



STYLE AND SUBSTANCE: AN INTERVIEW WITH CARINA AXELSSON

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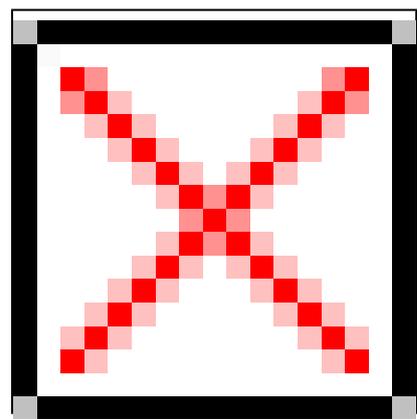
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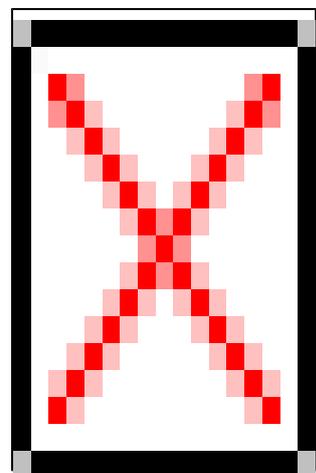
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An interview with the author of the **Model Under Cover** series.

Fictional girl detectives are definitely in vogue at the moment, and none more so than Axelle Anderson, the star of Carina Axelsson's series **Model Under Cover**. Axelle is a teen model with a passion for solving mysteries in the style of her hero Miss Marple. The series began with **A Crime of Fashion**, set in Paris during the prêt-a-porter shows when a famous designer goes missing. It was swiftly followed by **Stolen with Style**, in which Axelle tracks down a stolen diamond in New York. Book three, **Deadly by Design**, is set in London with Axelle investigating an attack on a young photographer, and Carina Axelsson was in London on publication. Andrea Reece talked to her for **Books for Keeps**.



The **Model Under Cover** books are hugely enjoyable crime stories for young readers and put a stylish, modern spin

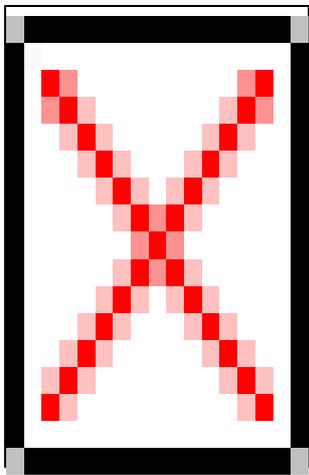


on the **Nancy Drew** format. Teen model and keen sleuth Axelle is a bright, appealing central character and the fashion world - vividly described - makes for a fascinating background. The series's author Carina Axelsson was herself a model, and one time assistant to John Galliano too, so knows all about the world she is describing, and her passion for fashion is catching. We met at the offices of her publisher Usborne, and my first question had to be: What are you wearing? A very London mix of designer and high street it turns out: a Ghost dress bought on the Kings Road and Mulberry bag - just right for book tours? - matched with Converse trainers and a bracelet from

Accessorise that cost £7!

I wondered how she got into modelling, and she makes it sound rather easy: "It happened the way it does for lots of girls. I'm from the west coast of California, not a fashion hot spot at all, but all my life people would say, "You've got long legs, you're so thin, you should be a model" and what tends to happen is that somebody knows somebody with an agency, so you go to the local agency, and then they tell a bigger agency about you, and it just kind of goes up the hierarchy and eventually a New York modelling agency asks if you're willing to come out and give it a go." Carina was definitely ready, not because of any driving desire to be a model "I didn't know what to do with myself at the time" but because she really wanted to see New York: "I'd been reading about it in my library, and I was really curious to see it".

The library provided early inspiration for the **Model Under Cover** series too. "Watching **Scooby Doo** on TV gave me a love of mysteries", she explains, "but from there it was a quick jump to **Nancy Drew**, and that led me to Agatha Christie. I was reading all the Agatha Christie novels at age nine "they're easy to read and understand and I still remember first reading **And Then There Were None**: Holy Cow, the book just blew my mind!" Soon she was racing through the **Sherlock Holmes** novels and then Wilkie Collins too. "I had an early obsession with mysteries!"



After a very successful career as a model "and one which she enjoyed a great deal" she started working as PA for John Galliano and began to write, first a picture book, then the **Model Under Cover** series. "Seeing the fashion world from behind the camera was really quite intense and I was kind of inspired. When I went back to look at the notes I made then, they're really close to how the books finally turned out."

The timing was certainly good: readers are eager for books set in the world of fashion. She agrees, "Fashion is fashionable! It's become a huge business too in a way it never was before; fashion houses are global enterprises involving people in all corners of the world. The financial sectors of the newspapers give it space in ways they never did before. It's no surprise that we're reading more about it, that there are more stories about it." She thinks Anna Wintour, the British editor of American Vogue, deserves a lot of credit for that shift in perception. "Fashion offers fertile ground for stories too," she adds. "It can be backstabbing, competitive, beautiful, inspiring "it's a very creative world that draws to it very upsize characters." She hasn't read Holly Smale's **Geek Girl** series yet, but very much wants to.

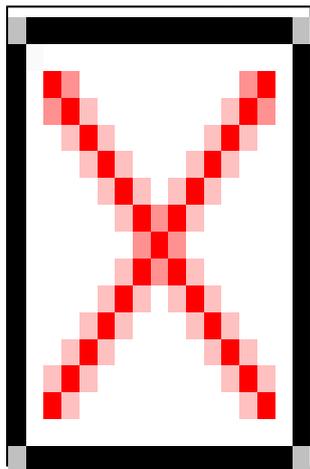
The world Axelle inhabits certainly felt very realistic to me. Fun to work in yes, but a real industry involving lots of people doing lots of different jobs. There's never any doubt just how taxing it is, or the level of professionalism called for. The popular media in the UK tends to portray models either as starving waifs or party animals; that's not the image presented in the **Model Undercover** books. "Axelle eats like a horse!" says Carina, "That was quite deliberate. I read the newspaper articles about models being anorexic but I never experienced any of that. Maybe that's because I generally had my nose stuck in a book, perhaps I just didn't notice, but what you have in my books is pretty much what I experienced."

How much is Axelle based on herself? "In some ways she's my alter ego, but better: she doesn't take no for an answer."

She gets lots of letters from her readers and is delighted that many of them comment on how smart Axelle is. "They love her cleverness, that she sees things other people miss. I very much wanted her to be clever, because girls are clever, they

can do whatever they want to do. Axelle is sassy, she's ready to tell a white lie to her mum to pursue what's in her heart, but she's not nasty. I love that she knows what she wants to do ? so often at that age I was frustrated because you do know much more than your parents and other adults around you give you credit for. I love that Axelle is very clear on what she wants.?

Axelle meets a boy, Sebastian, while cracking her first case. He's the son of a police inspector, with ambitions to



become a journalist. He helps with Axelle on her cases and Carina is proud too of the relationship between them, as she should be. ?What I like about my romance is that Axelle is the detective, Sebastian is her sidekick. He calls her Sherlock, and she calls him Watson. It was important for me for Axelle to be put into a situation where she would have to choose between a boy and ? I don't want to say career, it's not really a career ? but between a boy and her thing, and without being mean or cruel to the boy she consistently chooses what it is that *she* needs to do. I love her for that. And I love Sebastian's reaction too. He's like, ?that's what she's got to do and I'll support her?. I'm hoping that girls see that you can follow your heart and you should be able to find a boyfriend who accepts that.?

There's very little in the books on Axelle's looks ? was that deliberate? ?Yes, because that's not what she's interested in. She doesn't lead her life by her looks, her great love is solving mysteries. That was important because in the world I'm writing about, she's going to have to lead with her head. Models at the top are clever women, street smart, with business savvy and good with people. You've got to have the personality and brains as well as the looks to succeed.?

We finish talking about the renaissance in mystery stories for young readers ? girls in particular ? and she pinpoints the genre's appeal: ?I think it's the thrill, followed by a happy conclusion, that's always been part of the appeal. For girls though, whether it's Miss Marple or Nancy Drew, what has always appealed to me is their independence. Detectives get to be out battling a lot of different things, on their own. We live in a world of surprisingly little freedom, a girl detective is on her own, and she's got her freedom. We're able to experience that through her too.?

The **Model Under Cover** books are published by Usborne, £6.99 pbk

[A Crime of Fashion](#) [3] 978-1409563686

[Stolen with Style](#) [4] 978-1409563709

[Deadly by Design](#) [5] 978-1409590262

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