



Make-up maestro: one of Pat McGrath's recent creations for John Galiano. *Right,* transforming model Alek Wek backstage at the shows



beauty queen

The New Yorker called her “the most important black woman in fashion who isn’t a model”. A legend in her field, she is in constant demand by fashion designers, advertisers and photographers. She is super-successful, yet super-discreet.

Christa D’Souza snatched some time with British make-up artist Pat McGrath, backstage at the Paris shows



It is around six on a balmy spring evening and I am standing in the foyer of the Théâtre de Paris somewhere in the capital's 9th *arrondissement*. Although there are almost two and a half hours to go before the designer Hussein Chalayan unveils his autumn/winter 2003 collection, there is already a gaggle of immaculately kitted-out Japanese students outside. All ticketless, they are still hoping, praying, that somehow they might be able to sneak in if they are persistent enough. But security is tight – very tight. Not because of the current political situation, but because, well, just because. I try to explain to a large man standing at the door that I am a very important journalist here to interview

most people on the make-up side are wearing black, at first it's hard to make out exactly where she is.

With ages to go before showtime and no models here yet, a kind of controlled “cat’s away, mice will play” anarchy prevails. Chief larkers-about are the hairstylist Eugene Souleiman and his pint-sized sidekick Martin, who is wearing a T-shirt with “The Best Fuck Ever” emblazoned on the back, proudly showing off a photograph of himself and the model Carmen Kass to anyone who is interested. Itsuki, one of McGrath’s main assistants, is giving one of Souleiman’s assistants a shoulder massage. Greg, a key member of McGrath’s team, is passing around a vial of peppermint eyedrops from Japan, which are apparently perfect for getting rid of that red-eye look. Souleiman, all home-boy’d up in baggy trousers, Mickey Mouse T-shirt and back-to-front baseball cap, volunteers to try out the drops

and squeals as they are expertly administered by Greg, a dead ringer for Gregory Hines. “Oooh!” he says, wincing, “but it’s a nice pain...”

Chalayan, meanwhile, a spectral figure with his shaven head and sleep-deprived skin, is wandering around with a white plastic bag filled with

stuffed vine leaves that his mother has made for everyone.

Ah, and there is McGrath herself, hunched over a mobile phone and wearing her “uniform” of dark oversized shirt, sneakers, hair held back with blue Alice band and not a smidgen of make-up. So, *this* is who *The New Yorker* recently described as “the most important black woman in fashion who isn’t a model”; the woman who pioneered that famous

“kabuki” look for John Galliano last season; the woman who, in her time, has “beaded” faces with Swarovski crystals, “tattooed” skin with lace, and “armoured” necks with paillettes; the woman whose ultra-innovative work and quiet, almost alchemic ability to intuit exactly what every designer wants (“You say ‘Uzbekistan women on acid’, or ‘Cecil Beaton in rubber’, and she’ll know exactly what you mean!” enthuses Hilary Alexander, *The Daily Telegraph*’s fashion editor) has made her a kind of legend in the business. Not that you’d guess, of course. The business may be seething with difficult divas, but Pat McGrath certainly isn’t one of them.

Impervious to the hardcore hip-hop pounding from a big beat box (though not as



McGrath magic: below left, a look she created for Christian Dior couture, as seen in *Vogue* 2002; below right, at the shows with hairstylist and long-time collaborator Eugene Souleiman



Making faces: Kate Moss, left, and Liz Hurley, below, made up by McGrath for *Vogue*. Right, Viktor & Rolf with Tilda Swinton, whose look inspired the make-up she did for their autumn/winter 03 show



the very important make-up artist Pat McGrath, that the PRs in charge of the show haven’t given me the correct coloured backstage pass, and that my mobile has run out of battery but, in that inimitable way the French have, he simply won’t listen.

Eventually, someone comes to fetch me and I am led down

a long labyrinthine passage to the “inner sanctum”, a brightly lit pit-like space with a bank of mirrors around its edges, teeming with activity. McGrath, who has done Chalayan’s shows since he started over five years ago, is somewhere in here but because

hardcore, apparently, as the stuff Tom Ford played backstage at Gucci in Milan), McGrath enthusiastically signals “Hello”, points to a rickety table piled with plastic tubs of taramasalata, bundles of baguettes, and packets of PiM’s – French Jaffa-style cakes, and then proceeds to gather together her 10-strong crew of assistants for a final pep talk. “Now remember, team,” she says soothingly, as if addressing a class of school-children, “very natural, very matte and no ‘perfect bananas’ because Hussein doesn’t want that fashion eyelid look.”

“And you want us to do both eyes, right?” quips a voice from the back.

“Hey, no tricks today, chil’,” ripostes McGrath, who then breaks into a broad smile as two models saunter down the steps. “Hello, my love,” she clucks to a beautiful black girl, Liya Kebede, guiding her towards a chair and bustling round with a container of baby wipes. “Come and sit down here and have a Cadbury’s Finger, you must be starving. Hmm, now let’s have a look at you. Not too bad. Just a little bit of silver.”

As more girls wander in – Karolina Kurkova in Allen Jones-style heels and a stripy pink minidress; a new girl, Debbie, who is worried about the eczema she has just developed on her leg; Natalia Vodianova with her husband Justin Portman in tow (and for some reason with one shoe missing) – McGrath gives each of their faces the once-over. Backstage etiquette dictates that a girl arrives looking as fresh faced as she did when she got up that morning, but as anybody who has worked on the collections knows, the sight of a model arriving at the next show in her jeans and sneakers with her face plastered in half an inch of fluorescent-pink war paint is an all-too-common one. Hence the large pot of theatrical make-up remover at every workstation.

It has been three weeks now that McGrath and co have been on the road. They have already done six shows in Milan – including

McGrath’s work is ultra-innovative and she has a quiet, almost alchemic ability to intuit exactly what every designer wants. “You say ‘Uzbekistan women on acid’, or ‘Cecil Beaton in rubber’, and she’ll know exactly what you mean”

Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana and Armani (for whom McGrath is creative beauty director). Last night in Paris they did Christian Dior – involving 50 girls and almost as many looks – making the “natural look” brief at Hussein Chalayan seem like “an absolute holiday”. With six shows to go, including Stella McCartney, Louis Vuitton and Valentino, McGrath is the busiest make-up artist in >



**Bright ideas:
McGrath gets
creative for
Vogue's Gold issue**

town, and one cannot help wondering how she has managed to do this for the past 10 years, four times a year (for there is the couture as well) without becoming a little jaded. But “jaded” does not seem to be part of this rather extraordinary woman’s lexicon. As her great friend André Leon Talley (American *Vogue*’s editor-at-large) tells me, “Pat’s thirst for knowledge is totally unquenchable. She is constantly reinventing her own uniqueness.”

“Oh, but it’s not just me,” protests McGrath, while applying some Dermablend cover-up cream to Debbie’s legs. “You should

tomes ranging in subject matter from Chinese opera to the surrealism of Jean Cocteau, African body painting and the “genius” photographs of Irene Ionescu – they all go with her whether she gets a chance to open them or not. No wonder the customs officers at Charles de Gaulle airport can spot her coming a mile off. “Sometimes they even clap,” she giggles. “It’s like, ‘Oh yeah, here comes the lady with the portable library again.’”

For McGrath, home is a large airy flat at the top of a brownstone in downtown New York, filled with her books, photographs and

will be showing. In stark contrast to yesterday’s cramped, public-urinal-like space, the area designated for hair and make-up today is red-carpeted and spacious. There is also a proper sound system, with a DJ, who is pumping out some ear-splitting Seventies disco. Dancing in time is a bronzed, muscled stripogram, hired to celebrate the birthday of a Viktor & Rolf employee, Bram. As the stripper, now down to his Stars ’n’ Stripes thong, rubs soap all over himself he invites the frantically gum-snapping Bram to towel it off with a little serviette. Despite the whooping and cheering though and the comparatively luxurious surroundings, there is a slight tension in the air. One of many backstage photographers milling around tells me this is because all the girls are going to be hideously late, which means hair and make-up will probably have less than an hour combined to be ready for “first looks”, that “back-scrunching time,” as McGrath explains, when the girls have to be made up and coiffed, ready to put on the first set of clothes. Not a problem if the brief had been as simple as yesterday’s. In this case, however, McGrath and Souleiman have been told to make every girl look like “a disciple of Tilda Swinton” – carrot hair, translucent eyelashes, alabaster skin. This includes the actress herself, who is sitting patiently in McGrath’s chair in black stilettos, white pencil skirt and yellow hair net. No wonder McGrath has disappeared somewhere downstairs for half an hour of “quiet time”.

It occurs to me that in the two days I have been trailing McGrath, she has revealed few details about herself. In fact, other than the admissions that she is addicted to *Footballers’ Wives*, that she has been to Japan – her favourite place in the world – no less than 15 times and that she loves Jamaican food, I know almost nothing about her private life. But then, other than the tight-knit circle she surrounds herself with – Souleiman, Meisel, designer Anna Sui, stylists Edward Enninful and Zoe Bedeaux, and model agent Louis Chaban – nobody really does.

In fashion terms, however, she is known for her incongruously calm nature, even when, against such a frantic background, crises do inevitably arise. “I suppose I do bottle things up a bit,” she admits, now back behind her chair, gently smoothing a white Armani foundation onto Swinton’s neck. “But I don’t think there’s any point making a big song and dance about it all, and letting everyone know what I’m really thinking. It doesn’t achieve anything, does it?”

It is 6pm and half an hour before the show is supposed to start. Everybody has been told they need to get a serious move on. Thankfully, a clump of girls suddenly arrives. Stella Tennant, Maria Carla, sucking on a tube of Nestlé Sweetened Condensed Milk, Natalia

Her luggage is legendary. Apart from the six industrial-strength duffel bags loaded with make-up (identified by fluorescent ribbon) there are six bags in which she takes all her precious books – great big coffee-table tomes

see all the ideas I’m fed by the designers, loads and loads of stuff. And they give me all these key words, too, like Tom Ford will say “silver and black”; Stella will say “wings”; Donatella will say “sooty eyes”, and then it’s kind of a Ping-Pong effect, we just play ideas off each other until we come up with what they want. The surprising thing is that, even after all these years of working together, you can never predict what people will want. You think you’ve got it figured – like the person who loathes red lipstick who suddenly says one season, ‘Gimme a red lip!’ But that’s what makes it so glorious, the unpredictability.”

McGrath’s ability to run with an idea is obviously part of the reason that everybody loves working with her – from the photographer Steven Meisel to Oprah Winfrey (who wept tears of joy upon finding the first make-up artist not to give her a “suede” face), to Talley, who fondly describes her as “Miss Jean Brodie without the perversity”.

“We have this kind of language, me and Pat,” says Eugene Souleiman, territorially. He has been working with McGrath since they both started in the business 15 years ago. “Sometimes we don’t even need to say it out loud,” he says. “She knows exactly what I want and vice versa.”

Then there’s that never-ending search for new inspiration. “Even when she’s not working, she’s working,” explains Talley. “Have you seen her video collection, for example? Or the way she travels?” McGrath’s baggage is legendary in the business. Apart from the six industrial-strength duffel bags loaded with make-up – all identified by fluorescent ribbon, and meticulously labelled “eyes”, “lips”, “cheeks”, and so forth – there are the six other bags in which she carries all her precious books. Great big coffee-table

a collection of antique make-up implements, picked up from markets all over the world. But she appears to spend precious little time in it, what with the shows, the advertising campaigns, the editorial jobs and her collaboration with Giorgio Armani on its make-up range, which includes working on formulations in labs across the globe, as well as international press presentations. All of which sounds terribly glamorous but as McGrath promises, “isn’t at all”. When she is working on the shows, she has virtually no time to go shopping, to the beauty salon or out with friends. “Sometimes I’m so tempted to go out,” she says rather wistfully, “because those are the times when everyone calls and the gang are all together, but I wouldn’t be able to do what I do, if I did.”

Like all the other “fashion nomads” around at collections time, McGrath considers her temporary surroundings very important. Her room at the Paris Ritz is always filled with incense and her Diptyque candles – “lavender to go to sleep, orange to wake up.” Then there are her precious books and magazines and endless style journals. In the bathroom are all her skin products, beautifully laid out, just as they are backstage. “Cleanse, cleanse, cleanse” is what she both preaches and practises. Sleep, apparently, is always an issue around the collections, particularly if she is doing four shows a day. Sometimes, if she’s lucky, she manages to sneak back to the hotel during the day for an hour’s catnap. But more often than not, that’s not possible. Sadly, she admits, she never got the hang of meditation.

The following afternoon, the team reconvenes in an industrial park called Les Docks, about half an hour’s drive from the centre of Paris, where the design duo Viktor & Rolf

Vodianova looking more like The Little Match Girl than ever and Maggie Rizer, about the only model who has naturally red hair. Then there is Trish Goff, who doesn't look very happy at all. Heading for a chair, she curls herself up like a cat and buries her head in her arms. One of the hairdressing team, a crop-haired boy wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with "Eat Pussy", ambles towards her and asks if she's ready to have her hair done. "I'm not sure yet," she murmurs, inclining her heart-shaped, tear-streaked face upwards. "Oh God," she moans, as her other half, the photographer Nathaniel Goldberg, looks on a little helplessly, "I have never been this sick in my life."

McGrath, who is suddenly made aware of the situation, comes straight over and lays one of her hands on Goff's forehead. As Maria Carla chases Eugene around the room with a can of bright orange hairspray, McGrath discreetly beckons over the two designers who have been pacing round the room with their hands knotted behind their backs. "She's been to the doctor," McGrath tells them *sotto voce*, "she's had injections and she's still throwing up. Gentleman, I really think this girl better go home." Then it's straight back to business: "OK, team, now remember," she says in that almost unnervingly calm tone of hers, "white mascara and then concealer on the eyelashes and the eyebrows so you get that flesh look."

Born and bred in Northampton, McGrath was brought up single-handedly by her beloved mother, who died eight years ago. And it was from her whom McGrath thinks she probably inherited her "insane obsession" with make-up and fashion. At school, McGrath and her friends would spend hours

became an avid clubber, frequenting places like the Wag Club, where she saw Boy George and the late performance artist Leigh Bowery (still a major influence on her work). Her first big break, as such, happened when she was walking down Oxford Street and the TV presenter Janice Long stopped her in the street, admired her make-up and asked if she'd do the same thing on her. From there, as McGrath explains with typical vagueness, "seeds were planted".

Soon she found herself doing music videos with the likes of Caron Wheeler of Soul II Soul, Mica Paris and even the Spice Girls ("before they were even Spice Girls"). Then in 1996, after two seasons of shooting ad campaigns for Jil Sander with Craig McDean; close creative relationships with *iD*; shoots for French *Vogue* and French *Glamour* – her reputation was sufficiently out there for Miuccia Prada to call up and ask McGrath if she'd like to do the make-up for her spring 1997 show in Milan. And the rest, as they say, is history.

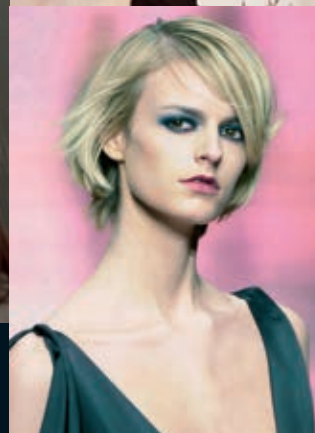
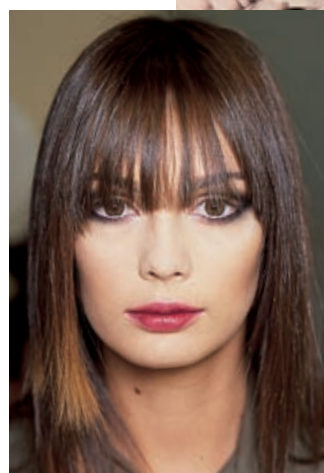
The crowd outside the Salle Wagram, where John Galliano is showing this evening, is seething, even though it is at least four hours until the curtain goes up. Inside, the atmosphere is no less frenzied, a mixture of models, their boyfriends, their babies and even *pompier*s milling around the large low-ceilinged room bordered by a row of brightly lit mirrors. Hairstylist Orlando

Her big break happened when TV presenter Janice Long stopped her in the street, admired her make-up and asked if she'd do the same on her. Soon she was doing Soul II Soul, Mica Paris... Then Miuccia Prada called

experimenting with the stuff and take day trips to London to ogle all the zanily dressed staff at Kensington Market. As a textiles student at the local art college, she and her friends scrimped and saved to get themselves to Paris for the shows. "We never had any tickets, but it didn't stop us," recalls McGrath. "I remember one Vivienne Westwood show where we all traipsed in and sat in the second row. The second row! Can you believe it? There I was in my M&S sweater pretending I was from Jamaican *Vogue*. I mean, who did I think I was?"

Dropping out of art college in the mid-Eighties and moving down to London, she

Pita is wearing a T-shirt that reads "Grow your hair until the war is over", while his crew gets crimping skeins of strawberry-blonde hair. At the back is McGrath's lot, all gathered for final instructions. Up since 1.30am, discussing looks with Galliano, she explains the brief: "A woman who has been locked in a closet for the past 40 years and has just been let out." The prosthetic glue that the girls are having painted onto their eyelids has to dry before the cut-out eyebrow shapes, glitter and exaggerated false eyelashes can be applied on top. While Cathy, McGrath's chief assistant, translates all of this (for many of the expanded team today are French), > 192



Head start: McGrath make-up looks for, clockwise from top right, a *Vogue* shoot in 1996; Versace's autumn/winter 2001 show; another *Vogue* shoot in 1996; Armani's autumn/winter 2003 show



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Jacqueline, McGrath's PA, hands out bags of brightly coloured glitter – gold for one girl, blue for another, pink for someone else. At another table two "helpers" are industriously cutting out beauty spots from a little plastic stencil. There are plenty of helpers around today ensuring they don't get into the same situation they did last season at Galliano, when even the man who was making the sandwiches had to help. "We had to lay all the crystals out on tables," recalls McGrath, "I tell you, it was one of the most stressful things we've ever done. And whose idea was it in the first place? Mine!"

Conspicuous by his absence is Galliano who – according to a female employee wandering around with a croissant in one hand and a pocket camera in the other – is "somewhere in the back". In a sense, he does not need to be here. He and McGrath have already spent three days together, locked in his studio with a couple of models, all their books, and around 100 packets of Polaroid film, until they got exactly what Galliano wanted. "That's the hard part," explains McGrath, "the pulling of ideas out of the bag. In a way, doing the show is just the icing on the cake."

By 6.45pm many of the girls are slowly but surely being transformed into "Grannies From Hell". McGrath hovers around, supervising – "remember you cannot open your eyes until the prosthetic glue has dried" – watching, hawk-like as Yumi, Itsuki et al painstakingly apply the all-important prosthetic glue and then stick circumflex-shaped bits of black vinyl over their eyebrows.

By 7pm the atmosphere is mayhem – myself and others who aren't directly involved having to press ourselves into the wall in order not to get in the way. McGrath is buzzing around murmuring "beauty spot top left-hand side, beauty spot top left-hand side" like a mantra. Stephen Robinson, Galliano's right-hand man, looks ready to expire from the heat, while Barbara, one of the producers from Bureau Betak – the company that puts together all the shows – looks as though she might cry.

"All girls who are ready, we really need you now," pleads Barbara, even though Angela Lindvall, who has brought along her baby, her boyfriend and her father, has only just arrived; Erin O'Connor is still in a make-up chair munching away on a *pain au chocolat* and explaining how "insecure" she feels about her spots; and Karolina Kurkova is half-heartedly complaining she cannot actually see where she is going with so much stuff on her eyes.

Indeed, the only human beings who don't seem to be in a state of panic are the girls themselves, virtually indistinguishable from each other with their Walnut Whip hair-dos and strange umbrella-like eyelashes, causally attempting to push cigarettes or morsels of food through their uniformly disconsolate, pillar-box red mouths. "I think we're supposed to be the result of an addiction," I hear one casually murmur to another.

With less than a minute to go until show-time, the girls are herded into a service lift, which spews them out backstage, followed by McGrath and co – all armed with lipgloss, moisturiser and concealer in the crooks of their thumbs for final retouches. "Come on, come on, come on, cha cha cha!" shrieks the increasingly hysterical Barbara. "Bring the rest of the girls by the stairs... Just be careful of their tights! And where's Stella? Stella? We need Stella!"

As the girls line up, they glance cursorily at a big board that reads "chic and elegant and *très, très* sophisticated, super-feisty and real go-getters". Thirty seconds later, they are out and, as McGrath stands on tiptoes to watch them all on the monitor, her drained features are suddenly suffused with maternal pride. It reminds me of something she mentioned earlier. "I'm always totally, totally wrecked after every show. We all are. I remember this one model swearing on her life to me that she was never, ever going to do a show again. And there she was the next day sitting in my chair and we just laughed and laughed. It's like childbirth, I expect – you just forget." ■

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placing people. Budding writers next to editors, etc...

12pm. Check tent to witness Bogliones in charge and feel safe. Ruby and Anna are setting out Emma's ravishing polka-dot plates to stop the light breeze from blowing the banqueting roll off the tables.

12.10pm. Flora (with a babe in arms) and Henry Brudenell-Bruce arrive to set up their teepee. They leave two tiny blonde children with us in the kitchen, one of whom falls asleep standing up leaning on the sofa, his head resting on it. The other discovers the 60 boxes of strawberries, half-eats some and leaves their other halves wet-sides down on various sofas around the house. Meanwhile, Rupert rings the school teacher, the vicar and the museum to beg, borrow or steal extra chairs for the 40-strong Wantage Youth Band.

12.20pm. Ismay Bannerman and his friend Matt arrive with a car boot full of mud-laden yellow irises to plant along the stream.

3pm. I retire to the top floor and my desk, from where I can watch the field out of the corner of my eye. I can see Henry puzzling over the erection of his teepee. Various pod tents are popping up by the hazels.

3.45pm. The whole guest list disappears from the screen of my laptop. I start to hyperventilate. I *know* I'm going to die before this party starts. I say the Lord's Prayer and take several deep breaths, minimise the screen and it reappears. I can see Ismay standing waist-deep in the stream planting the irises. The teepee is still horizontal and has drawn a crowd of people around it, no doubt with different ideas about how to put it up. I can see children playing football beside the "beach" that John created with loads of sand at the edge of the stream.

3.50pm. Mark Palmer drives into the field in his gypsy caravan pulled by Ruby the mare. It's all too much, these friends who came to our wedding 40 years ago. I burst into tears as per usual.

3.53pm. Go downstairs to begin writing 440 names onto the banqueting roll. Rupert has gone to Wantage to fetch the ice. I cannot find a single pen. Art thrown to the wind, I use a laundry marker. My writing becomes illegible at a run.

4.45pm. I shut our bedroom door. The French windows look over the field where Matthew and Nipper have been moving hot embers under the hoggets all day long. I am overwhelmed by their kindness, their diligence. Campers are watching and, wonder of wonders, the teepee is actually standing. It looks spectacular. I have a bath, wash my hair, and then lie back. Denni, my friend of 35 years, does my hair; and cool, calm Zoe, my make-up. Is this bliss, or what? One of Imo's twins rushes in to show me his tooth, which has just fallen out.

7pm. I'm all done and dusted. No time to find the right pull-in tights. Lost. The new bra is a disaster – I wear an old favourite. One of the strap-holders has bust. *Tant pis*. Up the stairs comes my brother Paul, straight off the plane. I haven't seen him in 10 years. I am crying, and Zoe's waterproof mascara is put to the test. My daughter Lucy, in the most glamorous frock ever created, has arrived from Florida with her husband. All our five children are here on the balcony.

Guests have begun to arrive, including Bernadette, my beautiful oncologist. The Wantage Youth Band strikes up and the eight-year-old drummer is not looking at the conductress but at Rupert and me as we walk down the steps and into the garden. We've done it. Our children and friends of a lifetime have done it. Without them, where would we be? And my mum, who organised our wedding in Wantage 40 years ago, has arranged for the sun to shine on what is already the most magical evening of my life. ■ *Candida Lycett Green's latest book, "Over the Hills and Far Away", is published in paperback this month by Black Swan, £8*