

COVER
STAR

Victoria Beckham

'I'm really good value at a dinner party – I want to relax and have a laugh. I like to have fun, and I think that often surprises people'

Words **Lotte Jeffs** Photography **Kerry Hallihan** Styling **Alison Edmond**

WHEN WE MEET AT HER SOUTH-WEST LONDON DESIGN STUDIO, Victoria Beckham, 43, is wearing an oversized cream jumper. As she talks – carefully, pointedly, knowing that every sentence is a potential tabloid headline – she frequently shrinks into her polo neck, pulling it up so only her hyper-alert eyes are visible. She warms up after I spill a cup of peppermint tea on the carpet (“When you have kids, nothing is sacred”), and answers my questions with warmth and humour. Her large, private office is in the middle of the workshop. Having just launched her first high-street collaboration with US retailer Target (her elevated everyday style for women and kids at an accessible price point), she and the team are busy putting the finishing touches to the autumn/winter collection she will show in New York the following week. ‘Emancipation with optimism’ and ‘Feminine with a practical streak’ were how she described her new work, and they are words that must be on her mind as we chat. She comes across as thoughtful – or, as she puts it, ‘intense’ – when discussing world events and a more feminist future for Harper and her three boys, but I’m surprised by her easy rapport. At one point, I jokingly invite her to my flat in Leytonstone for dinner and dancing. She’s so charmingly convincing, I think she might actually come. Better make sure there’s a bottle of her favourite sipping tequila on ice... just in case.

VICTORIA, DO YOU FEEL MORE YOURSELF IN THE WORLD OF FASHION THAN YOU DID IN POP?

Definitely. Being in the Spice Girls was so much fun, but I was never the best singer or dancer. I learned an enormous amount during that time, though: the staging, the lighting, the costumes – the package excited me. But I love fashion – this is what I’m genuinely interested in. >

SATIN BUTTON-DOWN LONG-SLEEVE SHIRT, VICTORIA BECKHAM FOR TARGET. POLYESTER TRACKSUIT BOTTOMS, AND LEATHER TRAINERS, BOTH ADIDAS. GOLD RING (ON RIGHT INDEX FINGER), CLARICE PRICE THOMAS. ALL OTHER JEWELLERY, VICTORIA'S OWN



BLACK WOOL JUMPER,
ALAÏA AT BROWNS.
GOLD RING (ON RIGHT
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HAS WORKING IN FASHION MADE YOU HAPPIER?

It has, because I feel fulfilled creatively, and that's reflected in the way I conduct myself, the way I dress. When I look back at my past self, [the way I dressed and behaved] was probably a sign of many insecurities. I feel quite confident in myself now – getting older doesn't bother me.

YOUR STYLE HAS CERTAINLY EVOLVED SINCE THE NINETIES...

I don't even consider the 'me' from back then the same person I am now. I saw Tom Ford on a plane recently, and he said: 'I don't look at you when you were in the Spice Girls and connect that person with you now – you're such a different person.'

DID YOU HAVE TO FIGHT TO GET THE RESPECT YOU HAVE NOW IN THE FASHION WORLD?

I knew people had preconceptions. I was in a pop group and was married to a footballer – and no one was more aware of that than me. But nobody was mean. I was probably quite naive at first. Now, I think, 'God, that took some balls!', but at the time I really didn't see it that way.

YOU'VE ADMITTED TO BEING A PERFECTIONIST. HAVE YOU LEARNED TO LET GO?

I *am* a perfectionist, and I like to be in control, but there are unavoidable situations where I am not in control, and I just have to learn to deal with that. I am getting better at that as I get older, as well as delegating.

WHEN DO YOU FEEL YOU'RE NOT IN CONTROL?

When I'm out and there are paparazzi around. I probably look the way I do when you put a control freak in an out-of-control situation – a bit like a fish out of water.

HAVE YOU LEARNED HOW TO ACCEPT THAT SOME THINGS MAY NEVER BE PERFECT?

As my brand gets bigger, it's difficult to really focus on the tiny things and perfect everything. You do have to delegate, because it's about the bigger picture. Plus, I tend to embrace imperfection more than I used to, because I think my taste has evolved. Things that weren't perfect that used to bother me, I find beauty in them now.

DO YOU EVER FEEL ANXIOUS BEFORE YOUR RUNWAY SHOWS?

Yes! Before the show you are constantly questioning yourself. An enormous amount of work goes into it – more than most people would think. And it's not just the clothes – it's the casting, the music, the venue. So many people put

in a lot of time, effort and energy away from their families to create a collection. So I'm nervous. There's that element of excitement as well, and adrenaline. You throw all those emotions into the pot.

HOW DOES ANXIETY MANIFEST ITSELF IN YOU? DO YOU LOSE YOUR TEMPER WITH PEOPLE?

No, I try not to be snappy – I don't think that gets you anywhere. It's probably difficult to recognise in yourself how stress affects you. I'm always quite intense, so maybe I get a bit more so.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY INTENSE?

I am passionate, because there's a lot of pressure, but I recognise that can be my strength in certain areas, and it's also possibly my weakness in others.

DO YOU REALLY GO TO THE GYM TWICE A DAY?

Normally, I wake up, do half my workout – an hour – wake the kids up, give them their breakfast, take them to school, come back, do another hour, quickly shower, and then come into work. I get a lot of ideas at the gym – that is *my* time. And then, when I get in from work, it's tea-time, bath time, homework time, bedtime, then if Brooklyn is home I want to talk to him. So I don't really get any time in the evening.

DO YOU LISTEN TO MUSIC WHILE YOU WORK OUT?

I actually watch TV shows, because I never do that when I'm home. At the moment I'm catching up with *The Killing* while I'm on the treadmill.

WHEN YOU'RE IN NEW YORK FOR FASHION WEEK, DOES DAVID DO MORE OF THE CHILDCARE?

Yes, he's great. During fashion week, when I'm working, the children will be in New York and he's already planned to take them to the museum then out for dinner on the Saturday night, so he is very good at that sort of thing – as am I. That's how you can show your support in a marriage, by saying, 'You know what, I've got this.' That's what makes a good partnership.

DOES DAVID DO MOST OF THE COOKING AT HOME?

It depends who's home first. He's a better cook than I am, for sure!

WHEN YOU ARE ALL TOGETHER AS A FAMILY, IS IT IMPORTANT TO COMMUNICATE WITHOUT THE DISTRACTION OF PHONES?

It is, but when you're running a company, it's not easy to just switch off your phone – there will always be emails or things needing approval.

IS DAVID EVER, LIKE, 'PUT YOUR BLOODY PHONE DOWN!'

David and I both respect that each of us is very, very busy; we are both running big businesses, but we do put the phones down, and sometimes we just talk. When David was on *Desert Island Discs* on Radio 4 recently, it was great to sit as a family and listen.

DID HE AGONISE OVER HIS RECORD CHOICES?

I thought his song choices were great. I was talking to my parents about it and they said, 'Why did he pick The Rolling Stones? He didn't like that song.' And I said, 'It wasn't about what he liked, it was about the songs that were relevant to him at certain times in his career.'

WHAT WOULD YOUR THREE DESERT ISLAND DISCS BE?

The Way You Look Tonight – my wedding song; *Sir Duke* by Stevie Wonder, as I listened to it all the time with my dad growing up and we would sing along; then it's got to be *Wannabe*. I remember when it >

NUDE COTTON BODY,
AGENT PROVOCATEUR.
GOLD RING (JUST
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was number one for months over the summer and my parents would be having barbecues and playing it to their friends. It reminds me how happy the girls and I were and what a special time it was for us all.

ARE YOU AS HARD ON YOUR CHILDREN AS YOU ARE ON YOURSELF?

I wouldn't say I'm hard. I like to do what I can to instil a good work ethic, and we show the kids that life is about working hard – David and I both work extremely hard. But kids are kids.

DO YOU HAVE TO BATTLE TO GET THEM TO DO THEIR HOMEWORK?

Very few children want to do their homework! I think it's important that they try their best. But, especially in London, there's a lot of pressure on children academically, being tutored and fighting for school places. There is an upside to that, of course, but you can also put a child off learning. I don't know if I'm doing it right, but for me it's about empowering and supporting the kids.

IT MUST BE SO INTERESTING TO SEE THEM BECOMING THEIR OWN PEOPLE...

It is great, because we spend a lot of time with the children as individuals. We are lucky – we can only do that because we have help. So, Romeo loves his tennis – that is all he wants to do, Brooklyn has his photography, Cruz has his music, and Harper loves ballet and also chess, which she plays at school. We are in a position where we can afford for them to try different things and figure out what their passions are. It is difficult for most families to do that. If I were taking Romeo to tennis and Harper to ballet, it would be very difficult.

WHEN YOU'RE NOT WITH THE FAMILY AND ARE OUT SOCIALLY, WHAT'S YOUR VIBE?

I don't tend to go to parties, but if I do go out for dinner, I like to have a drink and really have fun.

SO YOU ENJOY LETTING YOUR HAIR DOWN?

Yes, I'm not one of these antisocial, awkward sorts. I'm really good value at a dinner party – I want to relax and have a laugh. I like to have fun, and I think that often surprises people.

WHAT'S YOUR DRINK?

A clear sipping tequila. So you only need to have one and you're merry!

DO YOU GO TO NIGHTCLUBS?

I would never be in a nightclub, ever – not any more. I like to talk with people that interest me, and you can't really do that in a club.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE DINNER PARTIES WHERE SOMEONE PUTS RIHANNA ON AND EVERYONE STARTS DANCING?

No, I'm not so sure I would go there.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU HAD A GOOD DANCE?

It was at Christmas, on holiday in the Maldives. By total coincidence, Melanie C was performing, so obviously I got up and joined in. The place we were staying at had hired Melanie to sing on New Year's Eve. It was reported that it was my party and I'd hired her, which wasn't quite right. I got up and sang with Melanie. We had the best night because all the kids were there, David was there, and a few friends, too.

DO YOUR KIDS THINK YOU'RE COOL?

When it comes to the shows, they think I'm quite cool – the first time they went, they were surprised at the scale: the girls, the fashion, the energy and the excitement. But David and I were joking about this because, until Brooklyn learned to drive himself, he used to ask David to drop him at the end of the road on the school run, and I said, 'If you think David Beckham is uncool as your dad, what hope does every other father in the world have?' So I don't know if they think we're cool. I mean, hopefully we're not embarrassing.

THEY ALL SEEM QUITE FASHION SAVVY AS WELL

They all have their own little style going on. Cruz will spend a long time doing his hair before he goes out. They know it means a lot to me.

WOULD YOU EVER SAY TO THEM, 'ARE YOU SURE ABOUT WEARING THAT SHIRT?'

No, not really. As long as they look appropriate, that's the thing.

CAN YOU IMAGINE EVER TELLING HARPER HER SKIRT IS TOO SHORT AND SHE CAN'T GO OUT IN IT?

Well, hopefully she's not going to want to wear short skirts.

BUT KIDS REBEL SOMETIMES, DON'T THEY?

Maybe, but I don't know. When I used to want to wear short skirts and dresses, that's how people were dressing. I'm not sure it's the same now. Is it cool for young girls to wear tons of make-up these days? Surely the women that young girls look up to don't tend to plaster themselves in make-up?

HAVE YOU SEEN THE YOUTUBE VLOGGERS WHO ARE ALL ABOUT CRAZY CONTOURING, NOT TO MENTION THE KARDASHIANS?

I try not to think about that as inspiring, to be honest.

DO YOU TRY TO PROTECT YOUR DAUGHTER FROM THOSE SORTS OF INFLUENCES?

I think it's getting the balance right, not stifling them and then ending up with a child that rebels. I say to her, 'Harper, it's not who's the prettiest girl in the class, it's not even who is the smartest girl in the class, it's who is the nicest and most hard-working girl in the class.' I don't like her to focus too much on her appearance.

It was funny, the other day Harper said, 'I'd like you to come to my gallery opening.' So I went into the lounge and she had coloured lots of pictures, pulled them out of the book and laid them out on the armoire, and she wanted us to come to the 'gallery'. She had made little tickets, and she was selling her pieces of art. Then, later, she said, 'I'm just going to go into the lounge and do some yoga.'



WHITE COTTON SHIRT,
PORT. ALL JEWELLERY,
VICTORIA'S OWN

I SAW A REALLY CUTE PICTURE THAT YOU POSTED OF YOURSELF AND HARPER ON THE DAY OF THE WOMEN'S MARCH IN JANUARY. WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE GONE ON THAT MARCH?

I support the march and I think I have other ways of showing that, because it's not easy when it's a Saturday, you have four children and you're doing tennis and ballet, and this and that. So, I couldn't go and, also, I think David was away. But I think it's about doing what you can to show your support.

DO YOU TALK TO HARPER ABOUT WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE HISTORY OF THAT STRUGGLE?

You touch on it because you have to, and that's not just with Harper – that's with the boys as well. But I think it's more about how men and women should be equal and both respected as such.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF POLITICALLY ENGAGED?

I'd say yes. We have been talking a lot about this because, obviously, we are about to go to New York, so I think you have to be aware [of what's happening politically in the US] – it's all very frightening. But you need to be optimistic. I also have to be careful about everything I say, because I can't say something and it go unnoticed.

WE'RE CERTAINLY EXPERIENCING A LOT OF 'CHANGE'...

Well, I think the scary thing is it's not even about change. It's really frightening that we are regressing, so I think this is a time to be as positive as we can.

WHAT ARE YOU READING AT THE MOMENT?

Bloody *A Little Life*, by Hanya Yanagihara, on my Kindle. It's so great, but I rarely get the opportunity to read more than a page – at night I'll fall asleep with it on my chest. So I'm ploughing through that right now.

ARE YOU A SPIRITUAL PERSON AT ALL?

I believe in positive energy. I meditate when I have time. It's just about positive energy, and putting that out into the universe.

I KNOW YOU LIKE TO COLLECT ART...

We like a lot of contemporary Japanese artists, such as Yoshitomo Nara – art with a certain 'learning' to it. I also love Ed Ruscha, Cyprien Gaillard and Oscar Murillo. We don't have any Murillo artworks, but we've looked into it.

WHAT DOES BUYING ART MEAN TO YOU?

When I was young – in the Spice Girls days – I always liked art but didn't really understand it. I went to Elton John's house once and said, 'That's a huge amount of money to spend on something that hangs on the wall,' and he said, 'Yes, but when I look at that it gives me so much joy, and that is the value.' It's very true.

DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE A GOOD INSTINCT?

Yes. Simon Fuller says I have the best instinct he has ever known. I like to surround myself with great people, but I tend to go with my instinct. I think a woman's instinct never lets her down, and you don't really learn the true meaning of that until you get older. I don't always pretend to know the right thing, though. I've had a couple of situations recently where I have said, 'I don't know, I need to be guided by the professionals I surround myself with.' So I'm learning.

DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS FROM HOME GROWING UP THAT YOU'RE STILL IN TOUCH WITH?

I'm very close to my sister and a friend I went to school with, and then three or four others. I think a true friend understands that you can't see them as much as you might want, because they're busy as well. Everyone I'm friends with has a career and a family.

DO YOU EVER FEEL LONELY?

I am never, ever lonely. I don't have a lot of friends, but I'm surrounded by people I genuinely like to be with. I don't travel much because I don't want to be away from the children and I need to be in the studio. But if I am away, I tend to take that time for a bit of 'self care', and I enjoy being able to sleep because no one is waking me up in the middle of the night. So I never get lonely. It's quite nice, when you're a working mum, to have a night in a hotel... It sounds silly, but when was the last time I lay in a bath? Everything's always so quick, quick, quick!

WHAT KIND OF BOSS DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

I'd like to think I'm nice. I think I have a happy team – they seem to stick around.

HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE NEW MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUE CALLED 'RADICAL CANDOUR', WHERE YOU BLUNTLY TELL SOMEONE WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THEIR PERFORMANCE?

That sounds horrible. I would never, ever do that. I really think you have to be positive; to empower everyone – that's how you get the best out of people.

WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN YOU RETIRE?

I think I will probably always work, because I genuinely really enjoy what I do. In the future, I would like to spend more quality time with my husband – go away for the weekend, that kind of thing.

HOW HAS YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PARENTS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

I have matured, and you see things very differently as you get older. Mum is 65 and Dad is 70, but they are still quite young-spirited; they have a better social life than I do – they're always at the theatre, or going away with friends. I phone my mum every day – I always have – and even after years of travelling the world, if I go to her house, she always wants me to text her that I got home OK.

FINALLY, WHAT IS THE POSHEST THING ABOUT YOU?

The kids always say, 'Don't you think it's funny how doors just open themselves for Mummy?', because quite often there is somebody opening a door for me. That's quite posh, isn't it? ■

Victoria Beckham's collection for Target is now available exclusively outside the US via victoriabeckham.com

WHITE SATIN BUTTON-DOWN LONG-SLEEVE SHIRT, VICTORIA BECKHAM FOR TARGET. BLACK POLYESTER TRACKSUIT BOTTOMS, AND BLACK/WHITE LEATHER TRAINERS, BOTH ADIDAS. GOLD RING (ON RIGHT INDEX FINGER), CLARICE PRICE THOMAS. ALL OTHER JEWELLERY, VICTORIA'S OWN. HAIR: KEN PAVES AT CAREN AGENCY FOR KEN PAVES SALON. MAKE-UP: MEL ARTER AT CLM HAIR AND MAKE-UP USING VICTORIA BECKHAM X ESTÉE LAUDER. MANICURE: TONI JADE. SET DESIGN: TRISH STEPHENSON AT CLM UK. SHOT AT 32 PORTLAND PLACE, LONDON