

Imogen Poots. Photos by Tom Munro, interview by Roberto Croci.

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Twenty-four years old, Immie is fully part of the Millennium generation, but she is quite critical about her contemporaries. And prefers 1980s style, although her fashionista icons are extra-large punk pullovers and French Nouvelle Vague clothes.

“Ciao, sono Imogen. Come stai?”, she begins in Italian, laughing. Her perfect British inflection veers towards a Phil Collins-style accent; like her, he grew up in Chiswick, to the west of London. “When I studied your language, they taught me to begin a conversation by asking only personal information: ‘I’m 21; how old are you? I’m called... and you? I eat eggs and you?’ This aggressive spirit has remained: I use the ‘tu’ form to everyone in Italian, without distinction.” Thus begins my conversation with Imogen Poots, who is now 24, has a sunny face, blue eyes, a carefree smile and frank voice. She grew in the midst of literature in a house full of books, and Immie, as her friends call her, began acting very young, giving up the prestigious Courtauld Institute of Art in favour of the Youngblood Theatre Company of Hammersmith. She had her first part at the age of 14, in the “Casualty” TV series. Fame arrived with “28 Weeks Later”, “Centurion” and “Jane Eyre”. “Now I’m in New York, which is the city I most love. The most recent project I’ve been involved in is ‘Squirrels to the Nuts’, set here in New York and directed by Peter Bogdanovich. We filmed in Brooklyn and on skates in Central Park. I love rediscovering those places that jog my memory in this city, that take me back in time; remembering gestures, flavours, smells, sensations. Memory has an incredible power; it’s pure poetry. London is different, too familiar; it tends to impose on the rhythms of my life. New York instead represents freedom: here, I lived my first important experiences. I was 19, and this city made me change from young girl to woman.” Among her latest projects is the film adaptation of Jess Walter’s bestseller, “Beautiful Ruins”, set in Italy. “Even though I grew up in Europe, Italy remains a magical place for me. A film like Antonioni’s ‘L’Avventura’ conveys mysterious sensations, the obscurity of an idyllic landscape which for some reason becomes sinister and threatening. Many of the Italian films I prefer explore themes of extreme solitude, of loss of awareness, of abandonment.” Immie is about to arrive on screens in Italy with a variety of films: “‘Need for Speed’ (ed: to be released on 13th March) is based on the blockbuster video-game by Electronic Arts. It’s a pop culture film, a return to the culture of fast cars like in the ’60s and ’70s; the final race is with rare and very expensive cars, like the GTA Spano, the Koenigsegg, the Lamborghini Sesto Elemento and the Bugatti Veyron. Even I who know nothing about cars could only admire those models.” The other two films are both adapted from books by British authors. “‘A Long Way Down’ (ed: on release from 20th March) is from Nick Hornby’s novel. It’s a brilliant comedy with extraordinary actors like Toni Collette and Pierce Brosnan.” “‘Filth’ is adapted from Irvine Welsh’s novel, starring James McAvoy as a crooked cop, who goes in for perversion, drugs, sex, alcohol and prostitution. “James’ performance is extraordinary: it’s not easy playing such a vulgar and repugnant part and at the same time show the human side of the solitude, describing the desperation of the world in which he finds himself and making us want to hope in his redemption.” Among Imogen’s inspirations is the cinema of the 1970s. “I love the way Mike Nichols and Woody Allen tell their stories. ‘Hannah and Her Sisters’ is my favourite film. I like Truffaut, Godard and Wim Wenders as well, all directors who differ from each other. At the end of ‘Paris, Texas’, I asked myself: ‘Wow, is this a film?’. I grew up watching Disney films, with a start, middle and end. So as soon as I got the chance to see ‘cinema’, I was dazzled by the power of the images. Buñuel used to tackle reality by dreaming; it was surreal: he would explore taboo subjects with an elegance that no-one has been able to emulate; pure ideas that did not follow set patterns, and always gave the public the chance to reflect about important social themes. I have just seen ‘I’m No Angel’ with Mae West again; she was an exceptional actress and woman. She used to write all her own material, and the language she used exactly reflected the times in which she lived,

condensing an era into a dialogue, describing a style of living with the fast bite quotes of a film. We youngsters of the Millennium generation aren't capable of this because we're submerged by technology. I wonder what future generations will understand about us when they see films of our period; what will they think when they hear our dialogues? Sooner or later, directors, actors and producers will have to come to terms with the banality of the cinema of our times." Despite the fact that she says serious things, Imogen maintains a light, jokey tone. Next, to lighten things up, we talk about fashion. "I'm a daughter of the style and culture of the 1980s and 1990s, because they remind me of my adolescence. Much of my identity today has been influenced by the period in which I grew up, perhaps because Debbie Harry and, before her, Julie Christie, had a 'cool' look, that of an elegant, relaxed, sexy but immaculate lady. It's good to appreciate someone for their style; I know imitation is vulgar, even though fashion is the reinterpretation of a period we admire, giving it a new personal twist. Perhaps that's why I find the idea of the personal stylist absurd: no-one can choose what I wear for me, it's too personal a process, which you develop over the years, with culture, travels and personal experiences. In other words, it's your style and you shouldn't care less if no-one else likes it; indeed, individuality gives power to your shell against the world. Other fashionista icons? I have a morbid passion for oversize pullovers, the punk ones with holes, fluo colours, and I love the clothes of the French Nouvelle Vague and Dior-style 1970s belts. First of all, fashion is fitting, and not just on the flanks, bust or back side. It is the art of modelling the female figure and highlighting its good points. I find the whole process interesting and fascinating." Among her passions is music. "Many of my favourite singers are of the 1980s. I have seen Morrissey in concert and have always adored the Smiths: I know all their albums, the words of every song. I listen also to Laura Marling and Joanna Newsom. When I saw The National live, I fell in love with them. I would have loved to see Fleetwood Mac and Townes Van Zandt, a genius I discovered when it was too late." In 50 minutes' chat, Imogen talks about everything: animals ("I love big dogs and hate people who don't clean up after them"), Italy ("I prefer travelling by train, and I'll be making my next film there soon"), boyfriends ("never actors, always creative, eccentric"), Terence Malick ("untouchable, enigmatic"), Michael Winterbottom ("a director who encourages your ideas and who will perhaps make me win best supporting actress at the English Festival Indie with 'The Look of Love'"), Wes Anderson ("an extraordinary singer of my generation"), documentaries ("my favourite is 'Searching for Sugarman'"), and what it means to be 24. "It's a strange age: it seems banal, but I have realised that I have grown over the past two years, not only mentally but emotively too; the world is more alive, the opportunities for making the right choices are more concrete. I have stopped worrying about what others think of my decisions; I can only do my best. That's the way my life is working right now: at the moment, my life is not just what it is, but what I want."