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**RONSON
RISING**

Charlotte Ronson:
from growing up in New York's
coolest clan to creating her own
fashion empire

Fashion designer
Charlotte Ronson

Charlotte in Charge

The inside scoop on growing up Ronson and what makes this fashion designer one of the coolest girls on the New York scene

by Suzanne Weinstock Klein
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style assistance by Justin Rose
hair and makeup by David Tibolla
location Gallow Green at The McKittrick Hotel, home of Sleep No More

Lattice Lace Jumpsuit by Charlotte Ronson. Available at Blue & Cream, 1 East 1st Street, 212.533.3088.
Dolly pumps in black by Charlotte Olympia. Charlotte Olympia New York, charlotteolympia.com. Midnight Haut Bracelet by Ann Dexter Jones Design. AnnDexterJones.com. Ronson wears her own ring, by Genevieve Jones.





CHARLOTTE RONSON

walks into her favorite neighborhood café,

The Smile, shaking her head. "Ugh, I just got a look at myself in the mirror," she says with unfounded disappointment.

Her trademark tousled waves are pulled back and, aside from faded traces of lipstick and eyeliner from *AVENUE's* cover shoot this particular morning, Charlotte Ronson is enviably fresh faced, with dewy olive skin.

It's hard to believe that this modest, soft-spoken woman sipping lemonade is the same Charlotte Ronson endlessly photographed about town—downtown scenester, fashion designer and member of the near-mythological Ronson family.

"Charlotte is one of the most humble of my children," says her mother, Ann Dexter-Jones, adding that humility is particularly notable in an extended family with 10 children. "Sometimes I don't hear about her accomplishments until I read about them in the news."

Charlotte Ronson, her twin sister Samantha and their older brother Mark are the London-born but New York-bred children of Ann Dexter-Jones and real estate tycoon Laurence Ronson. After splitting with Laurence, Ann married Mick Jones of Foreigner, bringing two step-siblings into the mix and giving the Ronsons two half-siblings: Alexander and Annabelle Dexter-Jones.

Laurence Ronson remarried as well and added two more to the brood, for a grand total of 10.

Beyond Charlotte's success in the fashion world, Samantha is a globe-trotting DJ and Mark is a Grammy Award-winning music producer; plus their half- and step-siblings have sprawling lists of accomplishments of their own.

"I went through a phase when all my friends and I wanted us to dress the same. But my mother taught me that it's really important to make something your own and give off your own flair."

The epically talented and creative clan has evolved this way thanks to a unique upbringing by Ann Dexter-Jones—socialite, jewelry designer and "hostess with the most-ess," as Charlotte says. The household was defined by two opposing characteristics. It was bohemian, lavish and filled with famous, eccentric creative types constantly coming and going. But the kids were also given a strict English upbringing. The result was children who became imaginative, free-spirited adults but still have the discipline and work ethic to stay out of trouble and build empires based on their talents.

Telling stories about their mother's disciplinary approach is something Charlotte and her siblings love, though those tales are a little like war stories. Some of the restrictions, they say, fell into the realm of normalcy. There were early curfews enforced by a requirement that the kids sign in with the doorman, little spending money, no sleepovers and lots of groundings. "When my mother discovered the word 'grounding' in America, our life was over," says Charlotte. "She thought it was the best thing ever."

Then there was the not-so-normal. "When we moved to New York, we'd have to watch after-school specials about kidnapers and molesters; we were petrified and crying hysterically," Charlotte says. "My mother at one point had us on leashes." Mark Ronson recalls the entire family being put on lockdown during the L.A. riots "because she thought they were going to spread to New York in the course of seven minutes."

"I guess for America this seemed extreme to some families and their friends," admits Ann. "I remember sending Charlotte into the corner of a restaurant dining room at five years old, after I had reminded her twice not to touch her cutlery. Poor child! I didn't realize it was an oval room, as she tried unsuccessfully to find a corner. In their teens I think I was over-protective but I still think children need structure and boundaries. I would do so again in my next life but maybe without quite as much grounding."

Obviously there was method in the madness because Charlotte has grown up into a remarkably down-to-earth woman who travels in the

Ronson wears a multi-color suit print dress by Carolina Herrera, 954 Madison Avenue, 212.249.6552. Black Blazer with Zippered Faux Leather Detail by I Heart Ronson. Available at JCPenney, jcp.com. Stendhal Minaudiere red clutch by Reece Hudson. Available at Barneys New York, 660 Madison Avenue, 212.825.8900. Rings by Alison Lou. Available at Fivestory, 18 East 69th Street, 212.288.1338. RP 18kt Gold Overlay ID Bracelet by Ann Dexter-Jones Design. Available at Barneys New York.

most exclusive circles in the fashion and social worlds without any sign of affectation. And Ann's tight rein did little to dampen her children's artistic innovation.

Even groundings were an opportunity to encourage creativity. Charlotte loved to draw and sketch, so in order to be un-grounded, she was required to attend art classes and go to museums, usually with her twin sister in tow.

Nothing made Ann prouder than watching Charlotte develop her individuality and seeing her young daughter hone her talent for fashion. "At 3 years old she already had an innate sense of color, tottering over to replace items I laid out for her with a different color. I loved to watch her and say nothing," Ann boasts. "At 6 years old, she said, 'Mummy, when I grow up I would like to design material and frocks.' She loved to style her clothes with a stitch or a ribbon to make it more original. Then the outfit all made sense. She has an amazing eye for design."

Charlotte recalls her first styling experiences being in her mother's closet, where she would sneak in and play dress-up or help Ann pick her outfits to go out in. "I went through a phase when all my friends and I wanted us to dress the same," Charlotte remembers. "But my mother taught me that it's really important to make something your own and give off your own flair. She has such great style and only had fun, colorful pieces.

I didn't start wearing black until a couple of years ago because it seemed so serious. It was something you wore to bat mitzvahs and funerals."

“She’s by far the most family-centric of all the children and always sending around photos from when we were kids. Everybody is spread out and all over the place and she always makes the effort to bring us together.” —Mark Ronson

CHARLOTTE'S PASSION

and creativity were more than just admired. She was also told to do something about it by getting involved and figuring out how to make her dreams come true. She explored her interest in fashion with internships at *Harper's Bazaar*, *Rolling Stone* and Cynthia Rowley and, while studying at NYU in 2000, launched her line C. Ronson from her mother's bathroom. She used the tub to dye and re-work vintage t-shirts into stylishly grungy creations that she shopped from store to store, earning herself a clientele and soon launching a complete line.

"I'd go to her apartment, and it looked like a FedEx tornado had gone off because there were towers of FedEx boxes, where she was personally shipping all of her orders to all of these different stores around America," Mark reminisces. By 2002, she had enough traction to open a now-closed flagship store in Nolita and in 2005 she rebranded her line Charlotte Ronson, reflecting a more mature aesthetic.

At 36 years old, nearly 14 years after making her first t-shirts, Charlotte presides over a world that includes women's wear, shoes and handbags carried in more than a dozen countries, and a separate line for JCPenney, I 'Heart' Ronson.

Both lines feature easy, wearable dresses and separates designed to transition from day to night, including her signature "ditzy floral" dresses that Charlotte considers a wardrobe staple, especially when paired with a leather jacket. The clothes are flirty with a tongue-in-cheek, girly-girl-meets-tomboy attitude that lets you know these are outfits you're meant to have fun in. But the contemporary Charlotte Ronson line has grown up into more a more elevated line, while I 'Heart' Ronson fills the needs of more trend-driven, fast-fashion customers, much as C. Ronson did.

Sequin and jeweled dress and gold plated earrings with red mosaic by Dolce & Gabbana. Available at select DG boutiques, 1.877.70.DGUSA, dolcegabbana.it



The success of the brand and its aesthetic ultimately comes back to Charlotte herself, whose personal style screams downtown New York cool kid. "She's always been my style idol," says friend and *Nylon* editor-at-large Dani Stahl. "I love how she wears clothes, very boho-rock-chic. Her collection totally captures her style vibe."

Although, beginning with the Fall 2013 collection, Charlotte switched to a presentation format ("I get to talk to people instead of watching on a screen backstage"), her fashion shows have been one of the hottest tickets at New York Fashion Week for years, both for the clothes and the general hipness of the vibe.

Samantha lends her musical talents each season, taking Charlotte's inspirations and translating them into a soundtrack that viewers and bloggers regularly obsess over. And the audience over the years has been a testament to Charlotte's tremendous support among influencers of all kinds. Show-goers regularly include mainstream celebrities like Paula Patton, LeAnn Rimes and Mandy Moore; edgy girls like Peaches Geldof, Kelly Osbourne and Ellie Goulding; and socialites like Byrdie Bell, Zani Gugelmann and Shoshanna Lonstein Gruss. To sum it up, Charlotte Ronson and her line are simply cool.

"Charlotte was born cool," says best friend Shoshanna, who was a classmate at Manhattan's elite Nightingale School and collaborates with Charlotte on a capsule swimwear collection under her label Made With Love. "Some people just have that 'thing,' and Charlotte has it in spades. She's got the gorgeous hair and skin, and she throws on clothes, and they look just right, without looking like she tried. I've always admired Charlotte's easy way."

"I never want to look like I tried too hard," Charlotte says, shrugging off the undeniable fact that her style is aspired to by women all over the world. Today she is wearing short, cuffed denim shorts paired with a chambray button-up featuring cute cut-outs around the neck, and cap-toed oxfords—completely characteristic of her seemingly unstudied mix of feminine and masculine.

"Charlotte's line is a perfect extension of her personal style. It's a little bit tomboy, a little bit girly, a little bit bohemian, a little bit sexy and totally cool, just like my best pal Charlotte Ronson," Shoshanna says.

“Charlotte was born cool. Some people just have that ‘thing’, and Charlotte has it in spades. She’s got the gorgeous hair and skin, and she throws on clothes, and they look just right, without looking like she tried. I’ve always admired Charlotte’s easy way.” —Shoshanna Lonstein Gruss

CHARLOTTE'S COOLNESS is a genuine one built on a mysterious, magnetic *je ne sais quoi* that radiates from within. Although she may seem outwardly aloof, it doesn't take an observer long to see that beneath the killer hair and epic wardrobe is a rare sincerity and sensitivity. Reserved by nature, she takes her time to get to know people but stands by those close to her. "Loyal," "kind" and "compassionate" are descriptors that come up repeatedly among friends.

Family clearly comes first for Charlotte, who talks about her parents and siblings frequently and warmly. "She's by far the most family-centric of all the children and always sending around photos from when we were kids," Mark says. "Everybody is spread out and all over the place and she always makes the effort to bring us together."

Her relationship with Samantha is particularly special. "We're not the twins where, if you punch me, she'll feel it, or we would have been punching ourselves growing up," Charlotte jokes. "But we're definitely super-duper close and each other's best friend." Samantha concurs: "It's impossible to put into words the bond we share, but I can say you should all be very jealous."

In her free time, Charlotte may attend many a red carpet and will hit a club where her sister is spinning, but she prefers relaxing with friends, scrapbooking and visiting museums to nightclubs and parties. Ever since high school, she has filled books with images that inspire her—ripping pictures out of magazines and creating "inspiration books" around themes that may or may not eventually make their way into a future collection. She also has a soft spot for having a good cry over a heart-wrenching movie.

All told, she comes across as an old soul, an attribute that might be related to her status as a (nearly) lifelong New Yorker. While her siblings have moved around, Charlotte never wanted to live anywhere else and opted for NYU after high school instead of Paris where Samantha went to school. "I grew up maybe a little faster than everyone else," she says. "I got my own apartment. I had to have all these responsibilities much earlier on, but I couldn't imagine living anywhere else."

Introspective and self-aware when it comes to how she has evolved, Charlotte reflects: "I'm more confident and stronger in who I am, and I know what I want. I definitely worry more. I'm not as free. I've seen so much of life, good and bad, and not everything works out how you want it to. But building my business, working with people, becoming a grown-up, having a runway show and seeing things that you've dreamed about come to life—you can't ask for anything more."

And there may be nothing cooler than making your dreams come true. ♦

