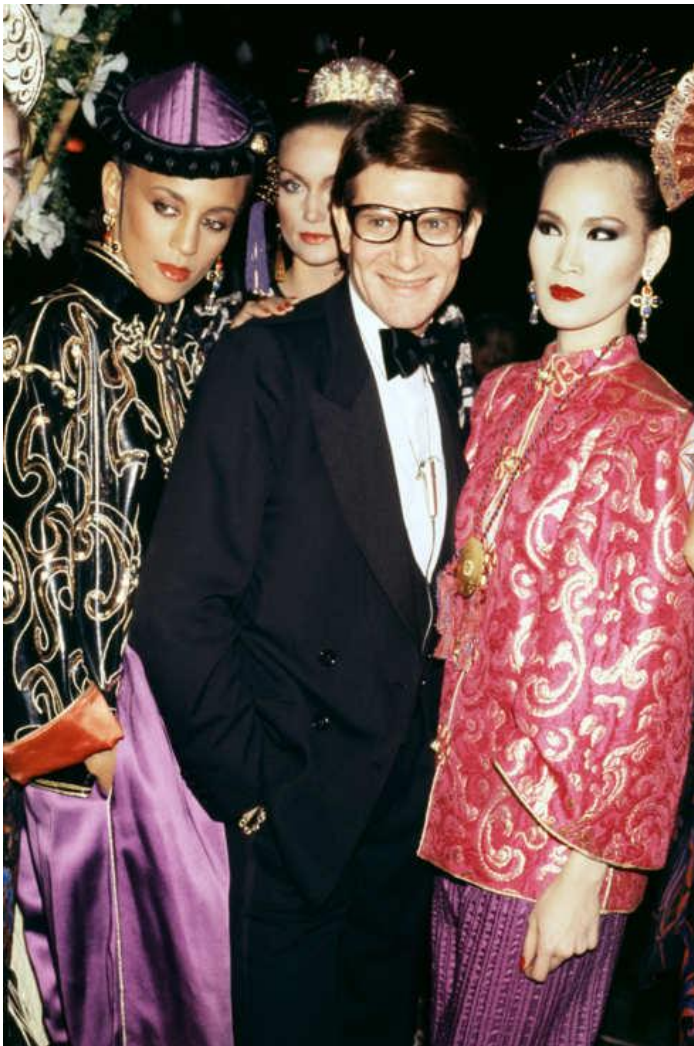


## See Glorious Backstage Photos From Yves Saint Laurent's Heyday

NEW YORK  
the Cut

By [Erica Schwiegershausen](#)



When the photographer [Roxanne Lowit](#) first started sneaking backstage at fashion shows in the late '70s, it wasn't so much an artistic choice as a matter of convenience. "I didn't have the credentials to be up front," she explains now — adding that it also didn't help that she was a woman. "I came onto the scene, and they said, 'You don't look like a photographer, you can't go in there' — because the photographers were these big men carrying huge cameras and lenses and so on," she told the Cut last week over tea at her Manhattan apartment. "I always met this closed door, and instead of trying to break through the door, I went around the back."

It didn't take Lowit long to realize that backstage was where all the action was, and before long, *SoHo Weekly News* editor Annie Flanders noticed her work and sent her to Paris to cover all the biggest shows. She attended her first Yves Saint Laurent show in 1978, and continued photographing the designer until his last runway show in

2002. Next month, a new book, [Yves Saint Laurent](#), celebrates Lowit's photography from the height of Saint Laurent's career, including backstage shots of Jerry Hall, Linda Evangelista, Shalom Harlow, and much, much more.

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The Cut spoke with Lowit about her memories of Saint Laurent, what it was like to be a female fashion photographer in the '80s, and how the industry has changed since she first started out.

**Though you initially photographed backstage out of convenience, you stuck with it your whole career. What about being backstage appealed to you?**

Yeah, I kind of pioneered backstage photography. Once I went backstage, I realized how wonderful it was, because you could see the girl fixing her clothes, and the designer fixing the girls, and then putting on the makeup, combing their hair, and just all of it. You know, there would be two girls standing together, wearing similar things, and I'd just ask them to turn, to smile. You can get up close and spend time with them, and shoot the front and the back and the full length. It was much smaller then, and much more personal. And much more fun — everyone was having a good time and people weren't really nervous. It was fun to put on a show. It was different. There was just so much more going on in the back. I never wanted to go to the front.

**You've said that you looked very different from the other photographers at the time. Was that an advantage?**

No. It was never an advantage to be a woman and it was never an advantage not to look like a photographer. Because then people didn't allow you entry when you wanted to go, you always had to explain yourself. All the photographers were male. To this day, I think I'm the only female photographer that does reportage in Paris.

**How would you get backstage?**

Any way I could. At first, Billie Blair — she was a model — would say I was her hairdresser. She had hair like, an inch long. I was like, *Couldn't you say makeup artist or something?* But then, as I would be around, I began to know the girls. So I knew Pat Cleveland, and she would take me in if she saw me outside. Things were different back then. There weren't that many guards. There wasn't the entourage that there is now of celebrities. It was much more toned down, much more personal.

**What was it like to be backstage at Yves Saint Laurent?**

Backstage they were working — they would be quiet and very efficient. There were a lot of discussions between Saint Laurent and Loulou [de la Falaise], but most people wouldn't break his aura. People were in awe of him, and sort of shy to be next to him. Everybody called him Mr. Saint Laurent. I called him Yves.

He would dress every girl and he would fix them, and he would tie the bows and fix the belts, and so on. He was very hands-on about it. He watched every girl go out, so he would stand there and just primp and fix and tie and so on. He was special. He knew what you wanted. He was very insightful. He was very happy being backstage, especially in the earlier years.

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**Did you feel nervous around him?**

No. Never. I think we liked each other when we first met each other. And that continued until the end. I was chosen to be his personal photographer for his show at the Met [in 1983], so that was quite an honor. His work was always incredible. He was always ahead of the curve, and he was an amazing designer. He did everything first. He did the pointy bra first. He did the see-through transparencies first. He did tuxedos for women first. He did pants first. He did ready-to-wear first. He did short skirts ... just about everything.

**How has the fashion industry changed since you first started photographing?**

The times have changed, the girls have changed, the clothes have changed, the backstage rules have changed. It's more business. It's not about creating, it's not about the love — I mean, I have pictures of Jerry Hall [and others] dancing, and I didn't ask them to dance, they were dancing because they were having so much fun, the music was so good, the whole energy backstage was so good. It was another time, when they had that kind of fun. It was magic — you were there watching this whole glorious creation take place. Your feet didn't touch the ground. If you loved fashion, you were in heaven.

Now, backstage, they're always hurrying the models, rushing them. It's all about business. There's the PR, and the PR assistants, and the assistant's assistants. They have ropes and dividers and favorites. It's just not the same flow, the same energy.

**Would the models act differently depending on what they were wearing?**

Definitely. They would try clothes on and look in the mirror and become like chameleons. The one who did it the most was Pat Cleveland. I remember watching her [pretend to] die at the end of Thierry Mugler, where she took some poison out of her ring — she was wearing like a burgundy-red velvet gown — and then she died to some opera. That's the dramatics — that's the extreme that it went to. When they went out it was their personality that was wearing the clothes, it wasn't the clothes wearing them.

**What was your lifestyle like during the years you photographed YSL?**

I would work day and night. I worked for *Vogue* a lot, so I went to a lot of parties and fashion shows. To this day, I still shoot parties and fashion shows when I have the chance, because I love doing it. I love going out late at night, and I wear black, and then also I'm not seen. I prefer to be not seen, and to be able to just create and imagine and take pictures. I love fashion, although nowadays it's hard to find what excites me. When I do, I'm really thrilled.

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**What does excite you?**

New, interesting, creative — in any shape or form. Last season, I thought Olivier Saillard's "[Models Never Talk](#)" was brilliant. It was something that I'd never seen before.

But when you see things that are rehashed, and you know lots of money was spent, you're like, *Why?* There's no reason for it. I much prefer the new things, or the innovative things, or the magical things. That's why I like going out at night, because the kids are amazing with what they do.

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

*Lowit's work will be [on view at the Steven Kasher Gallery](#) from October 29 to November 4.*