

NEXT UP



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MIA FREEDMAN

Power to the princesses

I can't decide if I want to be a princess or not. Do I? The answer is no when I watch *Australian Princess*. It's not the princessy girls I object to, it's the pompous "experts" who have pedantic views on the etiquette for serving tea and walking in a straight line. It's also a resounding no when I remember I'm a republican.

But as I'm emptying the dishwasher for the fourth time in two days, I can see the appeal. It's been a big week for princesses. Mary gave birth, Prince William went public with his girlfriend (possible future princess) and almost a million people watched the reality show *Australian Princess*.

So where does this princess fixation come from? Let's start by blaming fairytales. From *Sleeping Beauty* to *Cinderella*, the story is always the same: beautiful, wasp-waisted, long-haired babe is rescued from dire situation by handsome prince. Prince has big white teeth, big white horse and whisks babe back to big white castle. There she gets pretty frock, tiara and happily-ever-after life. The end.

There were no dress-up tiaras or tulle fairy frocks for wannabe princesses when I was little. (I never got to wear a tutu in 10 years of ballet concerts. Never was I a princess. One year I was a pumpkin. Another I was a scarecrow. But I'm not bitter.)

Today, fairy dresses are standard attire for all girls under six. Fairy princesses flit charmingly about supermarkets, petrol stations and shopping centres. It always makes me smile, but I'm also a bit jealous.

When I was growing up, the only real-life princess was Princess Anne. She was a huge disappointment. Closer to Bronwyn Bishop than the princesses in my books or imagination, I felt hugely ripped off. Where was her tiara, dammit? Her sparkly shoes and pretty frocks? Her long hair? Her glamorous, twinkly life? Nada. Princess Anne was all helmet hair, sensible shoes, tweedy skirts and horses. With the shallow simplicity of a six-year-old, I could never reconcile her title with her appearance.

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It was something of a relief when Princess Di finally came along, although her hair was still disappointing. But the next couple of decades were brutal ones for princesses. Di's sparkly life imploded with big public humiliations and little dignity before being snuffed out altogether. Princess Caroline was cheated on, divorced, remarried and widowed. Princess Stephanie churned through cheating men with alarming speed. Even Princess Anne and her sensible hair got divorced. Gradually, the princess fantasy bubble deflated.

It was into this vacuum that Mary exploded in 2003. Cue national frenzy. The night she got married, I was in Melbourne having drinks with dozens of colleagues at a conference. Everyone in the bar was glued to a giant screen that usually broadcast the AFL. Our Mary entered the church and a resounding cheer went up from men, women and republicans alike. I shed a tear. I wasn't alone.

Deconstructing the Mary obsession and the willingness of women to embarrass themselves on reality TV in the hope of capturing a sliver of Princessity, I reckon it's about three things:

1. The make-over factor

The idea of transformation is a potent one for women. We carry it in our handbag whenever we go for a haircut, start a diet, join a gym or shop for clothes. New princesses like Mary seem to get skinny, beautiful and stylish overnight. Quick fixes are seductive.

2. Money for nothing

Princesses don't have jobs. From the outside, it looks like all you have to do each day is put on a perfect new outfit, have your hair and make-up done, be chauffeured around and get bowed and scraped to as you graciously receive compliments and floral arrangements. You don't even have to schlepp said flowers – you have a lady-in-waiting for that. Wouldn't a lady-in-waiting be nice? Like a hybrid of a PA and a wife. Sign me up for one of those.

3. Extraordinary things can happen to ordinary people

You don't need a degree or a CV to be a princess. You don't even need a fancy shmancy family. Diana may have had royal family connections but Mary and most of the other new European princesses have been regular girls. Even Prince William's girlfriend has red blood, not blue. This proof that amazing and extraordinary things can happen to ordinary people is lovely. Happy, optimistic news at a time of global fear and pessimism.

Now if only I could get Paul Burrell off my TV. Mia Freedman is the editor in chief of *Cosmo*, *Cleo* and *Dolly*.

STYLE WHAT MELBOURNE'S WEARING

BABYDOLL AND EMPIRE LINE TOPS AND DRESSES

Babydoll and empire line tops and dresses that fall from under the bust in a billowing swag of fabric have been around for a couple of seasons now. But this summer, we see fresh interpretations in flowing maxi dresses, demure evening gowns, knee-length sundresses and playful babydoll tops.

Lisa Kelly, from South Yarra, was pictured in a sky blue empire line sundress from Scanlan & Theodore at the recent Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin champagne party.

"I love them. They are just easy to wear and there are so many gorgeous colours and prints around," said Kelly, who accessorised with a string of wooden beads from Mimco and sexy nude pumps from Zomp.

Sydney designer Lisa Ho used the empire line throughout her spring/summer collection of flowing 1970s jet set cocktail dresses in colourful kaleidoscope and paisley prints.

Ho says the empire line gives dresses a chic, carefree feel. "This season the emphasis was towards the bust," she says. "And I just love the way the fabric falls from under the bust and floats over the body."

Ho says the long empire line maxi dresses that flutter all the way to the floor are the perfect way to show off the bold prints that dominate this season's wardrobe. "The maxi dress is a great opportunity to use bold and eye-catching fabrics."

She says empire line gowns work best in "soft fabrics" like silk, jersey or diaphanous layers of georgette.

Mira Vukovic from Mad Cortes describes this season's babydoll and empire line styles as feminine and flattering.

"It's a style that is very easy to wear and very flattering and great for people who like to hide their stomachs or have a lot of fabric around them," she says. "It's a very feminine look that can be worn long or short, which is a bit sexier."

The freshest examples of empire lines come in the form of maxi dresses that fall from the bust in a voluminous and fluttering silhouette all the way to the floor; demure dresses with a tiny cap and fly-away sleeves, often trimmed at the bustline with bows or satin ribbons; jet set cocktail dresses that cling to the bust, halter-style, before cascading in layers of gossamer ruffles or a shower of sunray pleats; and sundresses in crisp cottons that balloon out from the bust to just above the knee.

Babydoll tops in crisp cotton prints and plains or floating jerseys and georgettes work best with a short hemline or a narrow bottom half – skinny jeans and trousers, or shorts long and lean to the knee or hemmed mid-thigh.



Lisa Kelly in a blue babydoll dress from Scanlan & Theodore.



A rainbow empire line dress by Renee August.



A high-waisted 1970s-chic kaleidoscope gown by Lisa Ho.



A flowing maxi dress by Millich & Morton.



A model wears a pretty empire line dress with fluttering sleeves by Lover.



A model wears a cotton babydoll top with skinny trousers by Mad Cortes.

STOCKISTS
Lisa Ho: 9569 4133
Lover: 02 9699 1822
Mad Cortes: 9696 8268
Millich & Morton: 02 9319 7033
Renee August: 0403 939 220
Scanlan & Theodore: 9824 1800

SELLOUT WHAT'S NEW AROUND TOWN MARINELLA PADULA

GO GOGH BAR



This Wednesday, Van Gogh Vodka opens up its first branded bar and the house spirit will be flowing freely. Check out the high-tech surrounds or sample enough fruit-infused liquor to convince yourself that cocktails are the best source of antioxidants. Level 3, Melbourne Central, phone 9694 1208.

EVENING FLAIR

Her Brunswick store is a top destination for brides to be and now Mariana Hardwick has a city salon just to showcase her ready-to-wear finery. All stock is currently discounted, so find an outfit to go with all those wedding invites. Shop 3, Scott Alley (off Flinders Lane), phone 9663 1066.



PARLOUR MADE

Strong on dainty packaging, Sohum's Parlour collection turns the drabest bathroom into a Parisian apothecary. Standout items include the Perfumettes – not a 1960s girl group, but stick atomizers filled with 10 delicious scents, including Gingerlily and Mango. Phone 9416 1114 for stockists.

ROSY COMPLEXION

Guerlain's Fleur de Teint foundation combines rose extract for petal-like skin with SPF 15 to prevent that dried flower look. Available in six dewy shades from department stores. Phone (02) 9695 4800 for stockists.

ZAKKAYA

Quirky, whimsical and charming are three words to describe Zakkaya's aesthetic, but you're sure to come up with more yourself. Stocking contemporary Japanese wares, Zakkaya's vibe is miles away from cherry blossom cliché. See zakkaya.com.au or go to 52 Johnson Street, Fitzroy, phone 9419 1882.

GLAM ROCKS

Louisa Smeeton takes semi-precious stones and crystals then adds a dash of childhood memory and holiday nostalgia to create Ripe Jewels. Her latest range is a colourful melange of vintage influences – try the diva earrings or gypsy necklace for jangly glamour. Stockists, phone 1300 734 183.



MUST HAVES

GADGETS

The coolest way to dress up your iPod Shuffle comes in the form of Shufflesome stickers – a funky new range of limited edition, removable and reusable art stickers.

"Shufflesome understands the iPod Shuffle as a fashion statement, as a vehicle to serve design... It is just waiting for a stroke of colour," says Alexander Schneider, the German-based entrepreneur behind Shufflesome.

Schneider, an economics student, does not design the art stickers. Instead, he invites artists to put their creative spin on the stickers by submitting their designs via the website. Shufflesome then produces the stickers and the artists receive a percentage of each sale.

"So far the sticker design collection comprises 40 different designs from 19 contributing artists coming from seven different countries," says Schneider.

The stickers are made from vinyl and coated with teflon for durability and to prevent scratching. Shufflesome stickers cost \$US7.88 (\$A10.50), plus shipping and are available at www.shufflesome.com.

BEAUTY

Mini Cool Feet Airbrush Catwalk Heels spray is a must-have accessory for any girl hot-footing it to Flemington for the Melbourne Cup carnival, which begins with Saturday's derby. This purse-size can gives an icy blast of instant relief for tired, aching feet, and is perfect for well-heeled racegoers who plan to teeter from the nursery to the lawn to the tote and back again. Made by Sydney company Modelco, the spray is packed with a cooling dose of menthol and is enriched with papaya, bamboo, chamomile and peppermint to soothe and refresh partied-out feet.

Those lucky enough to score an invite to the Emirates marquee will be able to kick up their heels all day long – organisers will have cans of the spray on hand throughout the carnival.

Launched earlier this year in a full-size spray can, the new-look, handbag-friendly Mini Cool Feet, \$14, arrived at David Jones and Myer earlier this month. For stockists, phone 02 8354 6700.



SCENTS

Husk's sensory range of soaps, candles and essential oils, which have a cult following here in Australia, are now selling in the exclusive Beyond Beauty department of London's Harvey Nichols. The range, introduced by Husk co-founder Justin Abrahams in 1999, hit the UK department store last month.

Harvey Nics picked up essential oil blends such as Laos, Yemen and Izmir, which include Egyptian geranium, Moroccan chamomile and patchouli, and come in handy little eyedropper glass bottles. The London store also sells Husk's signature ceramic oil burners, designed by Australian ceramicist Anne Ronjat.

Husk, the clothes store-cum-cafe with three stores in Melbourne and a boho blend of fashion, herbal teas, sensory delights and damn good lattes, is celebrating its 10th birthday this year.

For more information, phone 9528 7411.



SOLUTIONS FOR MODERN LIVING CORPORATE DAY SPAS

The day spa has replaced the golf course as the hot spot for stressed-out execs.

The Living Room, located in the revamped GPO in the heart of the CBD, is the city's newest corporate wellness haven.

It is the brainchild of former corporate trainer Denni Francisco, who has developed the centre's programs with stressed-out, time-poor corporate workers in mind. That means all classes, including pilates, yoga and tai chi, are designed to "relax, recharge and rejuvenate" and to promote productivity in the office. Classes are scheduled before and after work and during lunchtime and clients do not need to bring a change of clothes. "They can simply take off their jacket or loosen their ties and get started," says Francisco.

One of the most popular classes is the 30-minute deep relaxation course. They also teach "spot" meditation, training busy executives to meditate for just five minutes at a time throughout the day.

Day spas are also the new hot spot for corporate conferences, with employees combining work with pampering. Corporate getaways that mix conference facilities and spa treatments include: the Mansion Hotel, Werribee, phone 9731 4000; Lake House Daylesford, phone 5348 3329; and Sebel Heritage Yarra Valley (check out their new three-day wellness retreat), phone 9760 3388.