Photos courtesy of Esther Nash

Esther Nash glamgirl

by P. Reston Manfredi

As a little girl, she fell in love with dress up, often wearing Japanese kimonos and sequined gowns to school. As a teenager, she turned her energy to running boutiques, opening her first store when she was only 18. She has three stores featuring her own designs. Now, Esther Nash is poised to take the fashion world by storm with her unique collection of designs, which she describes as "a combination of James Bond, Las Vegas showgirl and Barbie."

"People are way too boring and mainstream," says Esther. "They need some excitement in their life." So Esther developed her philosophy of complete fun in fashion. Exhibit A on how to add excitement to your life is Esther's Baby Doll collection. There's the rock star gear, which is sequined, painted and shredded, and the clubwear and swimwear designs which scream 1973. Some designs are transformers—one quick zip, a snap, and you can go back and forth from pool to club with ease. The designs are exclusively for those of small and athletic build, and are made to catch the eye. "My motto is, be seen and be remembered. Shine and sparkle like the superstar you are. These clothes are for people who want to make the impression of a lifetime."

Despite the sexy nature of her designs, Esther's done a number of publicity pieces for teen magazines exalting the virtues of virginity until marriage. She herself is an avowed virgin until marriage. "Some people hide behind their clothes and appear conservative, but they may take drugs, smoke, drink and sleep around. It's funny, my values are conservative, but I don't dress conservatively at all."

How not conservative is she? "My prom dress was sheer, trimmed with ostrich feathers and topped with a bustier. I dress like that all the time. People assume I'm into S&M. They're usually shocked to find out I'm a virgin. "I don't sleep that much. I don't watch any TV. I don't smoke, I don't drink, no drugs. I'm a vegetarian. I'm just high on life."

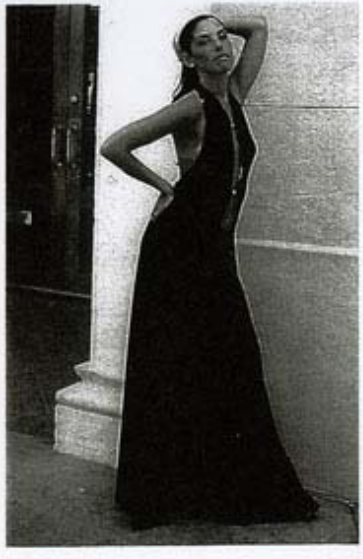
Photos courtesy of Esther Nash

These days, the high life is in Miami, partying with the stars in South Beach. "South Beach is amazing. They have a great party life there. Some of the stars eat under the moonlight. They're wearing nothing. They don't wear any clothes. They like to show off, and share their bodies with everyone."

Esther is currently focusing on selling her designs in resorts and in department stores. She's had fashion shows in nightclubs in New York and Miami and has recently expanded her repertoire in a new direction. "I am now a fashion columnist for the *Sun Post*. I actually covered my own fashion show. That was pretty cool. I gave myself a great review."

Esther grew up in Park Slope, Brooklyn. "My mother's in real estate. My father's in real estate. They were married for 10 years, and divorced when I was three. They're very, very happy separate. They don't get along at all. It's too bad they're not in the fashion industry—that would have made it a lot easier." Her father lives in Greece, and Esther grew up with her mother and sister, two women she says were wonderful role models.

Mom owned the Landmark Pub in Brooklyn, where Esther would sing when she was little and bus tables as she got older. She started making earrings when she was about six, and I sold them in front of the pub. One wonders where she found the time. Besides full time art school and an appearance on *Sesame Street*, she modeled part time. She was a gymnast for ten years, reaching level 8 in competitions (level 9 is the Olympics). There were also five years of ballet and eight years of figure skating. When she stopped those classes, she had to take up running—ten miles a day. "I wasn't exhausted anymore, because I was used to a six-hour workout. So I had to exhaust myself before I could go to sleep." Now, with college classes, fashion shows, writing, modeling and of course promoting her line of clothes, she's plenty tired. She only has time to kick box and do yoga for fun.



Photos courtesy of Esther Nash

How does she do it all? "I've been working really, really hard for a really long time. Since I was little, I made a decision to go to art school. I was lucky that I was talented, and my mother saw it. So I started art classes."

She received scholarships almost every year to top art schools. She went to high school at Calvin Klein's alma mater, New York City's High School of Art and Design. "I'd wear sequined gowns, Indian outfits, Japanese kimonos and hillbilly fun stuff. I've always enjoyed dressing up because it's like you're entering a whole new dimension.

"I loved going to art school; I still love it. It's really great because you can express yourself through your clothes, and people don't really hold you back at all. You can wear whatever you want, and they actually understand you. They're not like, 'Oh my gosh, look what she's wearing,' it's just clothing, and it means nothing. So, it's nice to be able to just relax and have fun, and to enjoy just dressing up in the morning and transforming yourself into whatever you want. It's exciting, I think. That's the way I look at clothes, as dress-up and play time. Just let loose and try out any kind of personality you want."

On the other hand, art school was sometimes tough. "It's very competitive and cut throat. I always had to outdo everyone else. They were very talented, so your work had to be even better to get that A."

It was also sometimes lonely—no time for after school socializing, what with all the classes and tutors. "I never went to school with Jews, and I felt really left out. I wanted to be with my people; I wanted to actually meet some of them. The kids I went to school with were from all different countries, which was great, but no one I went to school with was Jewish. So I studied in Israel for five months my junior year in high school. We lived in Eilat, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Jerusalem. It was a wonderful experience. We went on *tiyuls*, on hiking trips. I learned how to shoot an M16. We were on a kibbutz. It was exciting."

Photos courtesy of Esther Nash

Sister Shelly modeling an Esther ensemble.

High school was the start of her career in fashion. "We had an annual fashion show every year, but it was only for juniors and seniors. But I made a big huff and a puff, so I had my designs put in my freshman year. A lot of people were upset that my designs were in the show, but they liked my designs. And then I actually modeled them. I made my first outfit at 14. After that I was chosen as a designer for sophomore year, junior year and senior year. And my designs were chosen to be shown at Fashion Café. Then we had a fashion show at my sister's law school, raising $13,000 for public interest stipends." By the time she graduated high school, Esther had staged five fashion shows, modeling in them herself because she couldn't afford to hire anyone else. In 1998, Esther decided to open her own store with the money she had saved from modeling and bussing tables in her mom's pub.

"I could have just kept the money and wasted it, or whatever, just kept it, but my mother and my sister thought my dream was always to have a store. So I decided to try it, to see if I liked it. My mother thought it might be a good idea for me to see if I wanted to be in business. It was a good learning experience."

Esther renovated a space in Park Slope with a drill and 15 gallons of paint. "I had my friends come and help me paint. We had a few painting parties. And I decorated and made the store come alive." She called the store Baby Doll, and stocked it with vintage clothing (flea market finds) mostly under $20. The money from the vintage clothing sales went to produce her own designs, which were then featured in the store.

"After that I opened a second store called Sugar Daddy. That was a men's store, because the men were kind of jealous. They'd go to the ladies' store and there wasn't anything for them. So I opened Sugar Daddy right next door. And that went over well. I saved up more money, and I opened a store in Manhattan on 21st street and Fashion Avenue. I had that for a year. After 9/11 we had to close the store."

While running the boutiques, Esther was also working on getting her degree from Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). With six more courses to go, she's almost done. Close enough for *FIT Network*, the alumni magazine, to feature her. "I haven't graduated yet, but they're featuring me, so it's a major honor." And she's also done some teaching of her own,

Photos courtesy of Esther Nash

at the Learning Annex. She taught a seminar on how to open your own boutique.

These days Esther, never one to sit still, has been focusing on new directions. The stores have taken a back seat. "The two stores are closed now. I have to decide if I'm keeping them or I'm not. It takes up a lot of time. It's a big, big responsibility. And I want to work on other things."

She spends a lot of time in Miami, where she's slowly growing a clientele. She wants to get her designs into big department stores. "I don't think it's very easy. A few things happened in South Beach that I don't really like. I don't really want to go to that many smaller boutiques, because a few of them knocked off my designs. They didn't buy them, they didn't put them in the store. Nothing. I showed them to them, and then they stole my ideas. So that's why I'd like to be in the big stores. They don't do that."

At the moment she still has her designs in two boutiques in Italy. She's gaining exposure on the Miami scene with several successful fashion shows in nightclubs. Her stuff is also selling at assorted Manhattan boutiques, and she's hit South America.

"I designed a few pieces for Playboy TV in South America and Iberia, which was very exciting. Some of my designs made *Maxim in Español* magazine, and some of my designs will be in *Muscle Fitness* magazine. I'm also now with a modeling agency. I was scouted in Miami."

She is currently living with her sister in New York. "My sister takes care of all my public relations and my legal work, and I give her free fashion advice. I'm her personal stylist. We had 18 fashion shows at the hot Manhattan venues,—Cheetah, Lava Lounge, Kit Kat, Key Club, System, 151 and Saatchi.

"And now I'm trying my luck out in South Beach. I write for *Sun Post*. It's fun. I'm invited to all these big events. I went to the Versace Mansion—amazing! And the Bill Blass fashion show. At the Fashion awards I met all the big designers—Calvin Klein, Donna Karan. I even met Hillary Clinton."

Next up, she could be studying in Florence or London next year. So much so fast, is she burning out?

"No, but I'm getting a little impatient. I wanted everything to happen already yesterday. But it's not like that. So I keep working hard, and trying to make everything happen."

And she keeps reminding the crowd: "Every woman is a superstar. They just haven't found the right wardrobe yet." *Visit www.babydollboutique.*