

GET TO KNOW

## DOVANNA PAGOWSKI

FORMER PHOTOGRAPHIC & RUNWAY MODEL; CURRENT ASSOCIATE, RUTENBERG REALTY, NY

By BRENDA COFFEE *creative editorial director* MARK GRISCHKE *photography* NOEL SUTHERLAND

Dovanna Pagowski is a mixture of a 70's, bohemian free spirit and a savvy, New York City realtor. She was part of the infamous stardust days of Studio 54, where nothing and no one was too weird; where Bianca, Mick and Andy partied with Halston, Sinatra and Streisand. Dovanna Pagowski is also a reflection of her heritage and a mother who encouraged her endless curiosity about the world beyond her doorstep.

**YOU COULD HAVE A MAN IN A WEDDING DRESS, NAMED ROLLERINA, ROLLERSKATING BACK AND FORTH ON THE DANCE FLOOR WITH A TIARA AND A WAND; AND THEN YOU'D HAVE PRESIDENT CARTER'S MOTHER THERE, AND SOMEBODY BEHIND THE COUCH DOING INCHES HIGH PILES OF COCAINE... IT WAS INSANE!**

"I grew up in Michigan, as a first generation American, from Latvian parents. I often think about people whose families came out on the wagon trains. We didn't do the stage coach thing. I had a very European lifestyle, growing up in a very midwestern town, and we didn't match the people around us.

"Friends would come over, and I'd say, 'Do you want to stay for dinner, and they'd ask 'What are you having,' and I'd say 'duck,' and they'd say, 'I think I'll go home,' because they only ate hamburgers.

"I would read magazines, and I remember seeing early Deborah Turbeville pictures in *Vogue* and thinking, "Who's the person who took this photo in the steam room? I knew there was a bigger world out there."

When asked about her BA in Russian from Wellesley, Dovanna says, "Don't ask me what I got from that except I knew I should never be intimidated by people who came from different backgrounds. They had an incredible museum and art history program, and my senior year, Irving Penn, Susan Sontag and Man Ray spoke there. It opened up this whole new world for me. That's how I got to New York. It was the summer of '77.

"When I came to New York, I would work three lunches a week, as a waitress, and pay for everything. I just wanted to see the world and meet everybody, and I did. I did both Studio 54 and the Mudd Club, uptown and downtown, and I got to meet people who could tell me incredible stories.

"People would see me perched somewhere in Studio 54. Maybe I was wearing a crazy vintage dress with a crinoline under it. You could have a man in a wedding dress, named Rollerina, rollerskating back and forth on the dance floor with a tiara and a wand; and then

you'd have President Carter's mother there, and somebody behind the couch doing inches high piles of cocaine... It was insane!

"At that time, people of influence liked to have young people in their homes, so I used to show up at dinner parties on Park Avenue. It was so much fun. People did not care what your parents had done for a living. They just cared that you had style; that you had interesting things to say; that you were a good listener. That's all they wanted. And in return, you got to meet the world, and that's all I ever wanted."

After Studio 54, Dovanna's vagabond lifestyle took her to Europe and Japan as a photographic and runway fashion model, posing for the great photographers like Richard Avedon and Robert Mapplethorpe.

"At one point I think I had keys to apartments in London, Paris, Milan and NY. You just take it with a grain of salt and realize how fleeting it is. You're the cat's pajamas. Everyone wants you at the party. You might be the Persian vase there and look beautiful, and they might not speak to you, but everyone wants you at the party."

Part of what makes Dovanna Pagowski a good realtor is her keen eye for people. "People ask me what do you specialize in—what areas of town. I specialize in people. I think people are fascinating, and I bring everything back to their motivation. What motivates them to do what they do? After that, you can figure everything out."

Like her mother, Dovanna has instilled the same curiosity and love of life in her own daughter. "I tell my daughter I grew up with baseball diamonds. You grew up with the Met. Walk it like it was your mall. Get to know every room of the Met as well as the rooms of your home, and that will be your education."

# Q&A

WITH DOVANNA

## STYLE NOW VS 20 YEARS AGO:

Now I buy things that are less trendy, and I shop more judiciously. It's more about comfort. I stick to black and gray and off-white and throw in a splash of color.

## FLATS OR HIGH HEELS:

I've gotten into flats, the comfort shoes, because I do a lot of walking. I keep show shoes in my bag. Once I get somewhere, I can put on the mildly pinched shoes.

## FAVORITE DESIGNER:

I like Burberry.

#### WHAT KIND OF SHOPPER ARE YOU:

My mother used to say, 'Just because it's on sale doesn't mean you need it.' I might buy that one thing I'm wild about. If you take good care of your clothes, and wear them a lot, it might cost you \$4 a wearing, versus some icky piece for \$40 you only wear once.

#### BARE LEGS OR HOSE:

I'm more of a tights and leggings person, but pantyhose makes your legs look fabulous. I think bare legs go with someone who gets in and out of cabs, and if I had a life where I got in and out of cabs, a lot, it would be high heels and no hose.

#### MISSING FROM YOUR CLOSET:

A red Cadillac with fins.

#### FAVORITE OUTFIT:

My birthday suit. It's nice to be that free; to enjoy the way you were created, and I like less layers. I like the idea of shifts, the cute little dress that doesn't have a lot to do with your shape.

#### EXERCISE:

I swim every day. The idea of propelling yourself through the water is just magic. My inspiration has always been older people, because young people look good, even when they're hung over, but look at an older person who's still in control of their lives and self esteem, and work backwards. How did you get to the point of being that whole in your life? A lot of older ladies do what I call "lady swim." You do all sorts of strokes with your head out of the water. I can be in and out in an hour: 15 minutes to get undressed; half hour to swim and 15 minutes to get dressed. You never touch your hair or makeup.

#### DEFINITION OF LUXURY:

Doing special things sparingly, because that's the only way they stay special. If you ate foie gras everyday, it would be a bore, wouldn't it?

#### BIGGEST SPLURGE:

Having my laundry done. I haven't touched it in decades. Travel's a splurge. My boyfriend and I have taken to St. John. It's a small island. You can still hitchhike everywhere and sit in the back of people's pickup trucks. Makes me feel like I'm 19, again.

#### DRUG STORE OR DEPARTMENT STORE:

I am a big fan of drug stores. Department stores I sometimes find overwhelming and tiring. If I go into a department store, I have to have a mission, like shoes.

#### LIPSTICK OR EYELINER:

Lipstick

#### CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT BEAUTY PRODUCT:

Coconut oil, almond oil. I don't put anything on my skin I can't eat.

**MOST DARING THING YOU'VE EVER DONE:**

I saw Frank Zappa at the Mudd Club. It was his birthday. He was upstairs, sitting alone, smoking a cigarette. I sat down and said, 'Can I have a cigarette?' and he gave me a cigarette, and I just did a funny little pose, and he said, 'Do you need a light?' and I said, 'No thank you. I don't smoke.'

**BEST ADVICE YOU'VE RECEIVED:**

There's a Latvian saying, 'If you have a wreath of flowers, and each petal represents happiness, be sure to enjoy each petal, one petal at a time, so you'll have enough petals to last your whole life through.' To be more measured about everything you do. If you're riding high, enjoy the ride, but you have to know it's a ride.