

Ivana Trump: Gold-digger or guru? Fashion forward or fashion flashback?

To her critics, [Ivana] is a caricature of the anti-feminist. Throughout the '80s, she was typed as a modern-day Zsa Zsa with big, blonde hair, bad clothes and lots of plastic surgery.

Time has changed all that and Ivana has become a role model. She's admired for her considerable accomplishments as an athlete, mother of three, businesswoman, author, advice columnist, and charity fund raiser. She turned buying clothes into a home-shopping television network. She is a heroine for her status as a charter member of the First Wives' Club who made an ambitious, independent comeback after her rich husband dumped her for a younger, more accommodating woman.

O.K, so the former [Mrs. Trump] is not in the same league as [Madeleine Albright,] [Golda Meir] or [Mother Teresa,] but she's got fans, too, and about 1,600 of them turned out for the Unique Lives and Experiences lecture series on Wednesday night at Place des Arts. We were all a-twitter with the arrival of a celebrity, even a B-list name.

Ivana came across as warm and likable as she gave an hour-long motivational speech about achieving goals through determination, discipline, risk-taking and good old-fashioned hard work. She recalled a rough period of working for two weeks in a shoe factory when she was young and how she resolved after that to get straight A's in school so she'd never have to do it again.

Ivana had arrived at the Montreal airport from New York only an hour earlier and did a wonder-woman quick change at the Ritz Carlton Hotel from her travel suit into a glittery bronze-on-black evening gown. Eek! It was just the sort of showy number that catapulted her onto the worst-dressed list in this week's People magazine.

There had been rumours of a total make-over, but it was the same woman who has graced 1,000 social pages from the U.S. to Europe over the past 25 years.

In person, Ivana is startlingly slim -- the result, she said, of working out with three different personal trainers and when she travels, she walks up the stairs in her hotel. It's working, for better or worse. She's as thin as a rake, her hip bones almost jutting out, and her arms are so toned that she looks a little wired. Her trademark is the high, pouf chignon that is spoofed by a fashion-crazed character on the television sitcom Absolutely Fabulous. Oh you bitches! Don't be so quick to judge. There's more to the story. Ivana's gown is part of her own collection and she just happens to be a thriving industry all on her own. [Ivana Haute Couture] is a line of clothing, jewellery, cosmetics and accessories that she sells on home-shopping networks. [Ivana Inc.] is the umbrella for her world-wide speaking engagements, books and many advice columns, including those for Divorce Magazine and the racy high-circulation tabloid, The Globe.

She dates an Italian count, lives in New York and travels internationally. She leads what would be termed a glamorous life in any dictionary but she's enough of a good old gal to usually do her own hair and make-up.

She still has that puffy collagen-style look about her face and lips, but she's mum on plastic surgery: "I have no comment on whether I've done anything, but I believe in plastic surgery...anything to improve yourself and if it will give you more confidence, then it's fine."

With Donald Trump, she lived the rich and famous life, personifying the excesses of the '80s 'til the era and her marriage went up in flames.

Then in a bizarre twist during the '90s, the woman known for superficiality and conspicuous spending became a role model admired for her considerable accomplishments as a mother of three, independent businesswoman, author and charity fund raiser. With her slogan "Don't get mad....get everything!" she became a heroine of the First Wives' Club. She made a successful comeback and stayed in the limelight after her rich husband dumped her for a younger, more accommodating woman.

She's almost is a hometown girl. More than 30 years ago [Ivana Zelnicek] had the strength and drive to snare a spot on the Czech ski team and later to escape the Iron Curtain. She arrived in Montreal during the early 1970s to join her childhood sweetheart, [George Syrovatka]. She spoke four languages -- Czech, Polish, German and Russian -- and recycled herself into a model in Montreal's flourishing fashion industry. Ivana picked up English and French, and eventually picked up a rich man named [Donald] while on a trip to New York promoting Montreal fashion. It was good bye George, and {au revoir} Montreal.