

BRAZILIAN BELLE ADRIANA LIMA

PHOTOGRAPHER: Michael Zeppetello
STYLIST: Lysa Cooper
HAIR: Mitch Barry
MAKEUP: Pep for Bryan Bantry
MODEL: Adriana Lima, Elite, New York

BY JILL JOHNSON — It's about time for a new face to usurp the throne of supermodel queen—you know who I mean—and my money is on Adriana Lima. This means the reign will remain with Brazil, of course, but what country stands a chance against a gene pool that is simply swimming with beautiful strokes: the ballerina legs, the plump lips, the bold cheekbones, the mesmerizing azure eyes. These are the alluring attributes that keep popping up in Brazilian females with the frequency of Bush votes in a Republican recount.

Usually when I meet a cover model, pre-makeup, I am relieved to find a face that is human, i.e. flawed in some way—a blemish on a cheek, perhaps, or one eyebrow slightly askew—but flawed nonetheless. When I met Adriana, a spunky 19-year-old in blue jeans and a vintage tee, I looked into the magnetic eyes of a first-place finisher in the final heat of the international, gene-pool swim meet. Flawless!

Yellow jump-
suit by Jean
Yu at Denise
Williams.



With a French, Portuguese, Native-American, and Caribbean heritage, Adriana has a bedazzling, temptress-meets-angel face and the body to match. Her teeny-tiny calves extend several miles up to tiny thighs, which eventually meet up with a small but shapely Brazilian tush, which swivels with her hips below her fat-free waistline and *real* breasts, as she checks out the yellow bodysuit into which she has wriggled all those attributes and the deep dark tan which is now even more evident. Well, I don't need to tell you—you can see it in the photos—it's enough to make a 30-something pasty-white Anglo-Saxon girl run screaming for a jar of cellulite cream and some self-tanner.

But I gritted my teeth and stayed put—she had picked up the copy of *Tear Sheet* that I had plopped on the counter, and I wanted to hear what she had to say about it. “Oh, that’s me!” she cried, pointing out her picture on the party page with the genuine excitement of someone who was seeing her picture in a magazine for the first time. She has not only seen her picture in a few magazines—like editorial in *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, for example—she also may have caught a glimpse of herself on buses, cabs, and phone booths for French Connection; in magazine ads and on bus shelters for BCBG; in a TV commercial and on a catalog cover for Victoria’s Secret; in campaigns for Guess? and Giorgio Armani; in interviews on *E! Entertainment* and *Extra*; and on the runways for Ralph Lauren, Chanel, Christian Lacroix, and Anna Sui.

Surely Miss Flawless must be an absolute nightmare—right?... No, her reaction to her picture in the party page is typical of her unpretentious, zestful personality. She has a certain innocence that matches her age and her angelic face—but is rather unusual for someone in the supermodel fast lane.

JJ: How old were you when you made the move from a small town in the north of Brazil to New York City?

AL: I was 15.

JJ: You didn’t come by yourself, did you?

AL: I came with my mother’s best friend, and I lived with her for a while until I moved into my agency owner’s house (which was Ford at the time).

JJ: Did you speak English?

AL: No, not at all. I didn’t speak one word and I didn’t understand anything. Actually I knew how to say “yes” and “no,” but I was so embarrassed about mispronouncing words. I just knew how to smile.

JJ: Looks like smiling seemed to work pretty well for you! There’s certainly been a wave of successful Brazilian models in the last

few years. Are you friends with them or is it sort of competitive?

AL: I wouldn’t say it’s competitive. I think everyone has their time. Gisele is having her time, and Shirley had her time, and maybe I will have my time. I just think they’re really insecure about themselves sometimes. I know all the girls, but we all work a lot and don’t have time to hang out together. They’re all really nice; I’ve never had a problem with any model.

JJ: You’ve worked with most of the world’s top photographers—Steven Meisel, Patrick Demarchelier, Peter Lindbergh, Ellen von Unwerth—any favorite?

AL: Steven Meisel because he is definitely number one. I also love to work with Albert Watson because his work is a mix of photography and art. I love it.

JJ: What about a favorite designer?

AL: My favorite designer is Christian Lacroix, not just because his clothes are amazing and I love them, but because he’s so nice. When I did his fashion show, he was the first one to arrive there and he helped everyone. He came to every single model to say “hello” and ask if we needed anything. You don’t have to have an attitude if you’re famous. I think you have to be thankful and you’ll get more [fans] if you are nice.

JJ: That’s certainly a philosophy more people in our business should adopt. Now tell me, with your shoots all over the world, trips to the Cannes Film Festival with the VS Angels, visits to Brazil, how many flights do you take each week?

AL: I think I live inside the plane! I never have time to unpack; I’m always leaving in two days again. I travel a lot, and at the beginning it was really fun. The first time I went inside a plane, I was 15 years old and I had so much fun. I like to travel all over the world and learn [about] new cultures. Not that many people have the opportunity to do that.

JJ: Any favorite places?

AL: Marrakesh, Morocco. You can’t find a culture like that anywhere.

JJ: Do you have any modeling goals you haven’t achieved yet?

AL: I would like just one time to be on the cover of Italian *Vogue*.

JJ: What about after modeling? What are your long-term plans?

AL: I think I want to be an actress. But first I need to try to get a better accent!

JJ: (Her accent is lovely, but unmistakably Brazilian.) What is your advice to any teenagers who are thinking about modeling?

AL: Be sure what you want and be sure about yourself. Fashion is not just beauty, it’s about good attitude. You have to believe in yourself and be strong because you never know when [you will work





Fuchsia
cocktail
dress from
the Kenzi
Valenti
Collection.

and not work]. The truth of it is, if one day I have a daughter and my daughter wants to be a model, I would never let her! But then, if she wants to, what can I do? But definitely not until she's 18 years old. You know, every work has the bad side, and people will be mean to you, and when you're young, you don't know how to defend yourself.

JJ: Do you feel like you've missed out on anything as a teenager?

AL: I missed out on everything. Sometimes on the street I see teenagers hanging out and going to the movies, going to concerts together, and I get so jealous. But everything has the good side too. I'm a teenager, but I'm independent—I have my own apartment, I have my own life. And I think I have learned more than any of those teenagers have in school. I learned to be responsible, leaving my family and coming here alone.

JJ: Where exactly are you from? Is it a small town?

AL: I'm from San Salvador. It is small compared to São Paulo. We are really slow there. People work half a day and then go to the beach. People have time. Here in the big city people spend their time thinking about work and about money; they don't give some value to friendships and it can be depressing.

JJ: Tell me about how you're helping the orphanages in Brazil.

AL: The place where I grew up was really poor and when I was young I used to spend my time playing with the orphans. Now I'm helping that orphanage finish some construction work and get more space for the children. I don't know why, but if you look around in Brazil you see pregnant women everywhere. Here you don't see that as much. There the only thing they do is babies, babies, babies! Especially the poor families. Every time I go there I buy clothes to give to [poor children].

JJ: It's so great to give back like that, especially when you're in this business and everything is geared around such shallow values.

AL: Yes, everyone is very...what is the word when you only think about yourself?

JJ: Egocentric?

AL: Yes, I think everyone is a little egocentric, but when I help someone I lose 0.01% of my ego.

JJ: Back to the shallow stuff...your favorite beauty product?

AL: For makeup, I love Shu Uemura. For my skin, I don't like to use much lotion or any soaps. I just let mother nature do her job. And I've never been to the gym.

JJ: You don't work out at all?

AL: No, never, I do nothing. You can bring me into the gym to those machines, and I'd have no idea where to begin. I used to do sports in school, but right now, for four years, I've done nothing! My mother's body is similar—very skinny—so I'm lucky.

JJ: And I suppose you eat anything you want too?

AL: Umm, yes. I try to control what I eat, but the truth is I can't. I tried to give up meat last week, but I only lasted three days. I just couldn't do it. I love meat, chocolate, cakes...

JJ: This might be a tough one for you. What is your least favorite aspect of your face or body?

AL: I don't know. I think for the moment I like my body. I don't think it's the best one, but I don't have anything I don't like about it—yet.

When I get older, I don't think I'll like to have wrinkles, or a big jelly belly. I cannot have it. I'll have to work out!

JJ: But your mom looks great, right? I think good genes (great genes, unbelievable genes) are on your side.

AL: Yes. Thank God. Thanks Mom!

JJ: Do you have a boyfriend?

AL: Yes, my boyfriend, his name is Estevan and he's from Argentina.

JJ: What does he do?

AL: He's [an aspiring] photographer.

JJ: Where did you meet him and how long have you been dating?

AL: I met him here and it's been four years.

JJ: Four years? And how old is he?

AL: He's older. He's 31. Younger guys are just too jealous. The good thing about Estevan is that he understands my work and he's not too jealous; of course, he's a little bit, but not too much.

JJ: What do you do with what little free time you have?

AL: I like to go to the movies or read.

JJ: What's your favorite movie?

AL: *Shine*.

JJ: Your favorite book?

AL: *Memories of a Geisha*.

JJ: Most embarrassing modeling moment?

AL: I was in a fashion show and I had on a strapless top. When I got to the end the top was down. What's worse, the next morning my mother called me and said, "Adriana I saw you on TV. You were the one with the top that fell down!"

JJ: Are you parents protective? Were they supportive of your decision to come to New York?

AL: They're very protective, but what my mother told me was, if I was sure this was what I wanted to do, she would support me, and if I am happy, she will be happy. She helped me a lot because I used to be very shy. When I first started, I had to go to a casting, and I had to go in a bikini. When I saw all the girls, I thought, "What am I doing here?" The girls were so beautiful. I said to my mother, "There's no way that I am going in." I didn't like my body before; I thought I was too skinny. And she said, "No, you are going and you're going to get this job." I was so nervous, but I went in and I got the job! I couldn't believe it. And that's how I started.

JJ: Your best moment?

AL: My best moment...I think my best moment was taking the plane when I came to New York. My family was really poor, and we would never have had the money to take a plane. So that was the most exciting moment. I didn't know anything about fashion. I didn't know anything! If you asked me about *Vogue*, I would have said, "What is *Vogue*?" I couldn't believe it when I got here. I don't know how I got here. I don't know how I'm sitting here right now speaking English. I don't know how I got this job, this cover today...

Adriana's enthusiasm and amazement can fill a whole room, a whole studio, a whole magazine. And the answer to her question—in addition to that sweet, open, attitude-free personality—is jumping off of these very pages.