

By GRACE CAIN  
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# Culture QUEEN

Capturing the zeitgeist – with one eye on the future – Caroline Lever weaves between fashion, art, music and theatre. All are a mirror for our time... and a lot of fun

**D**irector of culture and entertainment is one of those jobs that probably takes some explaining at parties. “It’s an unusual title,” agrees Caroline Lever, who holds the role at London’s Edition hotel.

Essentially, she tells me, she’s responsible for driving the cultural relevancy of the Edition brand, and its position in the local market. How does she do that? “Lots of research!” she smiles. “I have to know what’s going on in the cultural sphere, and find the right names to partner with for events – whether that’s a new young designer who shares our viewpoint or an art gallery that might bring an interesting audience.” Armed with this knowledge, Lever develops the hotel’s cultural programme, planning events and ‘moments’ unique to the hotel, from a niche one-off such as a book launch to something city-specific – like London Fashion Week.

A multifaceted role, then; and that’s just how this self-described culture nut likes it: “I’ve always been interested in the cross-disciplinary. It’s amazing to be able to connect with the melting pot of London.” Lever recalls a particular event she organised with Project 0, an ocean conservation organisation. “I had the idea of hosting a deep-sea disco, based on the Enchantment Under the Sea school dance in *Back to the Future*. I transformed our basement club into an underwater world; there were mermaids walking around and a psychedelic crab.”

Her duties often take her to the openings of new



Caroline wears, left  
DIOR dress £15,500 and boots  
£930; HANRO bra £39.50; right  
SAINT LAURENT jacket £3,420;  
PAOCO RABANNE dress £2,799

Womenswear, First Floor;  
Harrods Shoe Heaven, Fifth  
Floor; and harrods.com

Hair & Make-up SALINA THIND  
Photographer’s Assistant  
RORY JAMES

## HOW SHE WEARS

Edition hotels around the world; in the last year alone, the brand has launched in Shanghai, Abu Dhabi and Barcelona. Lever is particularly excited about a new outpost in West Hollywood. “LA is so vibrant,” she says. “The art scene downtown is so interesting... the Hauser & Wirth space is just beautiful. And then the wellness trend is huge in California.”

Lever’s interest in what she calls “the cultural moment” was ignited at a previous job, working for Dazed Media, an independent fashion and cultural media group whose titles include *Dazed* and *AnOther*. “Good magazines capture the zeitgeist,” she says. “They offer a lens into fashion, art, design, photography, and then digest it all for you.”

Swerving from magazines to hotels might seem haphazard; not so, Lever argues. “While I was working on magazines, I organised events as an extension of the editorial – exhibitions, film screenings, launch parties.” The hospitality industry, she says, is following the same path. “Why would you go to a shop as opposed to purchasing online? Why would you stay in a five-star hotel, rather than somewhere that is just functional? The only difference is the experience.”

*“Fashion can be socioeconomic or political – just look at punk or grunge”*

This philosophy plays out differently in each Edition. London’s iteration, for instance, is housed in an impressive Grade II-listed Georgian building, while Shanghai’s occupies two tall towers – one post-modern, one Art Deco. “It’s all about how you stay relevant,” Lever says. “You have to give people a reason to come back, whether it’s the art community during Frieze, or the fashion community during Fashion Week.”

So as someone with her finger on the world’s cultural pulse, where does she suggest you jet off to next? “Barcelona for music and food, Paris for the nightlife, and Lisbon – just because it’s having a moment.” If it’s art you want, she continues, “I’m looking forward to visiting The Shed, a new space in New York.” Closer to home, an upcoming showcase has caught her eye. “I’m a huge Tim Walker fan, so I’m excited that he’s about to have a major exhibition at the V&A.”

It makes sense that Lever likes Walker, a fashion photographer whose fantastical images eliminate the boundaries between art, photography, fashion and theatre. His work is a good example of how fashion fits within what Lever calls “the greater cultural discourse”. In her view, fashion is well-placed to comment on society: “Anything interesting is made in response to what’s going on in the world. Fashion can be socioeconomic or political – just look at punk or grunge. I recently went to the V&A’s Dior exhibition, and when you think about the New Look – that abundance of material – you see that it was a direct response to the austerity of the war period.”

The intelligent way in which Lever talks about fashion is refreshing. When it comes to getting dressed, however, she avoids over-intellectualising. Outfits are influenced by her diary, the weather, and simply how she feels when she wakes up. “I think a lot of people find themselves almost afraid of fashion, but we are so lucky that we have an opportunity to play with our appearance,” she says. “Yes, fashion is political. And it is cultural. But it is also fantasy.” □



### Caroline’s style tips

#### On special occasions:

*“Give yourself enough time to find an outfit so you don’t feel like Cinderella.”*

#### On brands:

*“Simone Rocha for dresses, Isabel Marant for T-shirts, and Rejina Pyo for everything!”*

#### On travelling:

*“I plan for trips by laying out outfits for everything I will be doing.”*

#### On her icons:

*“Tilda Swinton, Carolyn Bessette-Kennedy, 1990s Kate Moss (obviously!) and all those cute 70s French girls.”*