



Mix and Match: McCarroll and Low mixed looks from early Sixties fashion icon Peggy Moffitt, late-Seventies band The B-52's and early Nineties sci-fi cartoon character Aeon Flux to create hairstyles for the show.

Lights, camera, action: Jason Low takes on the backstage frenzy of fashion week for the very first time as head hairstylist for *Project Runway's* Jay McCarroll.

BY ANDREA ARTERBERY



Jason Low at work.



Jay McCarroll and Jason Low



The results.

# like a virgin

Jason Low readily admits he's never been more exhausted in his life. Running his hands through his disheveled, short blonde hair, the hairstylist confesses that he hasn't slept in about five days.

It is, after all, the morning of his debut as head hairstylist for the Jay McCarroll fashion show during New York Fashion Week, where he'll be leading a team of backstage professionals from none other than Aveda.

"Please forgive me if I just pass out on this table while talking to you," he jokes, drinking a Venti Starbucks coffee. "I've been up pretty much all night working on some last-minute things with Jay at the showroom. I was taking notes on the looks for this afternoon, and it was crazy 'cause we were laughing hysterically one minute and the next, we're almost in tears because we're so tired."

Armed with 11 years of experience cutting hair for salons such as Kevin Mancuso in New York and Jonathan Salon in Beverly Hills, Calif., Low managed to create 12 looks for McCarroll, *Project Runway's* first-season winner. The two met through a mutual friend and "just clicked," Low says.

McCarroll, who Low describes as "crazy and out of the box," says one of the main reasons he chose Low is because "he understands what I'm after."

"He learned my style from watching *Project Runway*," McCarroll says. "Hair people can get weird, and sometimes you can't control their level of creativity to match yours, and it's hard to get them on the same page. But Jason and I gel."

Although McCarroll asked Low to create the looks several months before the show, Low didn't really start to finalize ideas until a couple of weeks ago.

"I don't even know how to describe it," he says nonchalantly when asked how he managed to come up with ideas. "It's like, I look at my [inspirational wall of pictures], and it just comes to me. I just know that all of these ideas in my head are going to fit together to create a new haircut." Deadline pressure helps, "even though that sounds bad," he says.

And although he may be suffering from a small bout of exhaustion, Low seems confident that everything will go as planned. He looks out a rain-streaked glass panel of the coffee shop and shares his fears of getting his meticulously created wigs for the show to the tents at Bryant Park without getting wet. "I can do it, though," he assures himself out loud, vigorously nodding his head. "I've gotten this far."

His ultimate plan for the show? Just to put on what he calls his "game face," which consists of dark, gold-rimmed aviator

shades and a serious expression. After that, he's sure he can handle almost anything.

By 1:30 p.m., Low and his team of 10 stylists have finished unpacking everything and are awaiting the arrival of models. While everyone else stands around chatting, Low, looking relaxed, is reading over his cramped, handwritten notes. With his game face intact—sans the shades—he thoughtfully glances around the backstage area before shuffling some of his styling tools on the lit dressing table in front of him. Low describes the wigs as a mix between Aeon Flux and The B-52's. His inspiration for the look? Peggy Moffitt.

"Think Velma from *Scooby Doo*," he says.

Each of the wigs sport a different cut, but all are short in length with jagged, asymmetric edges and bangs that swoop down across the eyes. After running a flat iron over each wig a final time and carefully applying a hair net over each one, Low is approached by his first reporter of the day, asking a barrage of questions Low will continue to answer for the rest of the night: What is it like working with Jay? How long have you known him? How did you come up with the looks you created for the show?

Before long, Low and his team begin the process of placing wigs on models and styling them. Jessica Barlow, director of fashion and media for Aveda, a sponsor for the show, describes Low as "somewhat of a celebrity among the other Aveda hairstylists." And although the media swarms his work space, taking pictures and thrusting microphones at him while he works, his facial expressions remain calm. By 3:30 p.m., he is gulping down coffee again, still feigning that everything is going smoothly and that no nervousness has set in. A model walks by handing out beers. He declines.

During the walk-through before the show, McCarroll belts out the Sunny and Cher classic "I Got You Babe" over the loudspeaker. Low tells one of the final models to "be careful out there" and "go with God," as he puts finishing touches on her wig and the team of stylists laugh. An air of calmness emanates backstage despite the growing mass of bodies.

The show begins at 5:33 p.m.—only 33 minutes late—complete with voluminous metallic dresses, biker helmets and a 12-inch-high black beehive wig designed by wig creator Chris March. Afterward, Low hugs members of the Aveda team and cries tears of what he describes as "pure happiness."

"The show couldn't have gone better," he says.

Two days later over yet another cup of coffee, Low looks refreshed. Well, he says, he did sleep for 14 hours straight. ■

## IF I COULD DO IT OVER AGAIN...

Jason Low offers up some tips to other head stylists who may also just be starting out.

**1. Rest.** "I would definitely have gotten more sleep, even though so much of what Jay and I did were in those wee loopy hours of the morning."

**2. Have clear direction about what type of leader you want to be.** "I would probably have been a little bit more clearer in setting a tone with my team. I don't mind having a leadership role, but it kind of threw me off that I was actually responsible for a team of people and it wasn't just me doing all the work. I wanted the team to feel equal. Actually, I was just glad to have people show up!"

**3. Invest time into figuring out how you work creatively.** "I learned so much about how I work creatively through this process and I realized that I work really well under pressure. It was like an epiphany!"

**4. Be prepared for the media.** "There were so many interviews that it kind of threw me off. I was prepared to do hair, but you also have to remember to be articulate and charming, as well."