

**THE A-LIST'S FAVOURITE DESIGNER
DANIELLA ISSA HELAYEL
INVITES US INTO HER LONDON STUDIO TO TELL
OF HER QUEST TO CREATE THE PERFECT DRESS**

'My clothes are about making everyone feel good about themselves at any time of day, not just on the red carpet'



Brazilian-born Daniella Issa Helayel is on a mission to create comfortable but elegant everyday clothes. And it seems she's on to a winner. Sales at her label ISSA have rocketed a hundredfold in the past four seasons and her signature jersey wrap dresses in bold, vivid prints have achieved icon status.

Today, everybody who's anybody wears her clothes – from Joss Stone to Madonna, Scarlett Johansson to Keira Knightley, Kylie Minogue to Jennifer Lopez and Princess Beatrice to Kate Middleton. Her Lucky dress is grabbing attention everywhere, with an appearance in the *Sex and the City* film as well as regular spottings on the party scene.

Here, the designer invites us into her London studio for a rare and exclusive interview.

What inspired you to become a dress designer?

"I wanted to create the perfect dress. Something so turbo-charged it makes you feel like Catherine Deneuve, Sophia Loren and Scarlett Johansson all rolled into one. First and foremost it has to be comfortable, but I wanted to combine this with an effortless elegance, in a style that could be worn at any time of the day. It sounds simple, but I'd never found it."

So you created your signature jersey wrap dress?

"Yes – I can do a full day's work, then go to a red carpet event, still wearing the same dress. For me, the important details are the cut, the fabric and the way a garment moves. The chameleon quality comes with the accessories you add – a piece of jewellery, a scarf, a pair of shoes; perhaps changing your make-up and hair. It's all about elegance you can dress down then dress up."

Where do you get your inspiration?

"Everywhere. I'm always taking photographs. And books, especially on art history, are very important to me. I also love period paper dolls and costumes, a passion that stems from childhood. My great-grandmother, an amazing seamstress, was a very influential person in my life and would make the most incredible wedding gowns and embroidery. I didn't learn to sew from her but I inherited her vision."

Did you set out to be a designer?

"No, not at first. My family wanted me to study law so I went to university, but I hated it. I gave up my degree and followed my heart and studied fashion in New York. I was soon travelling all over the world sourcing fabrics for clients, but eventually I found it frustrating

because I wanted to be more involved in the creative side. Once I'd set my heart on becoming a fashion designer I was determined to achieve my goal."

When did you found ISSA the label?

"I moved to London in 2000 and ISSA was born the following year when I started making clothes for friends. I dub the period my 'student years', because I was on a steep learning curve and didn't launch properly until 2003, when we had our first catwalk show."

Why is London the best place for your fashion house?

"For me the business is all about the people and all the people I want to work with are based here. I especially have to mention Leslie Poole, he's my secret. He used to be a consultant to Ossie Clark in the 1960s and 1970s and he works alongside me as a designer and pattern cutter – he's a genius at interpreting my ideas."

Who do you feel are the style icons of today?

"There are so many but Sharon Stone is for me the epitome of elegance as well as being a lovely person. She intuitively knows how to dress and look elegant, seemingly without effort."

You also created Jennifer Lopez's wardrobe for her last tour before she had her twins...

"A while ago I designed a sequin cape and as soon as I saw it I thought, 'This is so J-Lo.' Then by pure coincidence we were asked to design for her. We showed her the cape and she wore it on the tour. We made it in gold, pewter and black. She also wore our dresses throughout her pregnancy."

You dress royalty too – Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie have recently been photographed in ISSA. Kate Middleton also wore one of your dresses to the wedding of Peter Phillips and Autumn Kelly...

"Yes, the black dress was ours, but I didn't know she would be wearing it. We are very lucky. It makes me very happy she wears our clothes. She is a very beautiful girl."

Do you have a favourite person to design for?

"Myself and my friends! What is good for me, is good for the world."

Why do you think ISSA dresses are in such demand?

"Our clothes are all about making everyone feel good about themselves at any time of day, not just on the red carpet."

You've recently designed an exclusive, limited edition scarf which sums up your fashion philosophy...

"I was asked to design an accessory that I felt was the epitome of contemporary elegance for Bold2in1 White Diamond & Lotus Flower and I suggested a scarf in a unique ISSA print. I've always believed that any woman can instantly look more elegant, simply by accessorising an outfit with a beautiful scarf and a great pair of sunglasses. It was a fun project to work on."

How would you describe your own personal style?

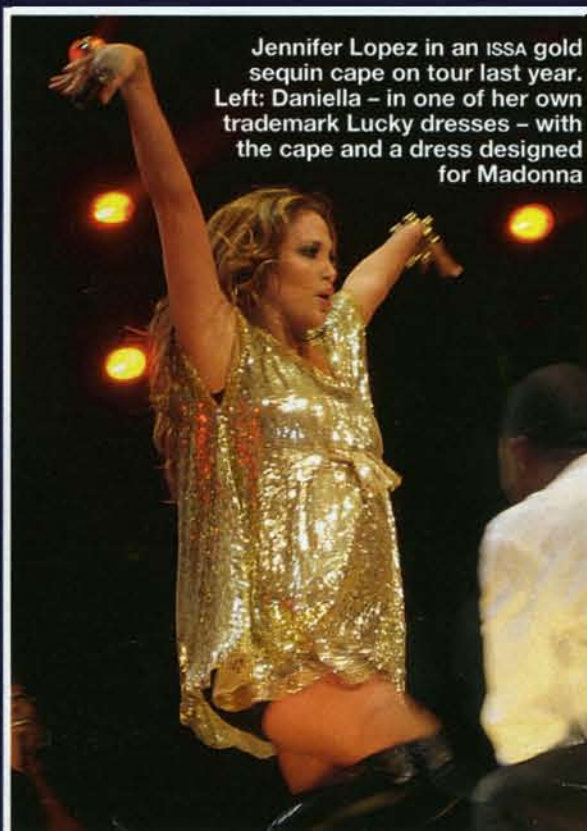
"It has to be easy and practical, because time is the most precious commodity. That is why I like dresses, one piece is so much quicker to put together than separates. I'm working on a style which looks like two pieces – a shirt and a skirt, but is still a dress."

What else can we expect from you?

"We have jumpsuits – I love that 1970s look – interpreted for now. And if the seasons didn't dictate – I could easily skip winter forever! – I'd design a cruise and holiday collection. But everything I do is about effortless elegance. It's all about a woman feeling comfortable and confident in her clothes." **H**

INTERVIEW: ALICE HARDY
PHOTOS: TONY WARD/SCOPE FEATURES

ISSA has designed an exclusive luxury scarf for the launch of Bold 2in1's White Diamond & Lotus Flower 'Everyday Elegance' campaign. For a chance to win this gorgeous accessory, visit indulgewithbold.com



Jennifer Lopez in an ISSA gold sequin cape on tour last year. Left: Daniella – in one of her own trademark Lucky dresses – with the cape and a dress designed for Madonna

PHOTO: SPLASH NEWS



After working in New York as a fashion consultant for ten years, Daniella moved to London in 2000 and set up the issa label. Her designs have won fans the world over with A-list celebrities beating a path to her door including Madonna, Kylie Minogue and Scarlett Johansson – and Kate Middleton, who has been seen wearing the Lucky dress and the wrap dress Daniella wears here