

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW & PHOTOS

SUPERMODEL, ACTRESS AND MOTHER MONIKA SCHNARRE

ON HER ICONIC CAREER, HAVING FUN WITH HER SON AND HER SURPRISING PLANS FOR THE FUTURE



'Shooting the cover of *Vogue* at 14 was amazing'

You know what? I feel like I'm at the happiest and healthiest point in my life," says Monika Schnarre.

Serene, warm and friendly, the 51-year-old mom is as captivating as she was back in 1986, when she became the youngest winner of the Ford Supermodel of the World contest and experienced a meteoric rise during the industry's golden era, alongside the likes of Cindy Crawford and Christy Turlington.

"Looking back now, I can't believe all the things I did at 14 years old! But I'm so proud of myself because I was living and working in a grown-up world – and I made it on my own," says the woman who has graced the covers of *Vogue*, *Elle* and the *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue*, to name just a few.

Thirty-plus years later, the Scarborough, Ont.-raised star has evolved her skill set, going back to school (UCLA), working as an actress (she's appeared in more than 50 films and television shows) and, more recently, using the pandemic to focus on a new endeavour, real estate – a passion she's quietly nurtured behind the scenes.

But Canada's first supermodel hasn't turned her back on her first love. Most recently, she lent her famous features and status to Lemonwood, a Canadian luxury sustainable lifestyle brand. "It was a natural fit," she says.

HOME BASE

For the past four years, Monika has been living in Collingwood, Ont., at the southern point of Georgian Bay – a two-hour drive north of Toronto. "My ex-husband and I were living in Muskoka, but when our son, Bode, was going to start junior kindergarten we needed a change. So we decided Collingwood was the right place."

Today, mother and son live in a spacious three-bedroom 19th-century home that features exposed brick walls, 10-foot ceilings and a traditional aesthetic. Oh, and she did most of the renova-



tions herself! "I'm pretty confident with power tools," she says matter-of-factly. "I've been using them for so long and have all the essentials. I'm pretty sure it intimidates most men, but I don't care." All in a day's work!

Hello! Canada caught up with Monika and Bode at their beautiful heritage home, where she opens up about her summer plans, a new career path and her dreams for the future, including writing a memoir.

Thank you for welcoming us into your home! It looks like it has a lot of history. Can you tell us about it?

The local town hall had a fire a number of years ago and all the records were burned, but I believe the house is well over 100 years old – 1884, I think. So, it's a heritage home that I fully gutted and I'm still in the process of renovating. I've actually done most of the work myself. I installed the kitchen. I laid the tiles – heated tiles! I've even made some of my furniture. I really love the exposed brick. When we started smashing up the walls during demo, that's when we discovered the brick behind the drywall. It's the exterior of the original house.

Have you always been very hands-on with projects? Yeah, I have. I lived in Vancouver ▶



You can take the supermodel out of the big city but you can't take her away from a fashion moment! "To sum up my style now, I would say casual, contemporary but still classic," says Monika. "And I still get a thrill out of going glam." Here, she poses in a sumptuous sage gown from Canadian fashion label RVNG Couture. Monika shares the record of youngest *Vogue* cover girl (left, in 1986) with Brooke Shields.

LEFT: RVNG COUTURE GOWN, RVNG.CA; PAVE DEMI HOOPS, MELANIEAULUD.COM; MIDDLE: MARTA BLOUSE, ELLEMAESTUDIOS.COM; EARRINGS, ILOVEBIKO.COM.

'It was a big change moving here but I've found my happiness. I feel at home'



'This house has a lot of character, and we've really made it our home,' says Monika, clad in a boho-chic dress from Canadian label Lemonwood. Elegant accents from local boutique Haven Home & Gift are placed throughout her living room, plus a few pieces of furniture she crafted herself. 'I made the coffee table and the mirror. It was actually the first piece of furniture I ever made using reclaimed wood from my old cottage.'



for a time and was renovating homes with my then-boyfriend. That's when I fell in love with using tools and also seeing the progress of a home renovation. When I moved back home to Toronto in 2008, I was approached by Habitat for Humanity for a project. I thought it was a great way to give back, but it also inspired women, myself included, to pick up tools and renovate themselves. And I've continued on since then.

During lockdown, did you pour yourself into the renovations? Over the pandemic, I had time to reflect, and I always loved real estate. It's secretly part of how I've made my living. I've been flipping houses for most of my adult life, between that and acting and modelling jobs. I actually bought my first house in Ontario when I was 16, with the money from modelling.

Real estate is something I've always been interested in but never pursued because of my other careers. But then I realized it doesn't mean I need to stop acting or modelling just because I get my real-estate licence – you can do lots of different things! So, I'm still acting and modelling and soon I can add real estate to the list.

I love the idea that you can affect someone's entire life through this profession. You know, I met my husband because I bought my cottage in Muskoka. And I wouldn't have my son if I didn't buy that place. So, you can affect someone's life by where they live. I decided to just go for it – and I'm almost done. One more exam left!

What kinds of activities do you and Bode enjoy doing together? He loves all the arts, so we paint together. We actually took up painting during the pandemic. I painted my first picture, which is hanging over my fireplace. I also bought an old piano and we've



'Never stop learning because life will never stop teaching' is a motto Monika has always followed. She and Bode took up the piano and painting together. In fact, her first complete acrylic painting (of a bouquet of flowers) is proudly displayed over her fireplace (left).

been learning together. We started with virtual lessons and went on from there. We're game to try everything, but mostly we're into outdoor athletics, like hiking, biking and roller skating. He's also an incredible skier, snowboarder and a natural when it comes to wakeboarding.

How did the two of you cope – and thrive – over the last two years? You know, at first, obviously, it was really scary, and we were very isolated. We tried to think outside the box. We took tennis rackets to an industrial wall and played tennis with each other against the wall. Home-schooling was super challenging. I

think for everyone, trying to also make a living and play teacher, that was hard.

But we've survived, and luckily we live in Collingwood, where we can get outside and isolate from other people, while still enjoying nature. So, we just felt really lucky.

In terms of summer plans, do you have anything exciting in the books? Well, I've always wanted to buy a home in Italy. I'm not quite financially there yet, but I'm going to take myself to Italy, on my own, and look around when Bode goes to camp. So, I'm really excited about that.

Also, my mom said to me she'd like to go ▶

DEVON TIRED DRESS, LEMONWOOD.CA; PAVE DEMI HOOPS, MELANIEAULUD.COM; GUTTER CREDITS

'I've never been afraid to try new things - and that's probably because I'm not afraid to fail. Definitely a mindset I want to instil in Bode'



As if supermodel, actress and mother with a real estate licence weren't enough, you can also add contractor to her growing list of titles. 'Renewal is just part of my life!' Not only did Monika design and install her kitchen, she also did the countertop-to-ceiling tiling.



'I don't jump on trends. I've always just bought pieces that I could have for a long time and that I could mix and match,' says Monika, wearing a cardi-style jacket from Canadian brand Smythe, a favourite among celebrities and royals.

to Germany one last time to see her friends. That's a big deal because she's 88 and hasn't travelled in 20 years. So I said, let's make it happen! I just think it's really important when someone has those wishes at that stage in their life to make them happen. It's my priority right now to get her to Germany.

Where in Germany is your family from? They're from Salzburg in Bavaria, which is just across the border from where *The Sound of Music* was based. My grandma's life was literally out of *The Sound of Music*. Her name was Maria - I swear to God - and she wanted to be a nun, but they wouldn't let her in because she was too jovial! She was always making jokes. Then she fell in love with my grandfather, and the rest is history. [Smiles]

Tell us about the vision of your future Italian home. It will be a second home, for now, ideally somewhere in Tuscany. That area has some beautiful properties with potential that can be bought for a very affordable price. You just have to agree to renovate them. So, the plan is to buy something now and use it as a summer home and then eventually retire there, down the line, when my son goes to college - on a full athletic scholarship!

I feel very at home in Tuscany, the weather, the rolling hills. I mean, I love Canada, too. It will always be my home. But I've also had this connection to Tuscany. It's always felt like my second home.

Where do you think that connection comes

from? I travelled there for work when I was younger. And then later I went with friends and fell in love with the lifestyle. They don't live to work, they work to live a full, beautiful life. It's always about the simple things and living in the moment. Like, you know, "What's for dinner?" or "What are we doing?" It's not about, "I have to work tomorrow so I can't do this or that..." They focus on enjoying life. I really like that. I think we could do more of that in North America.

Can you tell us about your relationship with the luxury fashion label Lemonwood? Christine Peters, the owner, approached me. I loved what they stood for. It's a female-driven business that ethically sources their materials and clothing. It's slow fashion ▶

MINI BAJA JACKET, SHOPSMTHE.CA. EARRINGS, ILOVEBIKO.COM.

'I guess I've always been drawn to creating things, whether it's a fashion image or furniture. I enjoy the process and results'



Clad in a head-to-toe Canadian look from Hudson North (blouse and jeans), jewelry from Jenny Bird and shoes from Ron White – a personal friend – Monika rests on the bar that she built with reclaimed wood and poured concrete



'Our backyard is the kind of spot all the kids want to hang out and play,' says Monika, who designed – and, you guessed it – built it that way. The highlight for Bode is his tree house.

that features beautiful luxurious fabrics and knits from Italy.

They work with co-ops that empower and support women throughout the globe, including in India, Colombia and Peru. So when Christine asked me to be a brand ambassador, I said, yes. It was a natural fit.

Is living and buying sustainably an important aspect of your own life? Yes, it's very important to me. I don't buy a ton of clothing. My friends can attest to that fact. I try to buy pieces that are not fast fashion so that I'll hold on to them for a long time. And even better if they are ethically sourced and sustainably made. Environmentally speaking, that's incredibly important to me. I think we all have to do our part in protecting the environment.

How would you describe your personal style? Working in the fashion industry for so long, I've had a lot of exposure to different things and lots of help in the past. But honestly, I'm 51, and it's taken me this long to get to the place where I love what I have in my wardrobe. Everything in my closet pairs well. I do wear a lot of black – but that's likely a by-product of being a former model. To sum up my style now, I would say casual, contemporary but still classic. Like, I love a good pantsuit, and I'm happy they're coming back because there's nothing like a good power suit.

Being Canada's first supermodel and having worked with the world's big-

gest designers, do you have a piece in your closet that you've kept, perhaps for sentimental reasons? I'm very much a minimalist and when you're walking in those shows or on-set, the models are wearing samples, which means one set, so I couldn't keep them. However, I have some pieces in my wardrobe from filming [the TV series] *BeastMaster*. So I've kept some of those items, but more as mementos, which are stashed under my bed.

Looking back at the peak years of your modeling career, what do you miss most from that time? At the time, all the travel was really taxing, both emotionally and energetically. It was a lot! But now, I miss having flights and hotels booked for me – and people dressing me. My

career took off so fast and at such a young age, it didn't give me much time to acclimatize to the lifestyle. Now, 35 years later, no one is doing all this stuff for me. But it's probably the travel and seeing the world for free that I miss most.

It must have been lonely, though, travelling at such a young age or did you find your tribe? I was mostly on my own because that's the nature of the business. At a young age, to be alone and missing your plane in Paris and dealing with those sorts of experiences was tough.

You must have countless stories to tell about this time in your life. Have you considered writing a memoir? I am writing one! I've actually been writing one for five years but the ►

(LEFT) HUDSON NORTH BLOUSE AND DENIM, THEBAY.COM, CAREY NAPPA SANDALS, BROWNWHITESHOES.COM, EARRINGS AND BRACELET, JENNYBIRD.CA (RIGHT) BOATNECK SWEATER, LEMONWOOD.CA, EARRINGS, ILOVEBICO.COM, SANDALS, KTEES.COM

**'I love spending time with him.
He's my best friend'**



Whether it's hiking together up the escarpment, hitting the slopes at nearby Blue Mountain or playing board games in the backyard, it's evident this mother-son duo share a strong bond. 'We love being active. We have a lot of fun together.'



'I'm actually still close friends with a few of my classmates from kindergarten and elementary school,' says Monika, who points to the sign that hangs behind her, a gift for her 50th birthday. Left: Her favourite magazine cover, French Vogue.



pandemic set me back a little bit. But now that Bode is back in school, I'm back at it. I've been inspired by [Irish singer] Sinéad O'Connor's memoir and a few others. The plan is to just write it and submit it to a publisher and if it gets rejected, I'll publish it myself.

Is there a specific picture or photoshoot that you look back on with fondness? A lot of my favourite shoots were with Bill King, who was a huge photographer; he shot my favourite cover, which was French *Vogue*. But it's hard to choose just one image because this was a period of time where we had the best talent behind the scenes. François Nars would be doing my makeup and Oribe was

on hair, while Steven Meisel would be shooting. I remember on one shoot, Christy Turlington sat in the studio watching and Steven asked, "Do you mind that Christy's here?" Obviously I said, "Absolutely not!" I didn't even notice that she had come in.

It was just such an exciting time to be in fashion and around all of these amazing photographers. In fact, all the biggest names were actually the kindest and had no egos. When you're at that level, it's just this creative process with the focus on creating beautiful images. It was fun.

Wow, you worked with some of the greatest talents! Did you ever work with legendary makeup artist Kevyn Aucoin? Yes, and he

was the sweetest to me. Such a kind person. Often models take off their makeup after a shoot but when he did my makeup I would keep it. When I got back to the apartment and my [model] roommates would ask why I have makeup on and the answer was always because Kevyn did it! I loved how he could transform your face. I was so young, but when you sat in his chair he would create a different character. I always felt glamazon.

Your career has been so tied into your appearance. How has your relationship with beauty developed? I promised myself when I was really young, without wrinkles, that I would never cut into my face. I think when you get a facelift at a young age that can age

you. But let me be clear, I'm not judging anyone who chooses to do that.

For me it's been a no-cut policy. I'm happy with how things are aging. Sure, there are days where we all get up and think, "Oh gosh!" but I'm at the happiest place I've been in. I've just learned to accept aging and I'm grateful to be alive. That's a feat in itself.

What kind of beauty practices, rituals or treatments do you lean on? I do like laser treatments, like IPL [intense pulsed light therapy]. I've been doing that since the technology came out, so, since I was in my 20s. For ▶

(LEFT) BOATNECK SWEATER, LEMONWOOD.CA; EARRINGS, LOVEBIKO.COM.

(RIGHT) HUDSON, NORTH BLOUSE AND DENIM, THEBAY.COM; CATEY MAPPA SANDALS, RONWHITESHOES.COM; EARRINGS AND BRACELET, JENNYBIRD.CA



'I'm ready for whatever is next - and I'm open to finding love again'

people who don't know what that is, it's a photo facial that sort of gently injures the skin to resurface and repair. It helps with collagen production and [reducing] pigmentation. Afterwards, you just look glowy.

I mean, of course, exercise is good for everything, your skin, your body and your mental health. I don't feel like myself unless I've done something that day, even if it's just a hike.

My beauty regimen is really simple. I'm going to get in so much trouble, but I just wash my face with soap. I buy two-dollar soap at Bulk Barn. Oh, and CeraVe moisturizer. TikTok got me to buy it and I love it!

What are your favourite ways to exercise? I've been running my whole life. For me it's meditative. I also just like to be outdoors. Since I live in Collingwood, I hike up the mountain when the weather is good, with my dog, Piper. She's a Lab collie mix. We got her for Bode for his eighth birthday. I could hike all day; it's never been about exercise for me. It's always been about connecting with the earth and myself and just finding balance. When I was little, I played for hours alone in the forest and I want my son to have those experiences, too.

In all your adventures you've likely experienced many different cultures, landscapes and traditions. With your outside perspective, what is it about Canada that makes it unique? I have to say travelling as a Canadian is really lovely. We are so well-received worldwide because of our foreign policy. I also think it's pretty unique at how safe it is to be in this country. I'm so grateful that my parents immigrated and met here. The life and freedom we were given just to be from here, without war, that has to be one of the best parts of being Canadian.

Also, our diverse and vast landscape. Each province and territory has something completely different to offer. Everything you could possibly want, we have in this country. **H**

INTERVIEW: JULIA McEWEN
PHOTOS: DAVID PIKE
STYLING: JULIA McEWEN
HAIR & MAKEUP: TAYLOR SAVAGE
INTERIOR STYLIST: ELLEN OELBAUM, ELLENOELBAUMDESIGN.CA
FLOWERS: @STEMSANDROOTSTUDIO

(MAIN) DEEP V MIDI DRESS: SHOPSMYTHE.CA, EARRINGS: ILOVEBIBO.COM (TOP RIGHT) ZANNA FEATHER BUSTIER, LAMARQUECOLLECTION.COM, BIXIR SHORTS, SHOPSMYTHE.CA

To say Monika has joie de vivre is an understatement. The supermodel's personality is as sparkly as her fitted Smythe cocktail dress, embodying the perfect balance of confidence and elegance with a dash of Canadian kindness.