



Hair by Jaymi-Lynn at Toni &amp; Gray

## A MODEL CITIZEN

From within the fast-paced world of fashion, Liz Bell finds incredible calm.

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IT WAS VANCOUVER'S party of the century, the kind that any burgeoning metropolis' most fashionable wait and yearn for. The day of the event hair salons were packed, you couldn't book a manicure to save your life, and rumours swirled as to which celebrities would make an appearance. That evening, the city's style contingent donned the likes of Chanel, Gucci, D&G and Louboutin, headed downtown to the opening gala of Holt Renfrew, and strutted high fashion down the red carpet for the rest of the local, sartorial world to revere. Meanwhile, in Lions Bay, globally renowned modeling agent Liz Bell picked up her gardening shears and went happily to work.

"That night I picked up my clippers and it was all Zen," explains Bell, the driving force behind Vancouver's highly successful model and talent agency of the same name, and one of the biggest shakers in town when it comes to the world of fashion and beauty. "I see these crazy people and all they do is live and breathe fashion and they're out of their minds, they're ADD. You have to have balance."

Bell should know. The Johannesburg-born, Lions Bay-based former international runway model knows fashion in an intimate capacity that most of us never will. At 21, the tall, brunette beauty had barely set foot in Vancouver when she was scouted by a model agent, and plunked onto catwalks for the world's biggest names in fashion design, a time Bell reminisces happily about.

"Being a [runway model] was so glamorous back then, it was a wonderful life. When I first went to Paris, at every appointment they'd say 'Anouk! Anouk!' I didn't speak French and I thought there was something wrong, but they just thought I looked like Anouk Aimée, the French actress. [Emanuel] Ungaro was dating her then, and they were really in love. I never did any of his shows... maybe because I looked too much like her?" Bell chuckles at the memory, and continues only when pressed for more tales. "The last time I did a Valentino show was in '89. Sophia Loren arrived and Valentino said, 'Look Lizbell (which is what I was called), she's wearing the same dress you wore in the last show.' It was couture, of course. And I remember Karl [Lagerfeld] cutting up furs when he was working for Fendi. Can you imagine?"

Just before her 30th birthday, Bell retired from modeling and decided to parlay her impressive industry contacts into a new career. She launched Lizbell Agency in Vancouver in 1992, after the birth of her second son. Her first office consisted of a

tiny desk in a small space where she, mercifully, wasn't charged rent. For months, Bell worked to make ends meet for daycare and parking, her two "biggest expenses". But the discovery of Canadian model and actress Rachel Roberts was all it took to put Bell's fledgling agency on the fashion map. She has since launched the careers of numerous successful runway and editorial models, such as current ones-to-watch Kate Bock and Noah Mills, most of whom she "passes on" to bigger agencies. "I'd do [the models] a disservice if I just held onto them here, so I just scout and build them. New York and Paris agents trust my eye, and they regularly peruse my website. I can put a model on my site in the morning and get calls from agencies in New York two hours later."

For a model to find success in countries outside of Canada is not just usual, it's expected, explains Bell. "I couldn't get James Neate arrested in this town, but now he's number 17 on the world's top male model list. You have to be international in this business, and you have to be quick. It's always about the next best thing." But there are times when young models don't quite have the confidence levels needed for the international stage. And while Bell has been known to teach her models how to dress by taking them to boutiques and putting together outfits for them, really being able to wear the clothing, says Bell, takes the kind of confidence that only comes with maturity.

Ironically, Bell detests shopping for herself, although that doesn't stop her from making an impressive style statement. "I always say we [in the industry] make fashion, we don't buy fashion. I don't follow trends, I just aim to make my own way, and to look like a million dollars but spend \$20. I admit I shop at Gap. I recently bought those fabulous white shirts that were on the cover of Vogue and wear them with leggings." Bell's look, which could be summed as classic with flair, is punctuated by a beautiful bob haircut that falls longer in the front. "Once you're in your 40s you need a decent haircut or you look like you're going to the dogs."

A proud 46, Bell has no plans to retire any time soon. One can absolutely expect she'll be behind many more gorgeous faces strutting down French and Italian catwalks and smiling out from the pages of the world's glossiest magazines. She also hints at launching a clothing line, but politely demurs on fleshing out the topic more, and nonchalantly changes the subject. For a woman whose professional life changes faster than traffic lights, she comes across as remarkably serene.

"I'm so fortunate," smiles Bell. "I get home and change into my gardening clothes and pick up my shears and I switch off. Then, tomorrow morning, I'm back on again." So one thing about her future is absolutely certain: if you drive by the stunning Lions Bay home Bell shares with her partner, David, the lush gardens will be in impeccable order. **1b** [moziiv.com](http://moziiv.com)