



Blouse, Pants
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CREATURE OF THE NIGHT SUSANNE BARTSCH

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Mother by day, anomaly by night, Susanne Bartsch can roast a chicken, knit a sweater, and produce one hell of a party. A fashion icon and the empress of New York City nightlife, Bartsch is notorious for exhibiting some of the most extravagant looks seen in the underground club scene and curating an array of eclectic events for over three decades. From Paris to Tokyo, Bartsch is a paragon of embodiment and transformation—providing offbeat venues and spaces for creative creatures and visionaries alike to unify, to dance, and to and express themselves with elegant fluidity. She released her documentary *Susanne Bartsch: On Top* in 2018, created Bartschland Follies, her weekly eclectic risqué show extravaganza at The McKittrick Hotel, and continues to throw elaborate events across the globe.

You were born in Switzerland and moved to London at just 17 years old where you sold antiques and clothing at Chelsea Market. Talk to us about your upbringing and creative background.

My father was a skilled artisan who specialized in furniture. My mother was very encouraging and taught me the value and importance of playing the game. She told me the most important thing was not necessarily coming out on top, but rather the act of participating in life to gain fulfillment. I was born with the fashion bug and was concocting avant-garde ways to accessorize and wear clothes from a young age. I was also a cosmetics maven throughout my teenage years and loved the attention I received

from hometown locals after applying the entire rainbow palette in my eyeshadow when I was around 17 years old. London was simply the place to be for a young girl in Europe who wanted to participate in the swinging youth quake that the city was vibrating with. Like any hipster chick would, I got a job at the grooviest boutique with cute rock-and-roll boys and started knitting sweaters with a young, fashion-forward contemporary flair. Business grew so much that I couldn't keep up and eventually, I moved on to other things.

Who is Susanne Bartsch at her very core and what does she stand for?

I have a picture of myself as a child throwing

a tea party for my dolls. I like to entertain. I like to bring people together and create happy, joyful moments. I have a motherly instinct. Now the dolls are humans, boys dressed up as dolls, girls dressed up as dolls, and everything in between. I'm a social creature and I love creative people, music and dancing. I'm open-minded and like to learn new things. I get excited about new ideas and concepts and new inventions. I love to see young people who are excited about life and the possibilities of the ways in which they might change the world. It feeds my soul, my heart.

What in your personal life has influenced your creative pursuits and the woman you have become?

That's a pretty loaded question and I could go on and on taking all sorts of twists and turns in the answering of it, but for the purpose of this interview I would say the most important part of my personal life is being a mother. I didn't necessarily envision myself sitting around the house with a frying pan and making beds when I embarked in my unusual career. In fact, the life of a Swiss housewife is exactly what I was running away from when I went to London and came to New York, but being a mom has taught me so much about myself. My son Bailey is the creation that I am most proud of. He's taught me patience and humility, and the rewards have been beyond my wildest dreams. You really do learn a deeper level of love when you become a parent and I wouldn't give it up for the world.

Describe your very first experience in a nightclub. Do you remember a specific song or perhaps a particular smell? What prominent feelings arose during the experience?

Hands down, it was the dance floor that blew me away. Being together with huge crowds of people, feeling and moving to the same beat was and still is, a spiritual experience for me. It's like meditation. I also loved all of the flirting that happened. In Switzerland we had these monthly pop night clubs and we would travel for hours to get to them,

but the travel was part of the excitement. The London clubs on the other hand, were definitely it for me because of all the creative and fabulous looks that were going on. There was the Blitz and New Romantic movement where people would have completely different styles and looks every week. Then there was Taboo Leigh Bowery's weekly club night where I got really hooked on the idea of getting dolled up to the nines and hobnobbing and dancing with other like-minded creative young people in London. My first New York nightclub was incredible as well, and perhaps even more so that as it was with Divine, the legendary drag queen personality for the opening of Studio 54. I was decked out in pounds of Egyptian ethnic jewelry and the evening was glamorous and intoxicating. The Gilded Grape in Times Square was also fabulous and one of my favorite clubs ever. The decadence and rawness and unscripted freedom was beyond. There were drag queens flying on trapeze across the room and passing joints to customers. There were no safety nets in sight! Amazing in every way.

In a previous interview you mentioned that space is the most important element when planning an event. What draws you in to a specific venue? Are there any environmental factors you consider?

In terms of venue, I started utilizing places that were either totally over the top, but when I started throwing parties in New York, disco was over and I wanted to bring back the glamour color and energy of it. I'm attracted to spaces that are total dumps or very raw and industrial. I like that built-in edginess or the brand new and glamorous night clubs designed by creative people. They are really cool and give this church-like experience. I can do a lot with very little and have learned many tricks throughout the years. There is so much you can do with lighting, but I'm not big on installing huge overpowering decor that obscures the space. I prefer to spend my budgets hiring really fabulous people to create gorgeous jaw-dropping looks or interesting art

installments as the main element of the party and overall atmosphere.

As a highly creative individual, do you believe that you perceive the world differently from other people? Do you think that any "unusual" thought processes are involved when you are planning a big event?

I'd say the part of me that fuses my creative drive is similar to that of other creative types in the sense that I can be obsessive compulsive about a project once I've embarked on it. When I'm planning a party I don't stop thinking about it. It's on my mind morning, noon, and night. As a Virgo, I'm extremely detail-oriented and I think of details that most people would never even consider. I think about every element of the event, from the invites and staff to what I'm wearing and what the staff is wearing, the lighting and music. I think a lot of creatives have one thing in common though: the ability to visualize their creation. I can see everything in my head before I embark on it.

Are you a spiritual individual and if so, do you think there is a connection between your spiritual or religious self and your own creativity? Do your dreams play a role in your creative process as you envision and plan eccentric parties?

Yes, I'm a very spiritual person and my spirituality is the basis of my business. I'm not a logical entrepreneur or artist and I didn't plan my life in the way that it unfolded. I left much of it up to chance, to the universe if you want to call it that. I believe I'm always being looked after and taken care of. In terms of my dreams influencing my events, not particularly, but they probably influenced everything on a subconscious level. My events are about spirituality. They are about uniting and bringing together all types of people—gay, straight, uptown, downtown, rich, poor, the corporate and creative. And the dancing to me is a spiritual experience on its own.

How much of your creativity and event

planning do you think is motivated by outside considerations, such as approval of others? How much is motivated by your "inner being?"

I never think about trying to please anybody, but I am always thinking about remaining modern, staying fresh, being current. I try not to get stuck on one aesthetic and of course, depending on the client, I have to take certain things into consideration, like their taste. They'll either like it or not, but in the end, I let my inner being decide the final details. They are coming to me to plan the event after all.

What event or project are you most proud of and why?

My Love Ball HIV/AIDS benefits are by far the most powerful events I have ever done. They were created to motivate and inspire the fashion community, which was in denial about the crisis. The events not only brought them together with the Harlem House Ball community who was very affected by AIDS, but they also helped to raise millions of dollars to fight the virus. It was incredibly rewarding.

Who are you main influences and inspirations when it comes to your sense of fashion and personal expression?

Living in London for 13 years really influenced me. There's that sort of mix between very well-tailored and camp, and it fit perfectly with my not-afraid-to-be-totally-off-the-wall-avant-garde-style. I think beyond that, on a day-to-day level, my style is always evolving as I am very inspired by travel and by all the brilliant artists and designers around me. They really feed my creativity and keep me looking at the world with fresh eyes.

Is there anything that you haven't done or pursued yet that you feel compelled to achieve in the future?

I'm launching a lifestyle brand. My first product was couture lashes and my next project is a skin care line that combines organic Swiss lotion and toner recipes with a bit of nightlife pizzazz. My brand could be



Dress THIERRY MUGLER
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best described as bohemian glamour. And to that end, what the lashes and cosmetics are really about is the development of a Susanne Bartsch lifestyle brand, which I am launching with an online shopping site called Bartsch Bazaar. We're starting with a manageable line of accessories for the home and some archive pieces for the fashion-forward customer. Curating extraordinary and unusual things for the fabulous realm of beauty really makes the world a wonderful place to be.

Tell me about the biggest challenges you have faced as an event producer during the pandemic. How have you found ways to continue connecting with your community and doing the things that fuel your soul?

The pandemic has been very difficult for me all around because it totally shut down my business. I feel like a bird that had its wings clipped. I went from doing four events a week and seeing hundreds of people to nothing. To cope and help both myself and my community, I started creating Zoom parties. They enabled me to pay some of my peeps that I worked with for years and keep us a little connected. It was a lot of fun and an excuse to create new looks. Everybody got dressed up and it became a substitute for the real thing. We also raised a lot of money for Black Lives Matter and the Ali Forney Center. I did a Prom for AFC and it was incredibly rewarding. I have really appreciated the support of these parties. In a way, the pandemic was a good thing as it finally forced me to take an extra step and go from life to virtual.

What is the biggest misconception about you?

That I'm sort of a frivolous dingbat party girl, which is a facet of myself that I play up and enjoy immensely when I work my events. I'm a raging freak-fest by night, but really I'm just an old-fashioned girl, a mommy who can roast a chicken and knit a sweater. And I never swear in my native Swiss tongue.

What are some of your favorite things in your wardrobe?

Wigs, heels, and lashes.

If you can send one message to the world what would it be?

Don't let fear run your life. Follow your bliss and blaze your own trail. You'll never win if you never fail.

Corset SPARKYLE
STUDIO @sparkylestudio



Dress BCALLA
@bcallabcalla



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