

THE RADAR PEOPLE

BY AMALIE DRURY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEITH CLAUNCH



Laura Schwartz in a Chicago television studio.

SPIN CLASS *Hip political gal-about-town Laura Schwartz tells us how it is—and how it should be*

Glancing out at chilly passersby juggling shopping bags and puffball dogs, Laura Schwartz leans forward in her chair at the Mexx Kitchen bar on Rush Street, elbows on her knees. The Chicago-based political commentator and Clinton administration vet is getting worked up about the 2008 election. "Do you know the day this article hits the streets is Tsunami Tuesday?" she asks, blue eyes widened. She can hardly wait to see what happens in the primaries.

Schwartz, 34, won't discuss her pick for president—that would be a violation of her contract with Fox News, where she's a national political analyst lending a Democratic viewpoint to such conservative-minded talk shows as *The O'Reilly Factor* and *Hannity and Colmes*—but the importance of voting is one of her pet topics. "I've met people in other countries who stand in line for days to vote. Your vote is literally your voice. And if we're going to invade countries to spread democracy, then we'd sure better practice it ourselves."

A petite blonde from tiny Plymouth, Wisconsin (her parents were recently honored at the town's annual New Year's Eve 'Cheese Drop'), Schwartz was the youngest woman ever hired at the White House when, in 1993, she left a program at American University to take a staff assistant position in the White House Press Office. By age 25 she'd risen through the ranks to become the director of television and then a senior-level special assistant to the president. For two years she produced every event that took place on the White House's 18 acres, from statements in the Rose Garden to glamorous state dinners packed with world leaders.

Today, Schwartz's consulting business, White House Strategies, often takes her on the road to present seminars with titles like "The Networking

Power of Social Events" (she's writing a book by the same name). When traveling, she'll sometimes take a break between dinner and dessert to be shuttled to a local Fox News studio, where she'll jump in front of the camera to talk to Bill O'Reilly or exchange barbs with Ann Coulter. "My mission on TV is all about what I call 'R and R,'" she explains. "Recognizing the difference between political rhetoric and everyday reality, and voting based on reality."

Schwartz's White House years proved all-consuming ("Bill and Hillary were wonderful mentors; we talked every day"), and her career since then has been just as demanding. In 2004, for instance, she toured the country as Teresa Heinz-Kerry's senior adviser during John Kerry's run for president.

"One night at P.J. Clarke's, some guy asked what I do, and I started listing off work stuff," Schwartz says. "He was like, 'No, what do you *do*? Rollerblade, watch movies?' I realized that outside of my job, I didn't know what I did." So, between speaking engagements and shooting a pilot for a new political show on a competing network, Schwartz is focusing on friends and family. Her sister, Andrea, a Macy's public relations and external affairs executive based in the State Street flagship (the two live just down the hall from one another in a Gold Coast condo building), says, "It's fantastic to finally have my ultimate best friend in town. She's so fun and energetic."

But in the end, politics—and possibilities—are never far from Schwartz's mind. "You know what would be cool?" she asks. "To go local; to sit down in a forum and talk with people about how politics affects their lives. Chicago has a little bit of everything I saw across the country on the campaign trail. It's the quintessential American city." Attention, station managers: wink, wink. ■