



ANJELICA

GRANDE DAME OF HOLLYWOOD
AND ICON OF JOLIE LAIDE,
ANJELICA HUSTON SPEAKS ON
THE CHARACTER OF BEAUTY AND
THAT INFAMOUS, UNMISTAKABLE,
INCREDIBLE PROFILE

PHOTOGRAPHS RICHARD AVEDON
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Anjelica Huston, haircut by Serge Lutens of Dior, New York, November 10, 1972 © The Richard Avedon Foundation

"I remember atmosphere very clearly. I could probably tell you what every hotel room I've ever been in looks like," Huston says, calling from the Pacific Palisades home she moved to last March after leaving the postmodern Venice Beach compound she shared with her late husband, the artist Robert Graham. She readily complies with a request to describe her immediate environs using the eye she demonstrates in her writing. "It's a white room with a faintly pyramid-like ceiling and a lot of paintings and portraits of things and people I love. There's golden light and a lot of gold in the room—particularly in the picture frames and the large oval mirror that hangs beside my bed with a candelabra, which I've had since I was 15 in London. I bought it with my mother."

Huston is a masterful actor with a command of accents to rival Meryl Streep. She was born into a world of artistic privilege as the daughter of the late, legendary director John Huston, and she upset expectations of her by daring those around her to witness what

she could accomplish—for instance, winning an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1986 for her performance in *Prizzi's Honor*. And the memoir she penned is so impressive that it was cleaved into two: 2013's pre-Hollywood *A Story Lately Told* and last year's *Watch Me*, which begins in 1973 at the baggage carousel at Los Angeles International Airport just after Huston parted ways with Bob Richardson, the fashion photographer she had lived with for four years. Huston's faculty for recounting lavish detail is remarkable, from the moment she suggests Schiaparelli-pink for the taffeta sash on the iconic strapless party dress she wears in *Prizzi's* to the specifics of the Richard Tyler white wool suit jacket and floor-length pencil skirt she commissioned to accompany then-boyfriend Jack Nicholson to the 1976 Academy Awards.

Huston herself is visually unforgettable. There is the otherworldly profile; the intimacy with fashion that tracks back to her mother, the prima ballerina Enrica Soma; and the formidable



Anjelica Huston in Valentino, New York, November 10, 1972. © The Richard Avedon Foundation

“YOU LEARN TO BE A HAPPY EXOTIC.” —ANJELICA HUSTON

dark bangs that can be slicked back to great effect (like in the astonishing Annie Leibovitz portrait from 1985 that captured Huston in Kohl-rimmed eyes and a masculine-feminine athletic tank and jodhpurs). All of her performances carry beauty with indomitable dignity: from the tender gothic glamour of Morticia Addams in 1991's *The Addams Family* (that was inspired by Jerry Hall) to the subversive sex appeal of the Grand High Witch in 1990's terrifying adaptation of Roald Dahl's *The Witches* and the platinum chill of con artist Lilly Dillon in 1990's *The Grifters*, one of the defining roles of Huston's career.

But to arrive at these successes required force of will. As a young girl, Huston overheard her parents discuss their fear that she would not grow up to be a beauty. Years later, while still a Hollywood newcomer, the director Elia Kazan escorted her to a bus stop where he asked a stranger if they thought Huston was beautiful. Proving the point Kazan was trying to make, the stranger responded, “Interesting, perhaps, but not beautiful.” “What was evident was that I was never going to be Christie Brinkley or Cheryl Tiegs,” Huston confides. “That was just obvious.”

And yet Huston never struggled to attract some of the world's most desired suitors and most rarefied image makers. A model since her teens, she was a favored subject for photographers like Guy Bourdin, Serge Lutens, Helmut Newton, and Richard Avedon. (Her Jun Ropé commercial with Avedon is compulsory YouTube viewing). In 1973, she was the centerpiece of a European fashion road trip with David Bailey, Manolo Blahnik, and Grace Coddington that ended on the cover of *British Vogue*. And when Huston did not feel like offering herself up to the disappointment almost guaranteed by Hollywood's finite beauty standard after relocating to Los Angeles, she'd jet to New York City to walk in runway

shows for her friends Halston and Giorgio di Sant'Angelo. “I had grown used to hearing that I was exotic and high fashion,” Huston wrote in *Watch Me*. I ask her to elaborate. “It means that my nose was too big for American commercials,” she exclaims and laughs. “Yes! My nose was too big.” She is delighted when she is described as the owner of a “statement nose.” “Beautifully put,” she responds. “A schnoz!”

“I've grown used to mine,” Huston continues. “Initially I never thought there was much I could do about it. It just wasn't something that could be done without a good deal of—should we say, backlash. The closest I came to a nose job was when I smashed it, which is probably why I was so sanguine about it,” she says, recalling the car accident she survived when she was 28 years old. “Most actresses hope they don't get a broken nose. But me? I thought, Well, here's an opportunity to fix things up a bit. When I got to the hospital they asked me what my nose looked like. So I had my assistant immediately go back to my house and get all of these lovely Avedon photographs, beautifully retouched and perfectly lit. I said, ‘That's what my nose looks like!’” she laughs. “I don't know that they did much but they did away with the scar.”

Whose beauty impresses Huston today? “I saw J.Lo in the flesh the other night. There's no two ways about it. That woman has skin and proportions and a tiny little waist. She's startlingly beautiful in a very classic way. But you know who has got it? Have you been watching *The Affair*? Ruth Wilson has a face that's almost like Jean Shrimpton but not. She's sort of jolie laide. She's sexy.”

It's no secret that what is considered editorial in a fashion capital may be outré at a West Hollywood Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf. “That's the way it is, but you learn to be a happy exotic,” Huston says. “I happen to think Diana Vreeland was a great beauty. She was so full of character and interest and her face was so great to look at. There are just some people who you lock onto. And it is because there's beauty—and yes it is unconventional and sometimes startlingly random. But those are the looks I've always been drawn to.”