

What makes a good backstage photographer

We asked 6 in the biz to share their experience on how to make sense of the maelstrom behind the curtains.

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As fashion becomes increasingly driven by data, algorithms, balance sheets and other unromantic measures of time and money efficiency, there's something even more compelling about the backstage of a catwalk show. It is, in many ways, the antithesis of our era – a hands-on, tactile environment that can't be smoothed over by virtual assistance or generative AI. It's messy, high energy and dependent on an elaborate choreography between multiple creative teams.

But chaos alone doesn't make a photograph. Backstage is unpredictable, often badly lit, and rarely patient. You have seconds, not minutes. You're navigating egos, hierarchies and tight schedules. So what actually separates a good backstage photographer from a great one? Is it technical mastery? Social intelligence? The ability to stay invisible while being exactly where the action is?

It's also largely a phone-free space, where the clothes are kept out of sight until the designer is ready to reveal them. While a catwalk photographer is now competing with every attendee's iPhone, a backstage photographer occupies a rarer position – one that rewards instinct, speed and trust over immediacy.

With fashion week underway (tbh, when is it not), we asked a handful of the best in the business to share the skills, attitudes and instincts that matter most when working behind the scenes.

“When I am shooting for the brand or have exclusive access for a publication, having full control can almost leave me dumbfounded or bored. As sick as it might sound, I think I need the chaos to give me the sense of urgency.” – Adam Katz

Sinding



Rick Owens men's Spring/Summer 2025 by Emily Malan

Emily Malan

You have to be prepared for any type of lighting condition. Some shows don't have ideal lighting setups backstage, so bringing in a continuous light source or flash is helpful. You need to learn how to move quickly as possible and make quick decisions while shooting. Backstage can be quite busy and chaotic once the models are in lineup. Everyone is trying to do their job so if you take too long you might miss your shot or you're encroaching on other people's time and space. Try to give direction to the models whenever you can. Sometimes certain backstage situations don't allow for it, but if you're able to get the models engaged with you and your lens, it makes for a better photo.

[@emilymalan](#)



Karl Lagerfeld backstage at Chanel by Simon Procter

Simon Procter

In my opinion, backstage at one of the major international fashion shows is most typically a combination of the most beautiful models in the world with the elite make-up and hair talents, working in a moment of pure excitement and focus led by an iconic creative director's concept. If you can put batteries in your camera and turn it on, my answer to the question would be, "Why *didn't* you get great backstage photographs?"

[@simonprocter](#)



Mugler Autumn/Winter 2020 by Adam Katz Sinding

Adam Katz Sinding

Backstage is mayhem. We have limited time, limited access, and often there is limited respect for our presence while we are there. My personal goal through all of this is to try to not only capture the chaos, but also to find moments of quiet. Moments where the hundreds of hands touching, adjusting, pinning, sewing, and touching-up are hidden. Picking out these little bits in a messy situation is a challenge, but it is extremely rewarding to walk out of a show knowing that you have found something which really barely even existed except for less than a blink of an eye. In contrast, when I am shooting for the brand or have exclusive access for a publication, having full control can almost leave me dumbfounded or bored. As sick as it might sound, I think I

need the chaos to give me the sense of urgency. If I can control too much of the environment, then the photo becomes, in my perspective, inauthentic to a certain extent. It's like hiking in nature: we enjoy it because it can swallow us up. The lack of control makes us respect it.

@aks

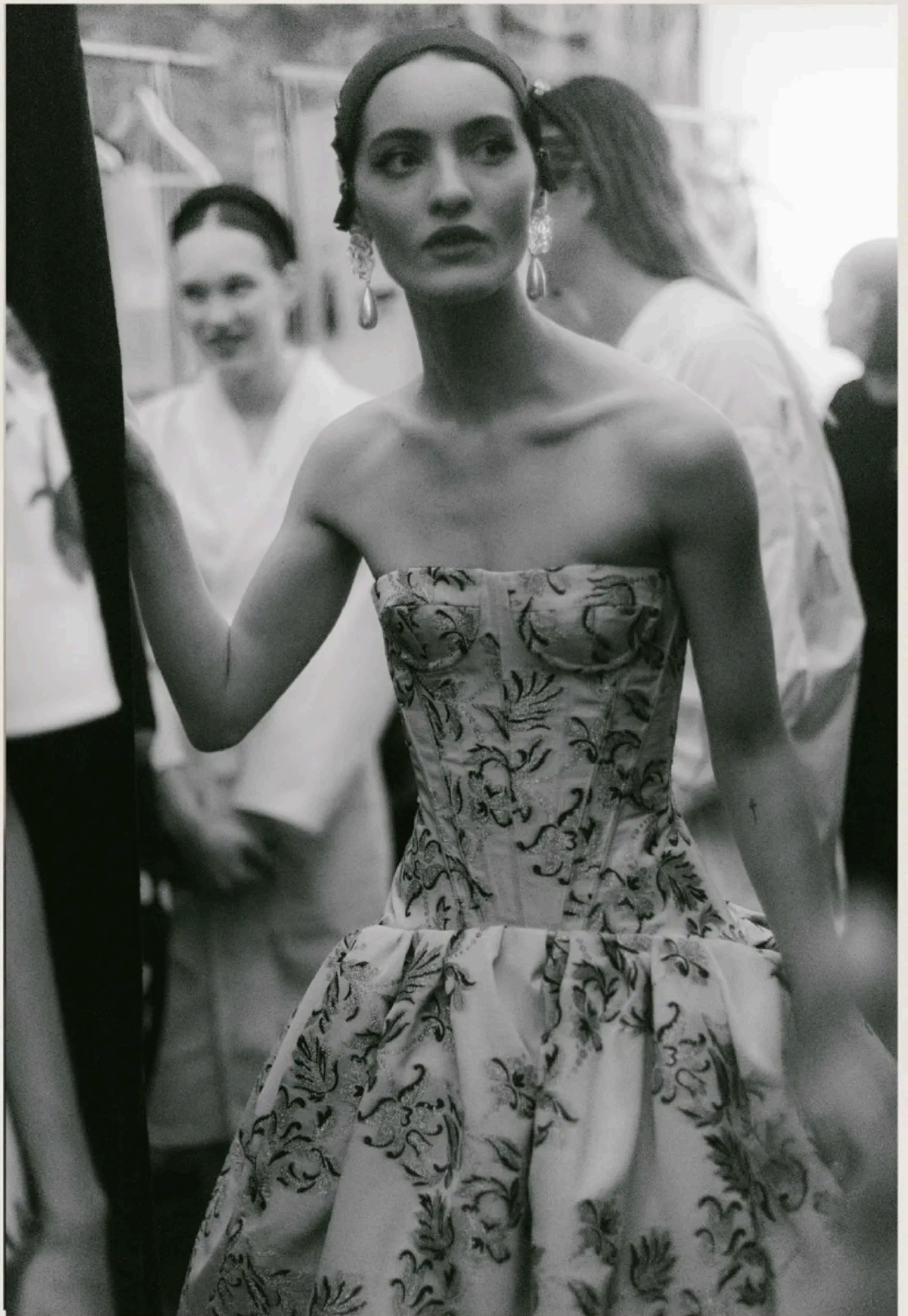
"Instinct plays a huge role. Knowing when to step back and observe, and when to move in closer, is key." – Georgina Millet



Armani by Kevin Tachman

Kevin Tachman

Attitude: know that you are an invited guest and treat everyone with respect. Everyone is trying to do their own job, no one owes you access. Don't be in the way, but be where the action is. Every fashion show has a script and you need to learn where you need to be to get the images you want to but not hinder the flow. And smile! Nobody likes bad energy. People are stressed out enough as it is!



Georgina Millet

For me, what makes a great backstage photographer is a mix of technical awareness, intuition, and human connection. Firstly, understanding light and movement is essential. Backstage is fast, unpredictable, and often chaotic, so knowing how to adapt quickly – technically and visually – allows you to capture moments without interrupting the flow of the team. Secondly, instinct plays a huge role. Knowing when to step back and observe, and when to move in closer, is key. Backstage moments are fleeting, and the best images often happen in between, during fittings, last-minute adjustments, or quiet moments of concentration. Lastly, building trust with the people around you is crucial. When designers, models, makeup artists, and dressers feel comfortable with your presence, you're able to document the process more honestly.

What fascinates me most backstage is seeing how many people are involved. An entire team working at incredible speed behind the scenes to create something that lasts only a few minutes on the runway. Every backstage is different, and that's what makes it so exciting. Seeing the work unfold behind the scenes and then stepping out to witness the final show is always a powerful and rewarding moment.

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Simone Rocha Spring/Summer 2025 by Jacob Lillis

Jacob Lillis

Backstage at fashion shows is notoriously energetic and high pressure. Amid the chaos you can still find moments of beauty and stillness. You may have to work fast and capture many looks, so I think it's beneficial to keep it simple and be alert for changes in the pace and environment. Although backstage has restrictions, it is also an amazing space to create a photograph that you want to take. Think fast and keep an eye out for moments that you feel work.

@jacoblillis



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