



JANUS FILMS

UNZIPPED

Directed by Douglas Keeve



NATIONAL PRESS

Cinetic Marketing

janusfilms@cineticmedia.com

Film Info: | 1995 | 73 minutes | Black and White / Color | English | 1.66: 1 Aspect Ratio

SYNOPSIS

Designer Isaac Mizrahi proved a force of nature on the road to his legendary fall 1994 collection, a career-defining triumph that was documented with an effervescent intimacy by Douglas Keeve, Mizrahi's then-partner. Both a time capsule of the buoyant, raucous 1990s, when pop culture and high art became interchangeable, and a vérité-style, in-the-trenches report on the daily agonies and ecstasies of the creative process, this seminal artistic portrait—sumptuously shot by Ellen Kuras and Robert Leacock—transcends glitz and glamour to offer an extraordinary view of the charisma and force of will inherent to genius, as well as its personal costs.

Digitally restored by the Sundance Institute and UCLA Film & Television Archive.

Funding provided by Isaac Mizrahi Entertainment. Laboratory services by Roundabout Entertainment, Inc. and Deluxe Media Audio Services.

UNZIPPED, in Retrospect

By Trey Taylor

When fashion was still mostly a trade show for insiders in the early '90s, one designer emerged to give it a public face. That designer was Isaac Mizrahi, whose genius is cut-and-sewn into the Douglas Keeve-directed 1995 documentary *Unzipped*. Keeve, Mizrahi's then-partner, captured the designer's neuroses, fantasies and wit in the creative process leading up to his seminal Fall 1994 collection. That it's brimming with celebrities and Mizrahi still stands out as the star is a testament to his magnetism. What was then a raucous portrait of a Seventh Avenue design fixture that Mizrahi considered a "home movie" won the Audience Award at that year's Sundance Film Festival. *Unzipped* went on to become an era-defining documentary — still widely regarded as one of the best fashion documentaries of all time.

In contrast to Robert Altman's *Pret-A-Porter* (1994), which had until then been the industry-defining portrait, *Unzipped* combined a cinema vérité style (the film was captured mostly in 16- and 35mm) with gonzo cinematography by Ellen Kuras (*Swoon*). It was a type of vérité where cameramen appear in mirrors, the boom mic often dangles into frame while Naomi Campbell or Cindy Crawford are visually prodded, and the camera technique is anchored on running circles, literally, around talent on screen. Though not much movement is required to keep watchers engaged.

Its subject is a melodramatic Scheherazade, an unreliable narrator who wears his heart on his expertly tailored sleeve. His static shock curls are just an extension of his chatterbox personality. Mizrahi's pen runs as quickly as his mouth. We witness him sketching aimless designs while on telephone calls that are proficient enough to be translated into muslin. There is no part of Mizrahi that isn't pregnant with energy. He even takes a phone call with his mother — cord included — in the bubble bath.

All of these vignettes are couched in charming interstitial title cards, taking what could have been an unfocused portrayal of an insider relationship and giving it the structure of a magazine, with Bette Davis impersonations, clips from *Call of the Wild*, and palpitating drop-ins from unvarnished fashion editors like Candy Pratts. The bitchy behaviors of a profession that has since been cemented by saucy fictions are made amusingly theatrical

with some of the zingers that exit Mizrahi's gob. ("The collection is being designed by the Ouija board!" he declares in one scene; or, "There's something charming about cows...")

The impetus for the documentary came from the idea that Mizrahi's studio was a waystation for the movie stars, fashion editors and models of the mid-'90s. His casual hangs with distinguished names like Sandra Bernhard, Eartha Kitt and Cindy Crawford possess the rare intimacy of moments never intended to become material. (Although Kieve admitted to setting up the visit with Kitt—only an acquaintance at the time—at The Carlyle Hotel specifically to capture on camera.) Apart from their being famous, they lend some kind of star power reminiscent of what early reality television captured: a raw unselfawareness that the surveillance state and social media have completely eroded since. It's an unprocessed charm that may never occur on screen again.

The cultural electricity of the supermodel era is given unusual room to breathe, embodied by figures like Kate Moss, Amber Valletta, and Carla Bruni. In one especially intimate moment, Mizrahi tries to persuade Naomi Campbell to remove her engagement ring for a fitting, prompting a conversation about her multiple engagements that may still be one of the most candid glimpses of Campbell ever captured on screen. He possesses the uncanny ability to buff the veneer off even the biggest stars, rendering them almost ordinary. At one point, Mizrahi convinces a handful of these models to change under hot lights behind a giant scrim for his fashion show, exposing their undergarments for a hungry front row, an idea we see openly scrutinized and warned against by the brand's president, Nina Santisi, in the back of a town car. Then comes one of the film's best edits: Mizrahi pitches the idea to a model at a fitting. We cut to Kate Moss, apparently being invited into the same arrangement, and watch the entire concept die behind her eyes. "What...? No."

As fashion's cultural power begins to wane, so too do the personalities that once defined it. Although we will likely never again glimpse the kind of runway magic that *Unzipped* managed to capture again, what the film preserves is something rarer still: a time when fashion had characters.

Featuring (as themselves)

Issac Mizrahi
Linda Evangelista
Naomi Campbell
Cindy Crawford
Kate Moss
Christy Turlington
Sandra Bernhard
Liza Minelli
Eartha Kitt
Carla Bruni
Shalom Harlow
Amber Valletta

CREDITS

Director	Douglas Keeve
Cinematography	Ellen Kuras
Editing	Paula Heredia
Executive Producers	David Pecker, Nina Santisi, and Issac Mizrahi
Co-Producers	Paul DeBenedictis, Keith Estabrook
Produced by	Michael Alden