

HOT COCO

EDGY AND COOL, CANADIAN MODEL COCO ROCHA IS SO MUCH MORE THAN A PRETTY FACE. SHE TALKS TO **OLIVIA STREN** ABOUT KEEPING IT REAL AND, YES, IRISH DANCING. PHOTOGRAPHS BY **MIGUEL JACOB**. STYLED BY **TAMMY ECKENSWILLER**.

Name your child Coco Rocha and you might as well nurse her on bottles of Veuve Clicquot. It's a name bound for the marquee, predestining the owner to a couture life of velvet ropes and flashbulbs. Indeed, the 19-year-old Canadian model had humble beginnings – she grew up in Richmond, BC – but has swiftly floated to international celebrity: Rocha is the face of the Yves Saint Laurent fragrance, Elle, and has graced the covers of American and Italian *Vogue*, traipsed runways for such heavyweights as Marc Jacobs, Christian Lacroix, Prada, Louis Vuitton and Hermès, played muse to photographers like Steven Meisel, and appeared in campaigns for Balenciaga, Lanvin, Chanel, Gap, Christian Dior and Dolce & Gabbana. Besties with model Behati Prinsloo, Rocha – with more It-party invitations than she has had grande lattes – is Canada's answer to

model Agyness Deyn. Hipped out and fête-hopping – but without the party-girl rep.

“Growing up,” she confesses, the nerve-jangling chaos of Manhattan traffic in the background, “I didn’t even know there was such a thing as a fashion model.”

Instead, she spent more time in mid-air than most butterflies: Her first love was Irish dancing. It was at a Vancouver Irish dancing competition that she caught the eye of agent Charles Stuart, who urged her to consider modelling. She and her mother dismissed the offer: “We thought it was a joke,” says Rocha. “My mom said it was a definite no.” But Stuart persisted for a year, following Rocha to every competition until she accepted. “If it’ll get you to leave me alone!” she remembers telling Stuart. At 15, she took off for New York, where she still lives, or rather where she rests her carry-on, eventually signing with Elite Model Management.

While many models can appear brittle or awkward in their movements, Rocha’s heel-kicking background has graced her with a confident physicality – and a striking, runway-ready strut. Many models can master the obligatory pout-strut-smoulder three-step, but Rocha also brings a theatricality, an athletic playfulness, and a joy (arguably the rarest of commodities in the industry) to the runway and to her photographs. In 2006, when Rocha walked in the Anna Sui show at her first New York Fashion Week, Naomi Campbell told her in the changing room: “You’re my favourite new model.” And Rocha famously opened and closed Jean Paul Gaultier’s Fall 2007 show in Paris by Irish dancing her way down the runway.

Despite the chaos of her world-winding schedule, Rocha seems to have maintained a level head – perhaps the harder act to pull off. Case in point: Securing an interview with Rocha is about as easy as