



In London Fashion Week, you may be wondering where those supermodels learn to swish so elegantly down the catwalk. Easy — they copy the style of their coach, a boy from the Bronx

Mannequin's best friend

JAY Alexander is black, about 10 feet tall and three inches wide, wears tighter than skin jodhpurs or a chiffon skirt and high glittery shoes, hair scraped into a weeny bun and has lips that confuse UFO spotters. He's the Terry Venables of the modelling world: the man who teaches the top models how to walk, sniff but not eat *pain au chocolat*, move their hips and carry double-faced sticky tape to attach to their stockings to save slipping on high-heeled mules.

Jay is friendly with the supermodels: he air kisses Linda, Naomi and Christy and has Kate Moss to stay. He's taught other big names, including Tatjana Patitz and Karen Mulder. He's the man you see at nearly all the shows with his binoculars. He is as essential for any aspiring model as frayed jeans. In Paris, he's stopped for his autograph.

A model himself ("Initially I thought, 'I'm not beautiful enough to do shows. Ooops, crooked teeth, lips too full, nose too wide.' But it's not how you look but how you move"), he's sometimes asked to show women's clothes. This confuses *les*



THE *Caroline Phillips* INTERVIEW

hommes. "Men come backstage and invite me to dinner." Another time he was stopped at New York customs with ladies' shoes in his bag. "I put them on and marched up and down in customs to prove they were mine," he says, with camp effrontery.

Pinning down Jay is fraught with problems. Castings in Milan, girls flying through Paris, collections getting under way, he explains, in a theatrical 20-minute cross-Channel telephone monologue. "I'm not just teaching a girl to walk, I'm a goddam psychiatrist."

Now we meet in his shared Paris studio in the 19th *arrondissement*. Charismatic Jay stands like a ballet-dancing daddy-longlegs despotically telling his girls that it's *all in the balls* of their feet. He's teaching dark-haired Lucy, 21, from Prague, and blonde Katy, 19, from California, who presumably has dotting parents

who told her she's beautiful.

Now he's showing them how to walk, floating up the catwalk (a tatty red carpet) trailing a mustard chiffon shawl and bobbing his shoulders backwards while shooting admiring glances at the mirror. "What did girls do before I came along?" wails Jay. "Made mistakes."

Katy stalks on to the carpet, apparently with a broom for a spine and a frying pan across her shoulders. "You don't want that foot like that," he admonishes. "Too much softball," she replies.

Jay puts on his coat, a dead ringer for a denim dress, to teach the girls to take a coat off. "You're not carrying a bag of groceries. You *always* unbutton your coat from the bottom up."

"Bottom up," the girls parrot, reverentially.

"And you don't get into a panic when you can't get the buttons undone."

KATY and Lucy are Absolu agency models and have both been in the business six months. Jay estimates Katy will need three two-hour classes just to get the basics. "I won't talk about the cost," he says.

He gives an initiation talk on the terrifying world of modelling. Terrible tales of fat old Parisian women, responsible for booking the models, who stick their fingers inside the measuring tape to stop a girl they don't like getting through. "Ah, ha, I had that done to me," says Katy. Of hitches like seeing "NB" written on model casting lists. "No Blacks." Of a nervous girl vomiting over her Anna Sul clothes before going on.

He tells the story of a girl who broke out in spots undressing backstage next to a supermodel at Christian Lacroix and of a girl shaking with fever. "The designer gave her medicine. This business doesn't give a shit about your mother dropping dead last night."



Supermodel coach Jay Alexander: "It's how you move, not how you look"

Jay reveals all about Casting Moisture. "I have girls coming here smelling like dock workers. Honey, you have to carry baby dry blots." Then there's the awful story of the girl who had *hair* under her arms. "Under her arms," says Katy, in utter dismay. Jay himself has recurring nightmares about waking up with one leg shorter than the other.

Lucy has a bottom that would look large under a microscope. "If you diet, do a healthy one. If you go into a pastry shop, just smell it and walk out. I don't want to see my girls coming out the bathroom with watery eyes. If you eat something, just suck your stomach in."

Different designers require different looks. "Never wear jeans." When a

girl goes to see Givenchy or Yves Saint Laurent, she must wear make-up. "They're old-fashioned houses and *like* red lipstick." Ungaro likes girls to walk just showing their fists. "He hates fingers." Karl Lagerfeld loves personality and Dior elegant girls. "Comme des Garçons and Yamamoto just want you to be dead, no movement."

Jay, the sixth of nine children, was born in a ghetto in South Bronx. He has a white Jewish grandfather (a "Cohen"), titchy-sized parents and a dye company foreman father. Jay trained to be an accountant, moved into designing womenswear and was walking down Madison Avenue when a woman from Giorgio Armani stopped him and said he should model for Jean Paul

Gaultier. "I went to see him and he booked me." So five years ago he found himself sitting backstage, "watching girls wearing things I'd have loved to have worn myself".

His career in teaching began three years ago when Linda Evangelista's estranged husband, Gerald Marie, who runs the Elite Modelling agency in Europe, asked him to help. There are modelling schools, but only one other Jay-style coach, and he's in New York. Jay has trained 50 girls, of whom he says 60 per cent are still working.

Katy, he says, will probably get shows like Daniel Hechter and Kenzo, a fresher look. Lucy will get Lolita Lempicka, Chantal Thomass and, says Jay, "Christian Lacroix, if your body gets right". Lucy gulps.



Evening Standard Literary Lunch

The next Evening Standard Literary Lunch will be held on Thursday 10 March at the Dorchester Hotel. The speakers will be Sir Stephen Spender whose new volume of poems, *Dolphins*, covers his memories of childhood during the First World War and advance to old age; Susan Crosland who has written an exciting novel about the aphrodisiac of power entitled *The Magnates*; and Sandy Gall, whose *News From The Front* is an entralling account of a television reporter's life. The authors will be signing copies of their books after lunch.

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Mutton dressed as lamb — or a

HOW old is too old to wear jeans? A new survey by Mintel Men 2000 brings evidence that more and more middle-aged men are flocking into the shops to buy this sartorial symbol of youth. As the report puts it: "Jeans — traditionally a young man's garment — had one of the highest increases recorded among the 45 to 54-year-olds (from 27 per cent in 1985 to 45 per cent in 1993)."

Why are the past-it some- things trying to cling on to

their youth in this way? They say that if you can remember the Sixties then you weren't there. It could also be said that if you weren't young in the Sixties and you weren't wearing jeans then equally you weren't there.

The trouble is that if you *were* young in the Sixties then you're likely to be between 45 and 54 now. Wearing jeans in the Sixties meant that you had probably turned on, tuned in and dropped out. Now it may demonstrate your

reluctance to wise up, grow up and get real. Even in 1975 J Arthur Rank's, the nightclub in King's Road, Chelsea, was known by mocking adolescents as the haunt of "the 30-year-old teenagers" due to the numbers of jean-wearers who had failed to grow up.

"It's the ski instructor syndrome," sniffs one 45-year-old former groover. "They don't travel. Jeans don't travel between the generations."

Yet perhaps the mutton dressed as lamb stigma is