



Rebel Rebel

Fashion icon and punk legend Dame Vivienne Westwood talks climate change and Clapham

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PHOTOGRAPHY: ALAMY, SILVER HEART PICTURES AND KAMIL KASTOSZ ILLUSTRATION: LACEY MCBANE

Famed fashion designer, activist, shrewd businesswoman, wife and grandmother – the sky has always been the limit for 75-year-old

Vivienne Westwood. Now, she has a renewed zest for her quest to tackle climate change and what she describes as a ‘war economy’ founded on the basis of a ‘rotten financial system’. To achieve this, she is urging as many people as possible to switch to green energy.

Of all of south London’s finest exports (and there are many: Michael Caine, Tracey Emin, Naomi Campbell, the now sadly departed David Bowie), Cheshire-born Westwood is the one I’ve always dreamed of interviewing. The grand dame of fashion did not disappoint, and was as formidable as ever when we sat down to chat at bhuti, an eco-spa and yoga haven in Richmond celebrating its first birthday. She herself, she revealed, has practised Iyengar Yoga with Clapham yogi Tom Logan for many years, and credits him with changing her life.

After cutting the (gluten-free, vegan) cake and giving an impassioned speech to much applause, adoring fans swooped in for the obligatory selfie, and an Evening Standard journalist provoked her to proclaim that Theresa May was an ‘evil woman’ by pressing her on the fact that the government recently scrapped the Department for Climate Change. As a result, she was initially – perhaps understandably – a little frosty.

However, in the tranquillity of bhuti’s members space, I ask her what she likes most about living in south west London, and she is quick to warm up. Every other night, she tells me, she goes for a walk on Clapham Common with her husband Andreas. ‘I find it very romantic,’ she

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On the catwalk showcasing her latest collection with Tooting model Leomie Anderson

Westwood talks fashion, art and politics in her published diaries



says. 'When I first came to London I was 17. I was in a hostel in Brixton and my best friend Susie – she still is, I love that girl, she's wonderful – her uncle lived in Wandsworth, and he used to invite us for dinner. Coming from the north, I just loved the expanse of it all.'

For 30 years, Westwood lived in an ex-council flat on Nightingale Lane, which links Wandsworth and Clapham Common. At first, she had few belongings. 'I used the space as a little studio to make clothes. There was a sewing machine and there would usually be some local rockers there putting studs into the clothes. I just thought it was wonderful, being in a metropolis with all these people, and all these sexy young blokes,' she reflects.

'You know, I used to go dancing all the time. I went dancing on my own once, and I found it very cliquey compared to Manchester. I was very nice looking, and somebody asked me to dance, but then nobody asked me for the rest of the night because I didn't dance like them.' With a Mancunian twang still discernible in her voice, she says that what she misses most about the countryside is the seasons. 'Of course, it's even more messed up now, because of climate change,' she adds.

The only reason she likes central London, she tells me, is the museums.

Courtauld Institute of Art, The National Gallery, Electric Avenue and Brixton Market as among her favourite parts of London. As well as her nightly walks with Andreas, she has often been spotted traversing SW on her bicycle. 'I've had friends in St George's Hospital in Tooting, and I just love cycling there from Clapham and going past all the Indian restaurants, the shops selling saris, and the market,' she says. One of her protégées, up-and-coming model and Victoria's Secret angel Leomie Anderson, also happens to hail from Tooting. I detect a bit of south London solidarity going on – but I'm probably biased.

These days, Westwood lives on Clapham Common North Side with Andreas, not too far from Holy Trinity Clapham, in a house that once belonged to Captain Cook's mother. Our discussion of the area has made her thoughtful, and she



At Richmond wellbeing centre bhuti, she urged people to switch to a green energy supply

Back in 2011, a Canadian-made documentary entitled *Vivienne Westwood's London* saw her name the

has a tendency to go off on intriguing tangents. Her train of thought is impossible to direct or predict, and often leads back to her activism or to a broader comment on society. 'Holy Trinity is the church where William Wilberforce congregated,' she expands. 'An interesting point – Bertrand Russell said it was very strange that Wilberforce felt so

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passionately about the slave trade – and yet his whole family were employing six-year-old kids in mines.'

Reflecting on her earlier speech, I'm struck once again by

the sheer force that is Dame Vivienne Westwood. 'I know Towist philosophy says you should take life as it comes,' she said, 'but of course, you have to get stuff done when you need to. People power is what's going to save the planet, and preserve human rights.' Her mission now, she announced to an enraptured audience, is to get half of the UK to run on green energy. 'Hopefully within three years,' she predicts. 'I believe it will be a catalyst and other countries will follow, and it will kickstart a move towards a green economy.' I don't doubt her.