

Emilia Petrarca is Fashionably Charting Her Own Path

The Cut's former senior fashion writer left her salaried dream job to pursue something riskier: freelancing full time. Spoiler alert: it's going *really* well.

By Erianne Lewis

Emilia Petrarca was destined to be a fashion writer. The coffee table in her childhood home in [Tribeca](#) was overflowing with magazines collected by her journalist mother. Similar to *everyone* working in fashion, Emilia too would tear out the pages of Teen Vogue, Nylon and Vogue and hang them on her wall; she took inspiration from them. Not all that different from the Scholastic Book Fair catalogs that she was also utterly obsessed with.

"I would love going to the airport, because I would just be like ... 'Can I get a snack?' And then I'd come with a stack of like, five magazines from Hudson News. And [my mom would] be like, 'Oh my god, why did that cost like \$40,'" Emilia said.

Beyond the pages of these glossy magazines, she held an additional, highly-coveted, source of knowledge: the experience of growing up in New York City.

It was a surprisingly hot Thursday afternoon when I met Emilia at Bloomingdale's in SoHo. She was wearing a black Issey Miyake mock neck top paired with black and white patterned Issey Miyake pants, with an orange purse tucked under her arm (her signature pop of color accessory).

Arriving a little early from a brand lunch, she waited in front of the department store she was quite familiar with. Bloomingdale's was where she bought her first designer purse, her first *grown up* bra and almost her prom dress (Barney's won that one), she revealed to me as we wandered up the different levels. Justin Bieber's "Beauty and the Beat," and other 2010s pop hits, played loudly over the speakers, surprisingly not distracting us from our chat, but reminding me we were still in a department store.

This particular store, (which I had only seen in [movies and TV shows](#)) was formative to Emilia's future involvement in fashion spaces. Only the SoHo location, though. The Upper East Side store was nearly forbidden during her childhood; wandering above 14th street alone was out of the question. However, she would make a full day out of her SoHo solo shopping adventures and hit Urban Outfitters as well as Yellow Rat Bastard. Bloomindale's, though, had everything.

These days Emilia finds herself stopping in Bloomingdale's for a quick nipple cover, and nothing else really. She can no longer identify with the items presented in the store she once loved so dearly.

It, as with many things, has evolved into something that doesn't hold the same charm and whimsy to a 32-year-old, as it did to a 12-year-old. Just like her salaried writing position, she's outgrown it, and is now chasing the next thrill. She's excelling at it, with style *of course*.

How does one get into a career that is often romanticized through TV shows, literature and movies? Emilia will tell you it's no easy feat, but *absolutely* worth it. Being from New York City allowed Emilia to do unpaid internships in undergrad at heavy-hitter Condé Nast publications, like Glamour, because she could live at home.

“When I started, I was like, oh, this is kind of like ‘The Devil Wears Prada,’ it’s exactly like they said. And I think that was really like the women's magazines. I think that it's changed a lot, because that behavior is just not allowed anymore,” Emilia said.

Spending time in Glamour’s fashion closet helped her comprehend how magazines worked and that she is “not a market editor, that is not what I'm good at,” she candidly admitted.

After Glamour, Emilia interned at Interview, The Daily Beast and Man Repeller (rip), until landing an editor role at W Magazine for nearly three years, followed by five and a half years at the *Cut*. Emilia then decided to do something “no one has ever done before,” (she joked in an [Instagram post](#)) and freelance, while simultaneously writing a Substack.

Since formally leaving the Cut over a year ago, Emilia has gained bylines in Vogue, W Magazine, Family Style, Grazia and Elle to name a few. [“More work,”](#) a photo of the magazines spread across her coffee table is casually captioned. How full circle to see her byline in the magazines that once consumed the coffee table in her childhood home. Her Substack, Shop Rat, boasts 10,000 subscribers in the eight months since she started it. She ventured off the fictionalized fashion writer path and *thank god* it paid off!

Emilia is a family name, but she is also named after the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy. Her dad’s side of the family is Italian and her mom’s side is Irish/German mix. She is the oldest of two, her and her younger brother are two years apart. Her dad, who died when she was 11, was an architect with curly black hair. Her mom had curly red hair—there were never any doubts about her inheriting curls—but more so, what color would they be?

“If I came out of my mom's womb with red hair, they would have named me Charlotte. And I came out obviously with a full head of black hair,” Emilia said. Now, “Charlotte is sort of like my alter ego,” she joked.

Her curly hair has also become somewhat of a recognizable identifier.

“Her silhouette is just iconic because it's like this massive curly hair and then just like you know, she's always going to be wearing something that's a little cutesy,” Charlotte von Hardenburgh, a friend of Emilia’s, said.

Emilia was sitting on the B train heading to Brooklyn when she snapped a photo of a stylish woman and [posted it](#) to her Instagram story. Within 10 minutes, someone from her story saw the photo, sent it to von Hardenburgh, who then DMed Emilia immediately. From there, they formed an instant friendship. The way von Hardenburgh spoke about Emilia during our interview, you would’ve thought they’d been friends for a decade (not *just* five months).

People enjoy being around Emilia because her energy is always a mix of fun but also direct.

She was a stubborn (and somewhat ambitious) toddler. She desired certain things and would find ways to ensure she got them and she was always creatively-driven.

“Instead of going to sleepaway camp, when I was younger, I would go to Parsons Photo Camp and like FIT Jewelry Design Camp and stuff like that,” Emilia said.

She was also a tomboy, to some extent. She hated shopping in the girls sections at stores like JC Penny because of what was being offered to the adolescents. She felt the girls’ clothing was frilly and had stupid phrases on them.

“I think it was just a reflection of wanting something very specific, and not really knowing what it was, but just not seeing it out there and being very opinionated,” Emilia said. “If I couldn't get exactly what I was looking for, I didn't want anything.”

She went to a public elementary school (PS234) in Tribeca, then Poly Prep Country Day School in Bay Ridge. After going to a soccer camp there, she was “blown away by the campus and found it very grand,” she admitted. Using that same ambitious spirit, she convinced her friends from Tribeca to attend the school too.

There she got really involved in student government and started a photography club. After Poly Prep, she went to Vassar and majored in English with an art history minor. She became enamored by Vassar’s campus, early hints of her love of interior and structural design.

During her junior year, she studied abroad in Paris, *unsuccessfully*. “It sort of popped like that bubble in my head a little bit where I was like, ‘Oh, Paris is kind of lonely. And they're kind of mean,’” Emilia said. “It almost got Paris out of my system a little bit.”

She dove into fashion during her time at Vassar and by her senior year she was co-editor in chief of the fashion magazine. She found her writing voice, as well as her style there.

“I would say Emilia Petrarca writes the way I wish I could,” von Hardenburgh said. “She says things so detailed, but not in a superfluous way ... so funny, but not in a kitschy way. And I love that. I love her writing and I love the way she tells a story.”

Emilia typically wears a lot of black, which was inspired by her dad’s closet. As an architect, his “uniform” consisted of mostly black attire. She also finds black to be pretty easy to style on the day-to-day.

“I'm pretty casual, I would say most of the time. And then I go like really ... I love events because that allows me to really dress up,” Emilia said.

Someone recently described Emilia’s style as Parker Posey’s character in *Party Girl* (1995), a wild partier—hence the title—who gets into trouble and begins working at a library, “if she actually read all the books.” She found this flattering.

Her former roommate of nearly seven years, Jess Coles, described it as “Prada narc.”

“She has a particular way of making it entirely idiosyncratic and her own. Like, even if everybody in the room is dressed in black, she will still stand out,” Coles said.

Emilia said she’s aiming for her style to end up “somewhere in the middle of like, silly and strict.”

Her favorite brands are Norma Kamali and Prada, *obviously*, (the latter which she excitedly added *forever* to the end of, in a die-hard fan kind of way). Neon green, long pointed toe, Prada shoes—that a friend described as being like “something the Queen would wear, but punk,”—are Emilia’s favorite thing in her closet right now. She’s a *big* shoe person. She considers them the perfect way for her to spice up any outfit.

“She wears like old lady shoes, not in a bad way, but in a very sophisticated way,” von Hardenburgh said. “But then she’ll have a cute little kitschy purse that feels like something that a 14-year-old girl would get on a school field trip to New York City or something. And so it’s like this kind of fun balance of whimsy and sophisticated old woman.”

Emilia, who just celebrated her 32nd birthday, IS the kind of person who *loves* her birthday, according to Coles. So much so that she plans elaborate (and sometimes unusual) celebrations. During the pandemic she *allegedly* used her stimulus check to charter a boat for her and four friends for her 29th birthday.

“I joke about Emilia loving her birthday, but I feel like she always comes at it with such a spirit of generosity,” Coles said. “It’s always kind of just a gift that she’s giving to her friends.”

This year, she invited her inner circle to celebrate with her at Greenwood Cemetery for a trolley tour (during the day, *of course*). It’s always been on her list to go, because she finds it to be such a beautiful cemetery.

This isn’t particularly chic, but it’s *very* Emilia, von Hardenburgh said.

“My favorite character trait of Emilia is that she’s a total nerd. I’m such a nerd, so for me, I really love it because she geeks out about things too,” von Hardenburgh said. “She embraces that inner nerdiness in a very chic way.”

Emilia is not a morning person (*which, I quickly second*), but freelancing provides her the flexibility to work at night and there is an excitement to it because her days look different than when she was working for a publication.

“I sort of let my inbox take me where it wants to throughout the day,” she jokes. “The busier that I am, the more that I can get done.”

She’s also not a coffee shop working person, there’s too many moving parts: having to pay for coffee, searching for outlets to charge the computer, unreliable wifi, NOISY, etc. She needs silence when she’s writing and conducting interviews, so she prefers to work from home.

But not the type of “work” from home that you tell your boss you are doing while shamelessly scrolling through social media or catching up on a hot new show. She actually *has* to work, because she’s in charge of holding herself accountable (which usually isn’t a problem for her).

“She’s such a hard worker,” Coles said. “It’s really cool to see her doing so well now. We’re actually about to have our 10-year college reunion. You know, I don’t know anybody who has been working harder, been more focused and had it work out as well as Emilia and she deserves it.”

Emilia’s ideal schedule would be structured around European timing. She’d love to have the ability to work from 3 p.m. - 9 p.m., grab dinner with friends, and then be in bed by midnight. But that would never work in the constantly operating New York City.

Emilia, who is always three steps ahead, has *already* planned out the rest of her year. She’s going to Paris Fashion Week for Men’s Spring/Summer 2025 in June and spending a month in Sicily, Italy, in October, immersing herself in the language and culture, while she also focuses on writing a book proposal.

New York City will always be home to her, but when she covered Milan Fashion Week for New York magazine a few years ago, she fell in love and felt very welcomed there.

“I started to get more into Italian culture and I’m learning Italian now. I’m really trying to spend more time in Italy and get to know it better. But I think New York will always be my home base for sure.”

Between writing about fashion events and the book proposal, she hopes to find more time educating herself about design also, which is her current obsession.

“I’m interested in sort of training myself more and like getting to know that world more. I really thought I could just read about it and sort of pick it up. But like there’s so much to learn and immerse myself in,” she said. “I love interior design. I don’t think it’ll ever be my beat, but I think there’s a lot ... there’s so much overlap between fashion and design that it would be good for me to know more about it.”

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