

Anna Chancellor

+ Add to myFT

Personal style: Anna Chancellor



JANUARY 24 2014



Anna Chancellor

My favourite piece of clothing is actually quite new. I've just been with my husband Redha [Debbah] to [Algeria](#) to visit his family and buy some carpets. We ended up in the Atlas Mountains, on the border with Morocco, in a town called Tlemcen – an amazing place with an inner city of crumbling fortress walls. It is a market town, basically. There are no tourists in Algeria, so everything is for the Algerians – it's not like Morocco – and the market was like any normal market, with generic, ordinary clothes, as well as stalls selling nougat and spices. It was exotic and ordinary at the same time. There was this one fantastic little shop owned by an old man selling very traditional, old-fashioned Arabic clothes, prayer mats and beads. He sold *djellabas*, a garment that men wear over their clothes because Tlemcen is very high up and it gets very cold. The *djellabas* were stripy and made out of thick, dense brushed cotton for the blokes – and rather nice for a slightly blokey girl like me.

I'm tall [almost 5ft 9in] and women's clothes don't usually fit me – they end up hovering just above my ankles. But these men's robes were the perfect size. My *djellaba* is navy blue with stripes and a hood. I bought loads, one for everyone in the family. We haven't done a photo line-up yet of everyone wearing them to send back to Redha's family, but we will. If someone calls unexpectedly at our house on a Sunday morning, there's a good chance they'll find all of us wearing them.

Comfort dressing is a big thing for me. When I get home, I like to take off anything that is remotely tight and put on something loose. You also do better in a play when you feel comfortable. In *Private Lives*, the Noël Coward play I have just appeared in, I start out wearing a kimono and a nightie and by the middle scenes I'm in pyjamas (pictured). We were at the costume fitting with Anthony Ward, a wonderful designer, and he pulled out some men's white silk pyjamas, thick and soft with piping around the edges, and they fitted me like a dream. I lucked out with that costume.

Advertisement

When it comes to what I wear as an actress, I will now always fight my corner, whereas when I was younger I didn't. I have worn some terrible things, and some wonderful things. Clothes lead you to many different ideas connected with the character you are playing. As an actor, you are incredibly lucky to experience that. And in the theatre you have amazing people around you who dress you, iron your clothes, fix them when they are broken and hang them in your dressing room every night. It can come as quite a shock, the next day, to find yourself at home rummaging through a drawer looking for a sports bra.

For public appearances I have a friend who doesn't mind coming over to do my make-up. In fact, I think she enjoys it. For clothes, sometimes I just grab what's going, and it can work really well, while at other times I can spend quite a lot of time thinking about it and borrowing things and it just looks OK. The whole thing is a bit hit and miss. Quite often people try to persuade you to wear something that doesn't suit you. It's not their fault, because they don't really know what works for you and probably don't care as much as you do. You only really look nice in your own clothes, especially once you are nearly 50, like I am. By this age your style is too specific – you are just too much yourself.

I was brought up in the 1970s in England's West Country, surrounded by dogs and Barbour jackets. It was all sludge green then. There was this one haven of style nearby, though: an artists' commune called Nettlecombe, which was a very beautiful place with a genuine feeling of creativity. The women there used to make many of their clothes themselves, and there was a lot of hand-dyeing and printmaking. They all looked so glamorous to me.

I was just 22 when I had my daughter, Poppy. I was so poor when I was pregnant that I wore gingham dresses that made me look like I was wearing an enormous tablecloth. Poppy howls with laughter when she sees photographs of me from that time. She is 26 now, has just moved out of home, and takes my clothes. I said to her the other day, "What are we going to do about you stealing everything in my wardrobe?"

I've always been really, really greedy about everything, including clothes. I've spent an enormous amount of money on clothes but always manage to make them look like I've had them for years within a few days. And something even worse: I lose them. I sometimes lie in bed thinking of all the lovely things I've lost.

As told to David Hayes

Advertisement

'Private Lives' is broadcast in UK cinemas

Thursday February 6. [cinemalive.com](#)

Sign up to the weekly FT Weekend email

One-Click Sign Up

Copyright © The Financial Times Limited 2020.

All rights reserved.

Share this article

Reuse this content

Latest on Anna Chancellor

Review **Film**

The Carer – film review

Review **Arts**

Young Chekhov, National Theatre (Olivier), London – 'Superbly staged'

Interview **The Inventory**

Q&A with 'Four Weddings' actor Anna Chancellor

Commenting on this article is temporarily unavailable while we migrate to our new comments system.

Note that this only affects articles published before 28th October 2019.

Follow the topics in this article

Morocco

+ Add to myFT

Algeria

+ Add to myFT

Tlemcen

+ Add to myFT

David Hayes

+ Add to myFT

Anna Chancellor

+ Add to myFT

How easy or hard was it to use FT.com today?

Leave feedback

Support

View Site Tips

Help Centre

About Us

Accessibility

myFT Tour

Careers

Legal & Privacy

Terms & Conditions

Privacy

Cookies

Copyright

Slavery Statement & Polici...

Services

Tools

More from the FT Group >

Markets data delayed by at least 15 minutes. © THE FINANCIAL TIMES

LTD 2020. FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd.

The Financial Times and its journalism are subject to a self-regulation regime under the [FT Editorial Code of Practice](#).

A Nikkei Company