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PARADE



Lisa Rosen makes house calls. The onetime downtown scenester and former Chanel model has been living in Europe—mostly Rome—and working on her latest career as an art restorer. “The reason I eat is because people put paintings over radiators,” the native New Yorker says in her trademark deadpan delivery. Her current house call is the best yet: The Vatican is undergoing restoration in anticipation of its millennial hoedown.

Rosen, whose mother is an artist, discovered her affinity for the arcane trade at the age of 13. Inspired, she wrote to European museums in hopes of landing an internship and was invited to study in Copenhagen. Returning home, she enrolled at NYU and discovered the Mudd Club, the legendary nightlife establishment famous for its decadent denizens. “That’s where my path deviated, and I got deviant,” she says. A career as a model and residencies in Paris and London followed from around 1979 to 1984. “Chanel was my first and last job,” she says. “I was [London designer] Jean Muir’s girl. [Jean Paul] Gaultier paid me in clothes I still have and still wear.”

On vacation in Rome nine years ago, she realized she wanted to return to her true love. A few years after apprenticing, she met Antonio Toscano while they were restoring the Excelsior Hotel in Rome. “Not only did we fall in love, but we also worked well together,” she says of her current partner in business and life.

Rosen’s favorite part of the job is being surprised—“when you think you have one thing in your hand and discover an entirely different story underneath.” While she was working on a wall in a palazzo that had been occupied by the American forces during World War II, she found a bathtub that had been walled in. A tube of lipstick and an officer’s button were resting on the tub, untouched since who knows what went on almost 60 years ago.

At the Vatican, she will spend her days—7 a.m. to 5 p.m.—on a 30-foot-high scaffold; gilding angels on the ceiling. “We get 15 minutes extra off if we go to pray,” says the suddenly devout Rosen. ★ BY DAVID HERSHKOVITS/PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE PITTS

LISA ROSEN RESTORES OUR FAITH IN ART