the trends for six months. Fashion and fashion product wasn't 'democratised,' in the way it is today.

**For me, fashion was always about enjoying myself.** Putting something on was a signifier of who you were, and once I got dressed and left the house, I didn't give it a second thought. I loved deep fashion in those days, and changed my hair all the time, shaving my head, having hair extensions, dyeing it black and then white. That's the beauty of youth: having the time to ask

yourself, who am I, what do I stand for and what does that look like?

**What fashion seems to have done is appropriate this voyage of discovery and sell it back to us as a set of seasonal trends and that is something I'm not in love with.** It's the 'corporatisation of creativity', as Debra Bourne, co-founder with me and Erin O'Connor of the All Walks Beyond the Catwalk initiative (allwalks.org) says.

**Is this a golden age for Brit fashion?** Fashion has highs and lows, but 'Brand London' is doing well right now. You can't be on top season after season - some collections will always be better than others - but London is always in the creative zeitgeist. We're in a time where British creativity and London-centric vision is highly desirable. People like Christopher Bailey at Burberry and Stella McCartney are at the top of their game.

**I love new designers.** Their energy excites me more than the big labels. If you work with someone just as they're first stepping out, you're dealing with the integrity of the person not that 'corporatisation of creativity' element. I am always inspired by the creativity of undergraduates, recent graduates and small businesses because I love to see what's emerging. At the start it's all about ideas.

*"Brands should start thinking about other consumers who are hungry for good design"*

### *On women, fashion and confidence*

**Female self-esteem seems to be something that businesses can't grasp.** Key studies show that when women are shown a range of body ideals, they respond to the one they most closely resemble. The retail world can benefit from understanding that. For example, women of colour have been saying for years that they are under-represented and have money to spend, especially in beauty. They want messaging that speaks to them. I believe we're going to see this more and more: women are beginning to demand change from retailers.

**Shoppers have power.** If a retailer is showing you images of unachievable beauty or body shape - showing clothes on very young women who would not wear those clothes in real life, say - I would urge women to vote with their purse and take their business elsewhere. If retailer messaging is ignoring you... why are you still shopping there? The power that we have in deciding where to spend our money can be extremely influential.

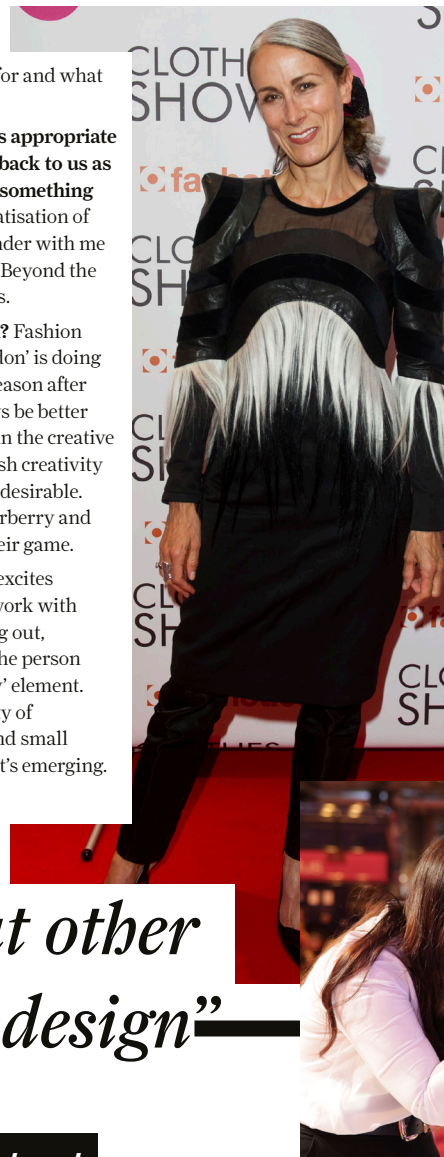
**If you've lost your confidence with fashion and don't know what your style is anymore, start with your self-esteem.** Fashion is a tool for you to use. It takes confidence to say 'that's not going to work for me': it doesn't matter how often fashion editors say it will look great on you, just because they are showing it on an eight stone, six foot model, no-one knows your body better than you do, so start looking for features on garments that will flatter your shape within the trends.

### *On the high street*

**The 18-24 thin, white, party girl aspect of the fashion market is saturated.** Brands should start thinking about other consumers who are hungry for good design. There are a lot of 50-plus women out there who are fashion literate and don't want elasticated trousers! We still don't offer good fashion choices to women above a size 18.

**Marks & Spencer is, though, at least trying to cater for a wider audience.** I heard some mixed comments about its recent Leading Ladies campaign (that featured the likes of Helen Mirren, Emma Thompson and Annie Lennox) and yes, they probably spent way too much money on it but I thought the energy and intention was great. It was an excellent attempt to make a connection with its varied consumer base. There's such a yearning for this age and gender inequality gap to be rectified, that whenever a brand tries - it may be a small drop in the ocean, and therefore it can't right all the wrongs - it gets harshly judged. But if M&S did not receive enough encouragement would we be happy if they reverted to standard fashion models once again? We as consumers have to be careful: we have a big influence. If you want change, get in there with your positive feedback and back it up with your purchases!

**The wonderful independent retailer is now a rarity:** someone who asks women what they like to wear and how clothes fit into their lives. These days, women have less time to spend shopping and so they go mass market: but what they often lose is service, empathy and understanding of them as an individual.



**I'm celebrating 26 years with The Clothes Show Live this year and I have a soft spot for it.** Jeff Banks was instrumental in starting it in the 1980s and he realised that women wanted to experience fashion, not just watch or read about it. Catwalk shows used to take place behind closed doors, but this was a chance for everyone to attend.

**This year, there will be a Platinum Area for discerning consumers who want a more salon-style experience,** in beauty, hair and also in fashion, to see the new ideas that are coming through. This is for women who have opinions about fashion.

**I love the educational element of the show.** We reached out to schools and colleges so we could cater for those students who are perhaps thinking of what to do after sixth form, or considering whether to go to college to pursue a career in the fashion industry. So, we're doing taster seminars with industry experts talking about the broad range of jobs available in the fashion world. Young creatives may think that the only job is to design clothes but there are loads of other options to learn about. An extra addition is our body confidence seminars for young people. Body image is now firmly on the agenda from many enlightened organisations. We have to address the self-esteem of young people and help them to learn

how to deconstruct fashion so that it doesn't affect their confidence.

**The catwalk shows are a brilliant experience.** We have big names such as Henry Holland



## On ethical fashion

**The Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh last year was shocking.** I visited Dhaka, the capital, in June and spoke to women who'd worked at the factory, some of whom had been injured or lost friends and family. It was heartbreaking. I met grandmothers who had lost three members of their family, all the wage-earners and who were now charged with looking after children orphaned by the tragedy. Very few of the British fashion companies had paid any compensation. I know that few people who love fashion would want a situation like this, just so that they can buy cheap clothing. We trust retailers to do the right thing and treat their workers well, but it's about the drive to get sales up and margins down. The human factor is taken out of the process.

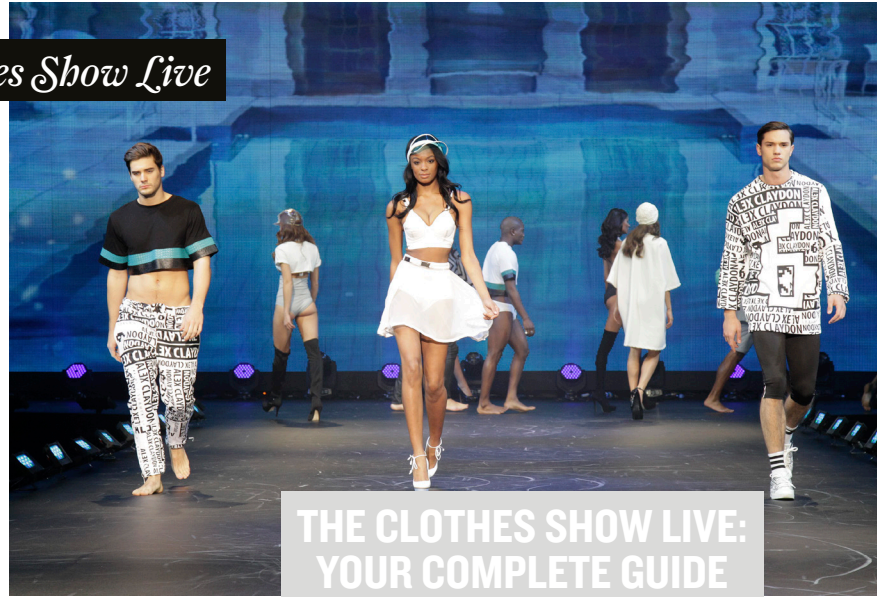
**My favourite high street store is COS,** and I always say to the person serving me, what else can you tell me about how this is produced? What can you tell me to reassure me that the money I'm spending goes back to the maker? I believe that most consumers would rather pay more and know that it's going to create a living wage for the people who make the clothes. I'm full of sympathy for the fashion consumer: we're all so busy with so many demands on our time, we leave it to the retailer to act with honour.

## On the Clothes Show Live

hosting, and it's very exciting. It's great to be involved in such a massive event, where people of all ages can come and experience fashion, have fun, see what's new and innovative and, let's not forget, take home some bargains!

**We want visitors to take pride in products that have been made here, so this year we've linked up with the Made in Britain initiative.** It celebrates factories that are

not too far away, for example, I've been working with Jack Masters Knitwear, a first generation Asian, family-run, company in Leicester. I visited and talked to some of the employees who proudly told me they'd been with the company for 20 years because it was such a great place to work. They supply many of the big high street brands, and are a British success story. This year, we ran a competition to design a Christmas jumper and the winning design will be available to buy from the Jack Masters stand at the show. British fashion producers are very proud of what they do, and we should be proud of them too.



## THE CLOTHES SHOW LIVE: YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE

The Clothes Show Live in association with Alcatel Onetouch returns to the NEC Birmingham from December 5-9 2014. With more than 500 leading fashion and beauty brands, it's the ultimate day out. Some of the highlights:



**CATWALK SHOWS:** Fashion designer **Henry Holland**, broadcaster and writer **Rick Edwards**, and Chelsea favourite Jamie Laing will present the runway shows, joined by girl band **Neon Jungle** on Friday 5, and British breakthrough singer-songwriter **Jetta** on Saturday 6.

**SHOPPING HAVEN:** Shop from more than 500 pop-up shops and discover vintage collections, one off boutiques, leading fashion brands and emerging designers.

**HAIR AND BEAUTY TREATS:** The Beauty Hall offers brands such as **Models Own**, **Barry M**, **Elemis**, **Ciate** and **bareMinerals**, and you can pick up the latest tips, tricks and tutorials from industry experts in exclusive hair and beauty demonstrations.

**FASHION EXPERTS:** From legendary British fashion journalist **Hilary Alexander OBE**, to **Dame Zandra Rhodes**, TV presenter, fashion stylist and writer **Antonia O'Brien** and of course, fashion communicator and Clothes Show Live Ambassador, **Caryn Franklin MBE**, there will be plenty of expert advice and interaction on offer.

**THE 'FACE OF'...** Having already spotted the likes of Erin O'Connor and Holly Willoughby, top model scouts from **Select Model Management** will be looking for the next 'face of' Clothes Show Live in association with **Barry M**, to front next year's Bright Young Things campaign.

**THE 'PLATINUM' EXPERIENCE:** Platinum ticket holders can relax in the **Saks Platinum Pamper Lounge** in association with **Cosmopolitan**. Treat yourself to a mini manicure or luxury blow dry from a top Saks salon stylist.

For more information or to buy tickets to this year's show, visit [clotheshowlive.com](http://clotheshowlive.com)

**I have a lot of clothes from sustainable fashion label Junky Styling** which deconstructs and re-makes pre-loved clothes to give them a new lease of wear. I take in my clothes and they re-make them, because though the trend may have passed, the quality of the fabric was great and I loved it. Ada Zanditon is another sustainable designer I love. I also buy from Vivienne Westwood in the sale, and I buy a lot of vintage and secondhand these days. I have an extensive wardrobe of pieces from friends who are designers. I have always bought classic pieces from studio sales and I add embellishments now and then.

**Clothes are art.** I don't want to engage with a whole new wardrobe every season, and when you've spent money on fashion you want to hang onto it, like a painting on your wall. Clothes are memories and a comfort blanket. I have a pair of delicious Georgina Goodman shoes on my bookshelf. I have a lot of pristine 'stage shoes' that I wear when I give talks and presentations: often when you're on stage, shoes are at the audience's eye level, and you don't have to run for a bus in them, so they don't have to be practical! Shoes, unlike handbags, retain their curves and beauty when not being worn: they're like sculpture.