





Gwen Stefani is cleaning out her closets. ¶ At the moment, she's prying open a crate labeled "archives." It's overstuffed and stuck closed; her long, white-painted nails slip on the latch, and she bursts into a wry, red-lipsticked grin as the satiny contents spill out. Everyone has old boxes full of memories. But not everyone's are full of 20 years worth of iconic costumes.

The bags and boxes crowding Stefani's design studio are a testament to the many phases of her career: first as the lead singer of the band No Doubt, then as a solo artist, and ultimately as a fashion designer. "Look!" she says, leaning over and pulling out a pair of sequined shorts. "This is from David Letterman. And this [grabbing a whiteboned corset] is from 'Rich Girl.' She points to piles of pregnancy clothes, old "*Voice* stuff," a costume from the American Music Awards. "I just did a shoot," she says, gesturing toward a pile of designer duds that would make most women quiver in their Manolos. "And they gave me the clothes afterward."

There's a lot to be excited about in this box, but Stefani seems reluctant to dwell on the past—it's almost as if there's something in there she'd rather not let out. Closing the lid and standing up, she projects a kind of defiantly confident, glam-rock vibe. Her high-waisted JBrand skinny jeans and strappy L.A.M.B. high heels exaggerate her tall, slim figure, while her faded black tank (an "old favorite," she says) reveals glossy blue bra straps. Her famous platinum locks are twisted into a severe topknot; her signature red lipstick is carefully in place. "I just feel like I've been in this cocoon," she says of the last few years. "And now I'm ready to burst out with all these new creations."

Stefani has certainly undergone a period of transition. In the last three years, she's had a third child, Apollo (her older sons, Kingston and Zuma, are 9 and 7, respectively), joined *The Voice* as a judge, and thrown herself into mogul mode, launching a series of new





fashion lines: bags, eyewear, shoes, watches. She's almost finished recording a new solo album. Most dramatically, of course, she filed for divorce from her husband of 13 years, singer Gavin Rossdale.

Stefani's marriage to Rossdale was a high-profile mix of romance, family bliss, and then, still, tabloid drama. For the last few years, media coverage has alternated between snapshots of the happy-seeming couple doting on their adorable children and other images hinting at marital tension. Just this past spring, Stefani made headlines after her appearance on the *Today Show*, during which she spoke emotionally of the pride she took in her marriage. "We both want the same thing—to be married, to be good parents," she said at the time.

Fast-forward several months and it's clear the brave front she put on was just that—a front. Though she refuses to discuss exactly what caused her marriage to crumble, she has been using her songwriting to work through her emotions. In October, she released a new single, "Used to Love You," which painfully documents her slippery slide from love to hate. She sings, "I don't know why I cry / But I think it's 'cause for the first time. / Since I hated you / That I used to love you."

In person, she has the almost over-zealous energy of someone who has suffered through a tough decision but is determined to come out stronger. When Stefani mentions Rossdale in conversation, there's no animosity or ill will, just a vague suggestion that their union wasn't always easy. "I didn't tour at all," she says of the years leading up

to her divorce. "But I did record the No Doubt album, which was super-hard. I was torn the whole time. Every day I would take the kids to school, drive to Santa Monica, work on the album, and then I'd think, Oh my god, if I don't leave by 2:30 I'm not gonna get home in time for dinner. And Gavin being on tour... I'm not gonna say there weren't some incredible moments making that album. But it was a lot of knocking my head against the wall. A lot of struggle."

Stefani still lives in the house that she and Rossdale shared: a luxurious but unpretentious modern home in a gated Beverly Hills neighborhood high in the hills above Los Angeles. At the moment, the house is full of vibrant activity. Tonight, Stefani is launching her line of high-end children's clothing, Harajuku Lovers for Chasing Fireflies, and teams are on hand to organize the show and prep Stefani's look. In the midst of the hubbub, Stefani's cherubic 22-month-old son, Apollo, toddles

comfortably, trailed by a babysitter. The mood is one of excitement, not anxiety. She refuses to take credit for the positive mood, but it's clear her attitude is giving it shape. "I beat them if they're not happy," Stefani says jokingly.

Tucked away from the noise is her playful design studio. Hovering over a heavy stone table and low benches are five oversize ceramic Harajuku girl statues mounted on pedestals. Today, the "girls," as Stefani calls them, appear to be overseeing a cheerful riot of glamorous clutter; past and present blend together in racks of costumes and clothing samples, glasses, and shoes. On the wall hangs a white board with possible set lists for an upcoming show.

"I've never

considered

myself

ŢsexyJ. I

think of

myself more

as a tomboy

with lots of makeup on."

Looking around, Stefani is practical about the mess. She points to three overflowing garbage bags on the floor and rolls her eyes. "I had 15 minutes, so I decided I should go through my closet and pull out everything I'll never wear again. That was a month and a half ago!" She nudges a large white box with her toe and looks up with a shrug. "That's my wedding dress."

If the boxed, iconic pink ombré Dior gown registers to her as anything other than another big box to be filed away, you wouldn't know it from her nonplussed demeanor. She casts about for a place to sit down, but every surface is covered. Good-humoredly, she starts clearing boxes off a bench. Finally she relaxes, long legs uncrossed and sprawled, trying to explain how her life has turned around recently. She credits Apollo at least partially for the positive change. "Getting preg-

nant, which wasn't planned and was such a miracle, has put me in a whole new spiritual place." But it added pressures too. "I was trying at that time to do more music with No Doubt. Then I got pregnant unexpectedly, and I was like, OK, well, what am I gonna do now? I need to make some changes. There's only so much energy."

Initially, she chose designing. "I wanted to really focus on the brands," she says. But then something unexpected happened: the offer to judge on *The Voice*. "I'd never considered doing that, and just out of nowhere, all of a sudden, I was on it." The call came when Apollo was only 4 months old, "and three months later, I was doing it."

For Stefani, *The Voice* offered a much-needed musical jolt. "I got so much out of that first season that I didn't expect, creatively, from being around so much music." Working with producer and singer Pharrell Williams, with whom she had worked years before on

hits like "Hollaback Girl," helped snap her out of a creative funk. "I did songs with him before, but I was never close to him in the way I am now. When we started working together on *The Voice*, he was going through this rebirth, having three huge hits at age 40. He helped me with a lot of stuff. I was in a closed-off period before that—I couldn't write and I didn't feel confident." Stefani talks carefully, clearly not wanting to sound embittered, choosing her words deliberately to focus on the positive. "There were hard times before the baby, personally, that were just not good. And then having Apollo, and being on the show, and being refreshed—it was just like, Whoa!"

The transformation wasn't easy, and the emotions she went through during that period were complicated. "Filming the show [and mentoring all those singers] was so amazing," she says. "I cried every day I was there. It was so intense. But I'm in a really positive place now."

Stefani is astonished by her creative energy and says she's channeling all of it into her writing. "In June, I knew I was ready to make a record; I just wanted it. Every single time I went into the studio, I wrote a song. Every time. That's never happened to me before. Songs don't just come out. And now I think I have the whole record."

The singer, who collaborated on a collection of nail polish with OPI and a makeup line with Urban Decay, has been equally prolific in her design ventures. In addition to bags, eyewear, kids clothes, shoes, and watches, she launched Harajuku Lovers dog gear (see the next spread for a glimpse into her growing empire). Perhaps her favorite launch? The lipstick she is wearing today—a bright classic Stefani red with a shiny finish from her Urban Decay set. "You do have to be a little careful with it because it's not matte, but since I'm a professional lipstick wearer, it's not a problem for *me*."

Looking at Stefani, one can't help but wonder how she reconciles this impossibly glam persona with her identity as a mom. "In the beginning," she admits, "I didn't want to think of myself as a mother. I was like, Wait a minute. Ain't no hollaback girl is who I am!" Stefani leans forward and points at an imaginary audience as she chants her most recognizable lyric, showing off the athletic charisma that made her a star. But she quickly relaxes again into a reflective pose. "I had to learn how to accept it. Being a mother and having a career—those are just different roles you play. You're still the same person you were before, but now you're more because you're a mother too, with a lot to do."

As if on cue, a makeup artist calls from down the hall-way; it's time to prepare for tonight's event. Gwen disappears and returns an instant later with Apollo swept up in a tight snuggle. Stefani grabs a pair of sunglasses from the table and strikes a knowing pose. The bold black frames from her new eyewear line are emblazoned with words that capture that moment to a tee: "I am," they say, "modern motherhood."

