

DESPERATELY SEEKING style

BY JACQUE JONES

FASHION EMERGENCY COMES TO THE RESCUE, MAKING OVER PLAIN JANES (AND



On the air for two years, and with more than 600 makeovers under its belt, the occasionally wince-worthy show was inspired by comedian and clothes-horse Joan Rivers. "Her comments about changes in people's appearance generated an enormous amount of letters asking for her help," explains John Rieber, E!'s senior vice president of programming. "And though she wasn't available on a daily basis, we loved the idea for the show and

went ahead with it."

On this hot summer morning at E!'s Los Angeles studio, 10 producers sift through requests for upcoming segments. There's a couple who enclosed pictures of themselves before and after having kids. Extra weight, sweats and disheveled hair scream makeover.

Another pitch is a videotape of a healthy thirty-something blonde who spends all her

time painting furniture for her shop. Dressed in spattered overalls, she says she's desperate to trade her down-home look for one that will "get me a man, a date, something."

It's that kind of entreaty that Emmeline, the plus-size supermodel who serves as the show's host, likes to

DAY 1: Ward, left, pre-makeover; below, with Cooper, ready to shop; right, evaluating the outfits



hear. "We encourage people to write us and take a chance, especially those who never have in the past." And Emmeline knows a thing or two about finding stylish clothes in sizes other than 2 or 4. "Fashion is so elitist and for only certain-sized people. I want to go beyond the stereotypical

Drag Queen Kandi Kane, stunning in a red dress, blond Nancy Sinatra wig and red stiletto heels, twirls and poses coquettishly on her submitted videotape. "My friend asked me to be best man at his wedding. Please make a man out of me, *Fashion Emergency!*"

That's a plea E!'s popular makeover show hears—via Internet (www.eonline.com), phone (323/692-6655) and mail—close to 1,000 times a week from such fashion failures as that drag queen, a nun leaving the order, a nudist needing to go out in public and just regular folks.



way we look at beauty," says the 35-year-old Revlon spokesmodel.

Eventually, Ms. Overalls is chosen as the next makeover.

DAY 1

It's high noon as stunning Brit Brenda Cooper, 42, a makeover pro and Emmy-winning former costumer for *The Nanny*, approaches Chris Ward, the 34-year-old proprietor of Heaven Sent, a painted-furniture store on tony Montana Avenue in

choice, especially with the provocative sheer panel on the back—but Cooper wants Ward to be absolutely convinced. As voluptuous Ward tries on a low-cut red top, Cooper surveys her subject's cleavage and points out helpfully, "Darling, we want a man looking up here [signaling her face], as opposed to down there." Ward looks relieved. The Blanchett dress wins.

During a lunch break at Café Montana, Cooper,

A consultation with Cooper, stylist Janice McMahon and Ward, who gulps nervously, begins to resemble NATO peace talks. Détente is struck: A shorter, more radical look is nixed in favor of light blond highlights and a slightly layered version of her present shoulder-length California-girl 'do.

As the tedious color process begins, Cooper, who shops 24/7, flies out of the salon, secure that Ward is in good hands. "Brenda's favorite store is

S-A-L-E," producer Colleen Lehman says affectionately as Cooper enters a chic store down the block. In no more than three minutes, Cooper yanks a white linen jacket off a hanger, slips it on, whips a Visa card out of

she loves her new look. Next: makeup. After a bit of direction from Cooper and input from makeup artist Julie Ireland, the plan is to play up her blue eyes, apply light foundation and finish with a berry-colored lipstick.

What a difference a couple of hours makes. Ward, still in overalls but divine from the chin up, stares at herself in the mirror. "This is amazing," she says, clearly delighted. "I just can't believe how I look." Best of all, Cinderella can keep the clothes—the outfits and services are donated by local stores in exchange for mentions on national television, making the show relatively cheap to produce.

For the all-important conclusion to the segment, in which Ward gets to show off her new look, an open house at her shop is quickly arranged so colleagues and friends can stop by for wine and cheese as *Fashion Emergency's* cameras capture their reactions.

As 5:30 rolls around and a small crowd gathers, Ward enters the front door in her long slinky dress, shimmering blond highlights and glamour-girl makeup. She's greeted by a round of whoops, hugs and applause.

One friend muses that Ward *should* have a date tonight, looking the way she does. "Oh, she will. I'm positive of that," crows Cooper proudly.

Ward turns to the camera and sighs, "I know I'm going to meet a man. I just know it." ■

Jacque Jones covers entertainment in Los Angeles.

Fashion Emergency
airs Monday-
Thursday, 7
P.M./ET, on E!

JOES) WITH HIP HAIRCUTS AND HOT THREADS



Santa Monica, California.

An admitted *Fashion Emergency* freak, Ward says she wants to get married and have babies, though she's worried that might be unrealistic since she hasn't had a date in two years. She's certain Cooper can help.

Equally confident, Cooper guides Ward a few blocks east into A.B.S., a store best known for its impeccable knockoffs of Oscar dresses worn by such stars as Nicole Kidman and Cate Blanchett. (For the record, Cooper loves knockoffs.)

Ward tries on the black, slinky Blanchett number, which seems to be a good

who has dressed countless stars, from Fran Drescher to Patti LaBelle, confides that most women, when asked in the pre-shoot chat, lie about their sizes. "I'm so used to it, I always have clothes in both directions."

DAY 2

It's 9:30 A.M., and we meet back on Montana Avenue at Zeine, a small, stylish salon. All the show's experts agree that the haircut segment is what inevitably rattles the person being transformed. Ward is no different.

DAY 2: It's a good hair day for Ward, above; the payoff, right.



her bra and is out of the store, package in hand. She arrives with perfect synchronicity for the next *Fashion Emergency* shot.

Beauty does not come quickly. In order to produce a 15-minute segment, just half of the 30-minute show, we are now well into Day 2 of filming.

Finally coiffed, Ward says