

he sun is setting on Santa Monica beach as Claudia Schiffer stands backlit in a golden glow, wearing a see-through cream crochet Ralph Lauren dress. It's the last shot of an exhausting day that began at 6am, and Schiffer is still working the camera like a demon. As the photographer takes his last few frames, the supermodel looks up from under the brim of her floppy straw hat and flashes the pouty Bardot-esque glance that first catapulted her to fashion fame after she was discovered at the age of 17 in a Düsseldorf nightclub.

But these days Schiffer is so much more than just an iconic model, and today is very much a family event. She is also the superwoman mother-of-three who juggles her modelling jobs, which just keep coming (recently she has starred in ads for Chanel, Ferragamo and Yves Saint Laurent), with being a very hands-on parent,

an A-lister wife and now a designer too. But more of this later.

A few weeks before the *Bazaar* shoot, she decamped from her home in Notting Hill to Los Angeles along with her three children: Caspar, eight; Clementine, six; and Cosima, one, so they can be with her husband of 10 years, film director Matthew Vaughn, while he works on post-production for *X-Men: First Class*.

She is fitting in work around her Californian sojourn and has booked a tutor for the kids. 'They were super-excited once I told them that the house has a pool,' she says of their Beverly Hills rental.

Her young family is ever-present on the shoot. Clementine comes for the morning and guards the photographer's monitor as she issues terse instructions to her supermodel mother ('You look like a teenager!'), before sweetly declaring when it's all finished: 'It was the best day of my life!' Caspar, meanwhile, comes down to play in the afternoon; and by the end of the day, Vaughn, who is incredibly low-key despite his status as one of our most starry film-makers, comes to collect his ludicrously gorgeous brood in his Range Rover.

Through it all, Schiffer illustrates exactly why she is still considered every perfect inch a supermodel, working each look with ease

and grace along with the sexpot smoulder that made her a star in the first place, won her over 500 magazine covers, and built her an estimated fortune of £40 million, thanks to long and lucrative contracts with brands ranging from L'Oréal to Revlon, and Guess jeans to D&G.

As *Bazaar* photographer Horst Diekgerdes, who has worked with Schiffer for almost two decades, says: 'Claudia has always had a very singular place in the business, not just because of her looks, professionalism and intelligence. She also has a great capacity to recognise a good photograph – she makes it happen.'

A steely determination and the quest for perfection are also behind Schiffer's newest venture – her own label, which will launch this autumn. It's a huge step for the model who, despite endless offers, has until now resisted dipping into design.

A couple of weeks before the LA shoot, we meet in Paris to have a first look at the collection. In businesswoman mode, Schiffer is worlds away from the sultry image that her campaigns and catwalk appearances would suggest. Of course, she looks amazing, towering above everyone in the sun-filled, parquet-floored Parisian apartment. She also appears the epitome of modern, laid-back chic in a slouchy inky-blue sweater-dress of her own design, long gold pendants and super-cool Isabel Marant ankle boots.

She looks fabulous for her 40 years, although she confesses that she is surprisingly low-maintenance. Her rapid, no-fuss beauty routine is carried out during her daily shower; her latest fitness craze, dancing around her bedroom with one of Tracy Anderson's trainers.

Designing her own line does seem like a very natural step. As well as her two decades experience working alongside the world's most celebrated designers, Schiffer is also renowned for being immaculately dressed.

There are her regular, although carefully selected, appearances on the party circuit. A few nights before we meet, she has been celebrating Michael Kors' 30th anniversary in fashion at the American Ambassador's residence in Paris, wearing a studded

patchwork micro-mini-shift.

And then, there are her daily school-run looks. 'You can't be too over-dressed or too sexy on the school run,' she says. 'It's about being practical and comfortable.'

Nevertheless, Schiffer's school-gate style still fills the tabloids on a regular basis. Along with Stella McCartney and Macpherson, her fellow West London über-mummies, she must strike the fear of God into other Notting Hill mothers as she is routinely papped looking phenomenal, but – more importantly – natural in MiH flares when collecting her children.

But this sense of what is right and proper is very Schiffer. She

You can't be too
over-dressed or too sexy
on the school run,' she
says. 'It's about being
practical and comfortable'

has always had a reputation for her super-slick professionalism. She is straight-talking and considered, choosing her words very precisely. This coolness could be taken for insipidness, but in reality, Schiffer has an unfashionable – although rather refreshing – reserve.

'People always say it's a German thing, but I am sure not all Germans are like this,' she says. And now that she is launching herself as a businesswoman, these qualities could just be the making of her – and her brand.

During her supermodel career there have been a lot of business offers too, but nothing ever felt like a good fit, and, as she puts it: 'I've worked for too long in the fashion industry that I could just sell out. I always knew I wanted to do something that I would love myself, something to be proud of. And there was never a product I really loved. I've had a lot of friends who said I was insane,' she says at the thought of deals rejected. 'But for me, it's not just about the money.'

So Schiffer is launching her own knitwear label for A/W 11 – the beginnings of what she hopes will one day be a big brand that she can pass on to her children.

'I wanted it to be effortless and chic,' says the model as she pulls out an easy cashmere-merino sweater-dress from the rails

of tube designs in dark blues, greys and taupes, oversize granddad cardigans, and dresses inspired by Breton tops and boyfriend knits. By that, she means exactly the kind of clothes she can wear from school run to meeting or for relaxing weekends when she routinely retreats to Coldham Hall, the rambling Tudor house in Suffolk they bought in 2002, just before their marriage.

Everything in the collection was born from her obsession with 'ticking all the boxes', and as a result, dresses are cut just short enough to feel cool but long enough so you can bend over without worrying about flashing your knickers, or with armholes cut so they will cover your underwear. 'I hate when you can see a bra!'

But does the fashion world need another knitwear brand? 'There is amazing knitwear around and I have a lot of it,' she says, laughing. 'But sometimes I saw things or wore them, and then I realised that, actually, this isn't so great and easy to wear.'

Back on the beach in Santa Monica, Schiffer demonstrates exactly how she has ticked all the boxes as she sits in the sand, cocooned at the end of the day in a soft waffle knit, which falls off her bronzed shoulders.

'Knowing what I wanted to achieve wasn't difficult, because I have been in the fashion industry for so long,' she explains, sipping from her Starbucks Frappuccino – one of her few vices (sugar is her other). 'If I go into a store, I'm not one of those people who look around and aren't sure. Five minutes and I'm out of there – most of the time I don't even try things on.'

She hasn't sought advice from Karl Lagerfeld or any of the designers she has worked with – despite her natural self-assurance, she's so nervous, she hasn't even shared her designs with friends. 'It is quite scary. It's the first time I have put my name to something. I feel very confident, but also very nervous. Who knew? Maybe it will just be me, the only person in the whole world who likes it.'

That's unlikely. As Roland Mouret, who first spotted Schiffer out shopping in the Marais markets when they were both living in Paris in their early twenties, puts it: 'I think she's absolutely gifted and that's why we call her a supermodel, a top model. Whatever the decade is, she's relevant for all women. As a woman, she's grown in power, in age, in life.' And that experience is all being poured into this debut. (Schiffer is also set to judge the Fashion Fringe prize in London alongside Mouret this year.)

Putting the beginnings of her label together coincided with the birth of her third child, Cosima, which, while possibly daunting to any other new mother, was embraced by Schiffer as the perfect time for a start-up business because she was, for once, pretty much housebound with a newborn.

Chances are Brand Claudia will be a big success. Her efficiency means that she has managed to pull everything off so far

without it having a massive impact on her family life. 'I try to be at dinner with the kids. I want to put them to bed. I'm not one of those people who are addicted to their BlackBerry. I put it away.'

But she is, she says, incredibly decisive – which helps. She travels with her business partner Carla James, making all their plans on the go, on an iPad in cars, planes and trains. 'The reason why we work well together is that we are very, very similar – we are so quick. When we work with people, we are constantly apologising, "So sorry we are so straightforward, sorry for being so direct."'

Schiffer simply knows what she wants, although like any working mother with young children, her life is still full of compromise. She would love to move to Suffolk full-time and it's something the family would do 'in a heartbeat – we went through this scenario so many times, but we are both working'. But slowly, the couple are persuading friends to buy places in the bucolic setting close to their estate.

This summer, though, like every other before, the family will go to Majorca, where days are spent sailing around the coast, discovering secret coves and feasting on tapas as the sun goes down. 'We stay until the children have to go back to school,' says Schiffer wistfully. 'It's like their second home.'

And there the model, mother and entrepreneur will finally get to relax at last, dressed in her summer staples – Isabel Marant dresses, Stella McCartney sandals and, most probably, one of her own little knits on top. □

'It is quite scary. It's the first time I have put my name to something. Who knows? Maybe I'll be the only person who likes it'