

ROMAN HOLIDAY

Sipping Chianti and seeing the Colosseum are lovely. But when in Rome, dress (and apply eyeliner) the way the Romans do. **By Danielle Pergament**

The yoga studio on Via della Scala was in a small, crumbling building covered in ivy, and if you weren't looking for it, you'd walk right past. Maybe I should have. There in that cramped room of chatty Italian women I might as well have had a sign with blinking arrows pointing at my head. For starters, I was the only one with 1) a bra, 2) a ponytail, and 3) sweat. I was the only one without 1) an armful of gold bangles, 2) a cell phone, and 3) eye shadow. Working out, actual exercise, seemed somehow untoward in this environment. These women appeared to have gathered in this small studio to lounge around and admire their forms in the mirror. Why wasn't I wearing a clingy cashmere sweater? Where were my hoop earrings? And why had I not thought to wear mascara?

I had been in Rome less than a week, and my expectations of Italian style were being proven wrong in nearly every way. Before I moved there, I got all kinds of advice: "Bring conditioner; it's expensive there." "Wear stilettos—that's how to look really Italian." "Adapters." So there I was in the Eternal City—just me and my Jimmy Choos, voltage converters in every size, an army of heat-styling tools, and enough Frédéric Fekkai Shea Butter to condition half of Vatican City. I couldn't have been less prepared.

I had been educated in Italian style by countless viewings of *La Dolce Vita*. In fact, if there was a movie shot in black and white, filmed in Italy, and starring a busty woman, I'd probably seen it a few times. I had watched with wonder as Sophia Loren defied every discernible law of aging. I had seen the Alitalia ads with exotic-looking women against a backdrop of orange-hued landscapes. My mind



Sophia Loren
in 1955

was full of images of buxom *signoras* with impossibly narrow waistlines, razor-sharp black eyeliner, and hair that fell in long, glossy sheets around their tan shoulders. They were elegant and sophisticated. As far as I was concerned, I was a mere plane ride away from steering my Vespa over the cobblestones of Piazza Venezia, my flouncy skirt and red scarf billowing in the breeze behind me.

But when I arrived, these women, these models of sirenhood, were nowhere to be found. Here's the thing: Fellini died almost two decades ago. And those Alitalia ads didn't feature real Italian women. The ads were playing into a romantic American idea of Italian women—and were made by an advertising company that targets people like me, people who want to live the orange-hued life. True Italian style, as I discovered, is something else entirely.

Women in Italy don't live by the kinds of fashion and beauty precepts that Americans follow. American women use makeup to enhance their natural beauty. We want to seem as if we woke up with these rosy cheeks. Italian women seem to wear makeup to show off their makeup.

Back in New York City, my idea of style had been to look as if I hadn't tried to be stylish. It was a daily struggle. My hair was thermally conditioned to hang long and straight down my back (and if it didn't, I'd blow it out until my arms went numb). My makeup consisted of black mascara combed as many times as necessary to get rid of clumps, followed by undetectable pale pink blush, clear lip gloss, and, if I was feeling wild, pale lilac eye shadow. I treated accessories with great caution. A few years before, a New York City hairstylist had told me, "Never more than one bold and one mild accessory above the neck, like sunglasses and a thin necklace. If you wear hair accessories and sunglasses and makeup and jewelry, you'll look like a Pomeranian." It was advice that stuck.

And now, I was living in a city of Pomeranians. But somehow, as I was slowly learning, abundance made sense here. Rome has always been steeped in excess and eccentricity—a place with a city-hall square designed by Michelangelo, where some police officers wear so much hair gel that they glisten from every angle. I used to wonder who bought those handbags embossed with dinner plate-size logos. Now I know. Back home, these status symbols would seem flashy at the least, and at most a little gaudy, but in Rome, they look as natural as pasta pomodoro.

The women in my yoga class were only the beginning of my schooling. Everywhere I went—to the Piazza Trilussa for my morning *caffè macchiato*, to the newsstand where I bought my paper, to my favorite *enoteca* by the river—I saw these creatures, my Italian counterparts. And I began to

study them, like a zoologist observes a pride of lions. Their eyeliner looked like scrawled-on crayon, their jewelry glittered from neck to wrist, and their hair fell in gloriously messy tangles around their shoulders. The young, sexy women who strutted through the Campo dei Fiori at night didn't teeter over the cobblestones on stilettos—they wore hefty motorcycle boots with paper-thin miniskirts. The older women who walked down Via dei Coronari left contrails of expensive perfume in their wakes. There was no attempt at subtlety. They were all slightly rough around the edges, as if they had stormed out of their apart-

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ment after a fight with their lover. At any given moment—at the store, at the bar, at the gym—the women in Rome were wearing every piece of jewelry in their collection, or so it seemed to me. Plus eye shadow. Plus lipstick. And that was just during the day.

One evening at Da Bolognese, a restaurant with tuxedoed waiters and starched tablecloths, my boyfriend and I sat at a corner table and watched the chicest women in Rome parade by us. I had written about beauty for ten years, and this was like witnessing every makeup trend I'd ever reported on (and a few I hadn't) come to life. There went the bushy eyebrows, the Chianti-stained lips, the multicolored eye shadow, the artfully rumpled hair—not to mention the gold-cuff armbands, thigh-highs, fishnets, and breasts so buoyant they could direct traffic. I looked to Devin for reassurance, but his head was swinging around like a bobblehead doll's.

The women who pulled off these looks seemed incredibly confident and

secure. How could you not be, walking into a room with Cleopatra's eye makeup and Pamela Anderson's cleavage? They even have a name for their rapturous approach to life: *fuoco nelle vene*, fire in the veins. They embrace the calling cards of femininity—perfume, makeup, flowing hair—the same way they do their pasta, their architecture, their fashion. And I wanted in—I wanted to be one of them.

There is freedom in being the stranger who comes to town. When you're an ocean away from familiarity, you can try on a new style as easily as new shoes. It's like when you travel abroad and run into a friend from high school, only to discover that she's playing the role of the artist/goth/Parisian with a baguette under her arm. Sure, you knew her when she was spraying Sun-In on her arm hair, but now she's a French sculptor who replaces her *th*'s with *z*'s. And in my case, what better place to try on a new me than a city where even political posters look like ads for tanning machines?

I went out and bought a sweet little Italian coat—black with white piping and cinched at the waist. I let my hair go wavy. I drew on a reddish lipstick that wasn't the least bit sheer, rubbed soft navy eyeliner around my eyes, and even smudged it a little. I went out on the town to test-drive my new look, and...*niente*. Not a single head turned. Here I was actually wearing the makeup that had always just decorated my bathroom shelves, and the result was totally unremarkable. I was stumped. Even my own boyfriend didn't seem to notice my new look.

Apparently, it takes a lot to make a fashion statement in a land of fashion exclamation points. I was determined to shed my 32 years of restraint. And then I found inspiration. I only saw her for an instant as she crossed Via del Corso, but that was enough. This Italian *signorina* had long, blonde, curly hair and wore a down jacket, snug, dark shorts tugged low on her hips, sheer black stockings decorated with big, loopy swirls, and flat leather boots. And as she dodged traffic, holding on to her (*continued on page 171*)

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boyfriend's hand, she was stunning.

I scoured the city for days, collecting each article of clothing I had seen on my mentor. Leather boots? Check. Sheer black stockings with a weird, loopy pattern? Check. Snug brown shorts with subtle gray-and-black plaid that made my butt look great? Check plus. I replaced the down jacket with a button-down shirt and my boyfriend's striped tie. I scrunched my hair with mousse, put on self-tanner instead of moisturizer, and swept charcoal-colored shadow around my eyes. I wrapped a thin silver chain around my neck and put on earrings: big silver teardrops with dangling beads that made a clicking sound when I shook my head.

That night, I walked into a dinner party at a restaurant and felt as sexy and confident as if I'd been a local. In one glorious evening, I shed my self-consciousness. "Danielle looks different," a Roman friend said. "She looks—I don't know—Italian." Even Devin, who had loved my near-makeup-less face for almost four years, said he felt as if he had a whole new girlfriend, and seemed sweetly nervous around me.

Devin and I have since married, moved back to New York, and had a daughter who bears the burden of my Italian fetish—the name Francesca. I'd like to say that the Roman aesthetic followed me home, but I would be lying. I'm just not the kind of girl who wears sunglasses on an overcast day. As wonderful as it was playing an Italian *signorina*, living it—and drawing that much attention to myself—would be exhausting.

Still, a few days after my experiment, I was crossing Via del Corso and continuing the getup—wavy hair, billowy miniskirt, and last night's eye makeup. I was at nearly the same spot where I had seen my style muse when a young American couple—khaki pants, pocket T-shirts, and map in hand—stopped me. "*Scusa, signora,*" said the man in halting Italian, "*parla Inglese?*" For a second, I was tempted to toss my hair and coyly shake my head. But instead I said, "Yep," and smiled. "I'm from New York." ♦

INTO THE DEEP

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she's for, what she aspires to and wants from life, and Stewart is a little more halting. Like a lot of 19-year-olds of a certain ilk and temperament, she has a number of ideas about what is "real" and how and why this "reality" is so often pushed aside in favor of "bullshit." Her difficulty switching into "interview speak" when it comes to movies that she feels passionate about can make her seem indifferent. That indifference can result in the too-cool-for-school persona, which makes people feel that Stewart doesn't give a damn. In fact, she gives a damn in a big way.

"I spend so much of my time guarding against sounding insincere about something that I would die for," Stewart says. "Maybe I'm overcompensating.... I care so much. And it gets reported as the opposite. And even seeing this [interview], they'll be like, Oh, she's trying to let us know..."

Stewart's voice trails off. She's not sure how to finish the sentence. She plays with her hair and covers her face with her hands and rubs her temples, as though her truest expressions are buried deep under the detritus of press conferences and photo ops and whatever causes her to do things like fling MTV awards across the stage.

"I could not understand the situation that was my life when that moment occurred," Stewart says of the trophy toss. "It was like, 'Nooooo...' Everyone said it was so endearing, but it was horrifying."

If any sentence can encapsulate what it's like to be Kristen Stewart (not that she would approve of anything so reductionistic), it might be that one. There is something unequivocally charming—even enchanting—about her awkward, unhewn affect. But Stewart's lack of interest in coming across as more glamorous or competent—or as the case may be, familiar with the streets of L.A.—can make her life more difficult than it needs to be. Still, when it comes to being 19, the good news is the same as the bad news: It doesn't last forever. Stewart will grow up and, with any luck, get her bearings. And with enough willpower, maybe she'll even stop Googling herself. ♦



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