



Albright in her loft showroom, a fantasy closet of designer creations collected over more than a decade.

A visit to Irene Albright's loft on the edge of Manhattan's East Village is certainly an eye-popping experience. "I just love beautiful clothes," she says of her vast collection of designer fashion which dates from the early 90s onwards and functions as a glamorous library for in-the-know stylists, fashion editors and costume designers.

Here, the showroom is jam-packed with thousands of creations from the likes of Prada, Chloé, Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani, Gucci (including all Tom Ford's signature pieces), Marc Jacobs and Balenciaga – the list of coveted fashion elite goes on and on.

Clothes by less well-known and emerging designers are also hanging nearby, while the shoes – around 5,000 pairs neatly stacked in long colourful rows – are just as impressive. "I think I have every Manolo Blahnik style ever made," Albright says. "But right now everyone's asking for Louboutin platforms." Of course, those particular must-have shoes are also adequately represented.

Elsewhere, a wall of doors conceals shelves neatly stacked with handbags of all shapes and sizes and a tall cabinet with many drawers is the organised home for a glorious array of jewels and headpieces. As to the whereabouts of anything that has been retired, Albright reveals that her pool-house in Southampton is bursting at the seams. "I've had a few huge sales out there but mostly I buy to keep."

Her gigantic fantasy closet came to exist after time spent working as a fashion stylist in the late 80s. "I learnt that the best way to save time on prepping was to keep everything,

business is booming. Patricia Field sourced much of the wardrobe for HBO's *Sex and the City* here, as well as for several scenes in the soon-to-be-released movie *The Devil Wears Prada*. "It's the place for beautiful, modern clothes that look like they've come out of someone's closet rather than a store," says another costume designer, Heidi Bivens, who pulled together clothes for *Dedication*, an independent film starring Mandy Moore that is in production. Celebrity stylists drop in all the time because, according to Albright, "No-one wants to be compared to a model on a runway any more."

Interestingly, the work of Australian designers has caught Albright's eye of late. "Collette Dinnigan's dresses flew out the door the day they came in and Heidi Klum wore one on *The Late Show with David Letterman* the same night," she says of those particular acquisitions.

The red-carpeteer

This New York tastemaker has amassed a gargantuan collection of fashion for the famous

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I was earning money and buying clothes, and so before I knew it I had an incredible collection that all my friends wanted to borrow from." Inevitably this ever-expanding wardrobe required a space of its own, so to cover the cost of renting a loft she began charging those friends a small hire fee.

These days, and several lofts later,

"Without my having intended it, I have ended up with a museum here. The archives are kept impeccably – the girls are obsessive about it." And isn't that just about every woman's ultimate fantasy? The dilemma being not what to wear but rather of what to do with such a gargantuan collection of clothes. ■



From the loft to the red carpet: Rachel Weisz.



Heidi Klum in Roberto Cavalli.



Scarlett Johansson in Calvin Klein.