

Amber: Hello, I'm Amber, and you're listening to bbclearningenglish.com.
In Entertainment today, we listen to an interview with a woman who - in the 1980s and 90s - put the word 'supermodel' in the dictionary! She's Elle Macpherson.

Elle began her brilliant modelling career at the age of 17 in Australia, where she was born. Time magazine later called her 'the body' - a nick name Elle has turned into a global brand. She's now a powerful business woman, and has an extremely successful underwear company.

Elle talks to us about how one of her early business ventures, or enterprises, used fashion as entertainment. But first she talks about the origins of the word supermodel, or as she puts it, how the 'term' 'came about'. She explains that after a period in the early 80s when women in the movie industry did not want to be seen as 'sex symbols' - as sexually attractive and nothing else - there was a hunger for glamour. Try to catch the word Elle uses to describe the desire or hunger for glamour and beauty.

Elle Macpherson

'I think that the term supermodel was a very 80s kind of phrase, and it came about because there was a movement where movie industry women in the early 80s they didn't want to be perceived as sex symbols, and there was a huge craving for sort of glamour and sex in the 80s, with all that influx of money and the fashion industry kind of supported it through great designers like Versace. So we had this kind of craving for people to have beauty and glamour in their lives and that's where models of that time kind of grew.'

Amber: Did you catch it? Elle says there was a ‘craving’ for glamour and beauty in the early 80s when there was an ‘influx of money’ – the 80s were a period of affluence for many people.

Listen again to Elle Macpherson describing the circumstances which she thinks led to the rise of the supermodel!

Elle Macpherson

‘I think that the term supermodel was a very 80s kind of phrase, and it came about because there was a movement where movie industry women in the early 80s they didn’t want to be perceived as sex symbols, and there was a huge craving for sort of glamour and sex in the 80s, with all that influx of money and the fashion industry kind of supported it through great designers like Versace. So we had this kind of craving for people to have beauty and glamour in their lives and that’s where models of that time kind of grew.’

Amber: Six foot Elle was an extremely successful model in the 80s – she was frequently on the cover of magazines all over the world. People began to put Elle’s name and body together and this gave her a lot of power in terms of creating a business ‘brand’ – a name for products she could sell.

Elle now talks about the Fashion Café which was not a particularly successful venture, but she does not see it as a failure. Why not? Oh, and notice that Elle uses the noun ‘icon’ as a verb – to iconize, meaning to celebrate.

Elle Macpherson

‘It was a fantastic stepping stone for me and it was actually before its time. The idea of using the fashion industry as entertainment was way before its time. Now, today, we have fashion TV, we have all those television programmes that kind of iconize the fashion industry, like the film industry and like the music industry. When we did Fashion Café, it was taking from the business model of the music industry and the film industry and we put it into fashion - it was just before its time.’

Amber: Elle describes the Fashion Café as a ‘fantastic stepping stone’. A stepping stone is an experience that helps you achieve something else. Elle says the Fashion Café was ‘before its time’, ‘way before its time’ – meaning it was a clever idea that has only recently become appreciated. Listen again.

Elle Macpherson

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Amber: Now here’s a list of the language we focussed on in the programme today.

supermodel

business ventures

sex symbols

craving

stepping stone

before its time

iconize

business model

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