



With her company Meyler and Co, she has championed a renaissance in the beautiful modernist works of Richard Neutra, Rudolf Schindler and Pierre Keonig on the west coast of the United States, and got Gucci, Steven Meisel and Donna Karan desperate for her design advice.

A complete newcomer to the business when she arrived in the US in the early 90s she has become one of the most respected location agents in Hollywood.

S/ What do you like about living in Los Angeles compared with London?

CM/ LA was attractive to me because you get more bang for the buck. You can rent an unfurnished apartment very cheaply. For three years I lived in a fantastic Schindler apartment for \$600 per month. It had views over the whole city and was in a great up and coming (then) area - Silverlake, an area known for its unusually high concentration of architectural properties. Neutra Place (a cul-de-sac of eight Neutra houses), various Schindlers, Lautners

S/How did you first become interested in architecture?

CM/ It started when I worked as a nanny and my employer was very involved in preservation. She bought me a membership of the LA Conservancy and a book called "Architecture in Los Angeles-A Complete Guide". Because LA is so new, the most obvious architecture is art deco, some streamline moderne, and international moderne. I just did things at my own pace, as long as I could support myself. For a few years I reverted back to secretarial work just to relieve the pressure of a "career". I just enjoyed myself. Learned to sail and raced yachts for a while.

Behind the scenes of style. Ever looked at the back backdrop to a fashion shoot, and wondered where did they find that house? When fashion photographers, designers and commercials directors need to find the perfect location for their photo shoot, who is the first person on their check list to call? Most likely Catherine Meyler.

Tessa Williams Akoto got to grips with with LA's finest location agent.

LA STORIES

S/ What do you think of fashion designers like Prada pioneering the work of avant garde architects for fashion stores?

CM/ I think making the purchase of clothes a complete design experience is an excellent idea and any opportunity to bring architecture into the public consciousness is a step ahead. The fact that so many fashion ads are now shot within and around great architecture is no coincidence, obviously it worked very well and this is the natural progression. That designers publicly endorse architecture in this way makes it a discussion topic and therefore encourages people to learn more about it in order to have a point of view, it makes it cool to know and people want to know more. It gives fashion an added diversity.

S/ Do you deal with film companies or is it mostly magazines/photographers?

CM/ The company is only four years old and we are known for still photography. However in the last year we have done a feature film and we are being sought out more and more for this type of thing. We are now in a markedly different climate than when I started in this business (in 1995). Then there were far fewer location companies and architecture wasn't understood by most of them. I was the first person that people could ring and discuss architecture with.

S/ If someone requests a Neutra house for instance?

CM/ You should also submit Koenig, Craig Ellwood, certain Lautner's, you know? Knock-offs too.

S/ Can you describe how your Company works? Is it like an agency?

CM/ Absolutely. In a city where everyone seems to have an agent, I am an agent for houses. I have houses photographed, and keep those photographs in files under various headings. When a certain type of house is requested I submit my ideas and if one is chosen, I negotiate the contract and have a staff member on site at all times. A few years ago I got a brief for an "artist's loft" for an Italian Vogue story Steven Meisel was shooting. We pulled out the requisite downtown lofts, big warehouse spaces etc, just like every other location service. Then I threw in one of Tony Duquette's houses-after all he was an artist. I knew that the photographer would be shooting about 20 pages and you can't get 20 good pages from a couple of big, spare, white-walled rooms. But Tony's house offered something wild and different in every room-in every direction-FAR more interesting. I immediately got a call asking if there were any more houses similar so I sent up Tony's Malibu property and that sealed

the deal. The funny thing was that the inspiration behind the initial idea was that the model should represent an eccentric artist, and Tony's late wife was an incredibly eccentric artist-so it really was the perfect fit.

S/ Do you feel people's attitudes to their environment are any different in LA?

CM/ LA has a huge history of great architecture and a massive concentration of it. The LA Conservancy is very visible. Also because of the constant use of architectural properties in advertising and filming, it brings the visibility to the forefront and so it's easier to encourage people to accept it and (hopefully) help to protect and save it as well as appreciate it.

S/ Was there any particular moment that inspired you to start your company?

CM/ After I left my last company I was being headhunted by anyone and everyone and I opted to start negotiations with a large photo studio who had a production department and were thinking about starting a location department too. When it got to remuneration and commission levels, the person interviewing me was scathingly apprehensive about the billings I said I could generate. I was so insulted that I stomped out and had lunch with a couple of English location managers. One of them, Ilt Jones (location manager of X-Files) was aghast that I would even consider generating anywhere near these kinds of sums for someone else. He also pointed out that I had now given my vast resources to two other companies and now was planning to do the same to a third. He insisted that I should open my own service which I was reluctant to do for a variety of reasons. He was very determined and two hours and two bottles of wine later, I agreed to give it a go. I opened in June 1999 with \$50,000. This year we have steadily billed out around \$100,000 per month and it doesn't seem to be slowing down. It doesn't seem possible does it?

S/ Do you feel people's attitudes have changed towards architecture in the last decade?

CM/ In a way but it's still not enough. Even though it's now become hip and cool to be interested in, and know about, architecture-there are still very few preservation ordinances in place in the US, so buildings are constantly being demolished for new shopping malls, or McMansions. According to the AIA (American Institute of Architects) only 8% of houses built have an architect involved. But perhaps the architects are at fault too. I think many of them concentrate solely on making money and just sell their souls. It's rare in LA to hear of a really good architect building low-income housing or community projects. It used to be that architects had somewhat of a social conscience



and found such projects challenging, but I think now the almighty dollar rules and too often only the rich are in a position to afford great architecture. It's a shame because in LA there are tracts of housing built by Gregory Ain and A. Quincy Jones, plus Neutra and Schindler apartment buildings. Great architecture should never be the preserve of the rich.

S/ How did you get involved in such an interesting business?

CM/ In 1995 I had been in LA for 8 years trying to "find" a career or area that suited me and I hadn't so I had planned on returning to England. I rang someone I knew socially who owned a production company for still photography and asked for a temp job basically for airfare home. She took me on and put me in the Locations Dept. The first brief was for a Neutra style house and they really didn't have any so I ran home and got all my LA Conservancy literature-the Gebhard Architecture in Los Angeles - A Complete Guide and all the pamphlets from the house tours. I knocked on doors until I had a good selection and we got the job. I was in heaven-fashion and architecture. I got more houses and went after more fashion clients. The turning point



was Harper's Bazaar. Tonne Goodman (now Fashion Director at Vogue) was coming out from NY to shoot Nicole Kidman with Patrick Demarchalier. Tonne has an incredible love and knowledge of architecture and her assistant Beau Quillan (now at Marie Claire) was thrilled to find someone who "got it". They put houses on hold with me and some other companies, but requested my presence when they scouted them all. Even though I didn't represent some of these houses I knew about them and gave Tonne some background of the houses when we scouted them. We ended up shooting at a modern house, through me, and afterward Tonne gave me some advice. Namely, that I was obviously so suited to this business that I should really think about a future within it, she impressed upon me that there was no one else who understood the inherent taste necessary for this and I could create my own market. As success bred success, I found myself collaborating with the most amazing people creatively. It was a truly amazing time, zero to Gucci in two years!!

S/ Can anyone's house be considered to be taken on by your company, what are the prerequisites for joining?

CM/ When the company's focus was almost entirely still photography and fashion, we really only listed the best of any particular genre. That said-it could include anything. One has to be entirely without judgement-if you personally hate 70's that's fine but you have to be able to recognize a truly great and original 70's house and just love it for what it is. Sometimes bad taste is fantastic! If someone wants a trashy 70's Boogie Nights style house, there are only a few great ones. That is true for any style, period etc. With commercials and films, anywhere in the USA is demanded so almost anything can contain that certain nugget that's required. When you think how many commercials are made selling household cleaning products or foods and they're almost all shot in everyday houses. For high-end fashion however, it's a different story. The only ones we tend to pass on are houses that are bland, with no redeeming features so that even if you replaced all the furniture, it would still be just four square white walls and could be any house, any where. You may as well build a set.

S/ If you could live in any house, anywhere in the world. Where would it be?

CM/ In my 1957 Neutra house in Palm Springs!

S/ What do you personally feel makes a house appealing for locations?

CM/ The best houses-like the best people-have soul. A great house has an intangible, unquantifiable "thing" that the owner has, unknowingly, infused into it. It can be found in any style

or period of house. It is usually an eclectic mix of furniture/fixtures/fittings that has exactly the right balance. It can be ultra minimal or madly over-the-top. These houses are usually easy to work in too, the crew always seem happy and relaxed. Sometimes this is because the owners are older and have large families. They look at filming as if it's just another big family event and seem to enjoy the whole experience. The house is used to having large groups and can accommodate them easily these are always the house that sustain the least damage, probably because a) everyone loves the house and respects the owners so therefore are extra careful and/or b) everyone is relaxed and happy because of the atmosphere.

S/ What small things do you think people can do to their house that are often overlooked, that would improve visual style?

CM/ Either pare it down-or add to it.

Sometimes owners have a few great pieces of furniture but it's lost in the clutter. Pare the room down to it's functional minimum, and don't have too many knick-knacks on the surfaces. Art on the walls should be removable-either because there could be a copyright problem or it's too overpowering.

When people try to copy what they think works from magazines- it shows. For instance, with the popularity of all things mid-century modern, it is possible to walk in to one or two shops and order all of the standard Eames/Knoll furniture in one go. Usually a good house that is extremely minimal has been thought out very carefully with furniture and pieces placed in just the right place, in just the right way.

Even if most of the furniture is name brand, there's always something else in there-a bit of a twist, that shows imagination. So sometimes the advice is to put something back in or the house looks like a bad set with everything of the same time period but brand new. Sometimes a 50p bowl or a couple of odd lamps from the flea market can make all the difference. The one style that is utterly unique and can very rarely be copied is the complete and utter over-the-top, more-is-more house. These are rare and usually owned by eccentric, artistic individuals who can throw caution to the wind and decorate with gay abandon, and they are a joy to behold. Tony Duquette was the best example of this, as well as the house in Beverly Hills where we shot much of the Versace campaign in April 2000.

