

R H A P S O D Y

AUGUST 2014

MICHAEL KORS
BACKSTAGE GLAM

THE INDY 500
*THROUGH A
DRIVER'S EYES*

CABLE TV
*CAN IT GO
A LA CARTE?*

*THE RISE OF
SAIGON*

ROSARIO
DAWSON

*From Alphabet City
to Sin City*





TONY DURAN

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THE
GOOD,
THE
BAD
AND THE
BEAUTIFUL

The list of Rosario Dawson's good works and charitable causes is a mile long. But in the new film Sin City: A Dame to Kill For, the devilishly gorgeous actress embraces her wicked side.

By **MATT DIEHL**
Photography by **TONY DURAN**
Styling by **LAWREN SAMPLE**

BCBG MAX AZRIA
Jacket, \$298
LOREN STEWART
14-karat yellow gold
ear cuff, \$250;
14-karat yellow gold
3-D triangle diamond
ear pin, \$275





PREVIOUS PAGE
CAMILLA AND MARC
Dress, \$420

THIS PAGE
REBECCA VALLANCE
Jumper \$395
LOREN STEWART
14-karat yellow gold
ear cuff, \$250;
14-karat yellow gold
3-D triangle diamond
ear pin, \$275;
14-karat yellow gold
three-bar ID rings, \$375;
14-karat yellow gold
flat ID ring, \$1,300

IN THE nearly two decades since Rosario Dawson made her auspicious film debut at age 15 in the controversial cautionary tale *Kids*, she's enjoyed a most unique cinematic trajectory—as likely to appear in indies from auteurs like Spike Lee, Kevin Smith or Quentin Tarantino as in big-budget multiplex fare like *Men In Black II*, the smash musical *Rent* or Oliver Stone's period epic *Alexander*.

"It wasn't obvious career building, just stuff that came up that I wanted to try," the actress says over an outdoor lunch at a stylishly eco-conscious, farm-to-table eatery in the funky exclusive Los Angeles neighborhood of Venice, where she lives. "I came into this so strangely. I was always expecting that, at some point, someone's going to make me get a real job. I kept waiting for what I call the ['Showtime at the] Apollo' hook to come and yank me off stage, so I just decided I was going to enjoy it for what it is, for as long as I can. But then I'm not one of those people who's ever been interested in being the rom-com girl who has pretty hair."

For the record, Dawson—sporting a demure, Audrey Hepburnesque black summer dress that adds to her combination of low-key glamour and room-filling charisma—has *very* pretty hair. But even it suggests the dynamic contrasts of her career. Brushing it away from her black-and-gold

Bulgari sunglasses, she reveals that her flowing locks have been cropped close on the left side into a demi-mohawk.

"I had this haircut on reserve for the *Sin City* sequel," she says with a laugh.

That film, *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*, which arrives in theaters this month, is a follow-up to 2005's box-office hit *Sin City*, based on celebrated writer-artist-filmmaker Frank Miller's grittily surrealist crime-noir comic series. While this latest installment features a few fresh faces—most notably Lady Gaga—it retains nearly all of the original cast, which includes Bruce Willis, Mickey Rourke, Jessica Alba and Dawson, who portrays Gail, the Uzi-wielding leader of the gang of vicious courtesans that rules *Sin City's* Old Town.

Both films were co-directed by Miller and maverick movie innovator Robert Rodriguez. "Rosario has the perfect combination of beauty and grit that makes her fit right into the *Sin City* universe," Rodriguez says. Miller typically isn't as generous with praise, often criticizing how his work has been interpreted for the silver screen. Not so when it comes to Dawson. "Rosario took what I'd done and stayed faithful to its intent," he says. "The kind of fire she can bring to a character is almost inhuman. She's at once alluring and threatening—both a joy to behold and a weapon. She pretty much walked in and owned the character from the day I met her." >



CAMILLA AND MARC Dress \$420
CHELSEA PARIS Heels \$595
LOREN STEWART
14-karat yellow gold
ear cuff, \$250;
14-karat yellow
gold 3-D triangle
diamond ear pin, \$275

A SIMILARLY inspired meeting begins Dawson's origin story, which reads like the Lana Turner legend recast in the down-and-dirty Manhattan of the early 1990s.

"I grew up really poor, living in a squat on the Lower East Side," Dawson recounts between spoonfuls of the spicy chicken soup that has made her one of the Venice restaurant's regulars. "I wanted to be a marine biologist or engineer. I even took a summer civil-engineering course at Columbia. I was going to make sure I wasn't going to end up a starving artist like the people around me."

Then, one high-school afternoon as she was hanging out on her apartment building's stoop, renowned art-world photographer and first-time director Larry Clark and his teenage screenwriter, Harmony Korine, happened upon her, spontaneously offering her a role in their film *Kids*. Unknown to Dawson, *Kids'* frank depiction of urban teenage life would make it one of the most critically hailed—and

controversial—films of the '90s, placing her firmly on the map in a way she'd never dreamed of.

As Dawson remembers, "Harmony and Larry came up and said, 'We're doing a movie. Do you want to be in it?' I always think of folks like Iman, Natalie Portman—there's just a handful of us who were discovered like this. Life tends to be more gradual, so it's interesting to be able to say so specifically, 'That day changed the rest of my life.'"

While Dawson would revisit debauched New York territory in 2005's *Rent*—"When I auditioned, I was like, 'I'm not Juilliard-trained, but I grew up on the Lower East Side! I went to high school with drug dealers! You gotta give me a chance!'"—she's largely avoided being typecast. This despite (or perhaps because of) her wide-spanning heritage, which includes Afro-Cuban, Irish, Native American and Puerto Rican ancestry. >

“THE FIRE SHE CAN BRING TO A CHARACTER IS ALMOST INHUMAN,” SAYS *SIN CITY* CREATOR FRANK MILLER.

“There’s been an interesting conversation around my multiethnicity,” she says. “Unless they’re explicitly casting for someone of color, a lot of times they don’t have the capacity to look beyond. [Yet] it [also] gives me that space where I can be cast opposite any spectrum. It’s fun for me to just take on all these different types of characters and play with them—whether it’s a crack mom, a businesswoman trying to brave it out on her own with breast cancer, a hypnotherapist or the ringleader of a prostitute gang.”

In the case of the latter, Dawson calls *Sin City*’s Gail “my most insane character ever. It was interesting coming back and reimagining her. She’s evolved—or devolved!” Miller doesn’t disagree: “Wait until you see Rosario in an executioner’s mask! At the same time, there was one scene we’d finished shooting and everyone was happy, but at her insistence, she wanted to do one more take and try a softer edge. It added dimension to the character, which all came from her. There’s an underlying morality to Rosario that’s not overstated and in your face.”

This compassionate side is further evinced in the wide range of causes to which the actress devotes her time, from women’s rights to environmental concerns and beyond. Her social consciousness stems from “how I was raised,” she says. “I was introduced to it when my mom worked in a women’s shelter when I was ten.” Dawson is particularly proud to celebrate this year’s 10th anniversary of Voto Latino, the nonpartisan organization she co-founded to encourage Latinos to become involved in the voting process. “Believe me, when we started, no one knew that the Latino voting bloc was going to grow into the force it is today,” she says. “We were knocking on doors and speaking into deaf ears

when we began, but we’ve been able to grow into a whole other space.”

Fittingly, earlier this year she played Mexican-American labor activist Dolores Huerta in the biopic *Cesar Chavez*. While Huerta herself endorsed Dawson for the role, there was still one person skeptical of the casting. “We had a screening at the White House,” she says, “and the president made a joke about how I’m a whole foot taller than her!”

DAWSON APPEARS in no rush to leave the restaurant and its minimalist décor. She lingers over the remainder of her lunch, leisurely sipping a decaf almond latte and savoring the salmon-quinoa bowl entrée. She’s certainly earned a few deep breaths.

“I tend to work a lot,” she says. “All these movies I’ve shot over the past couple years are showing up at the same time.”

After *Cesar Chavez* and *Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*, Dawson has at least three other much buzzed about films in the works: *The Captive*, a dark crime story by iconoclastic Canadian director Atom Egoyan that co-stars Ryan Reynolds; the ensemble drama *Parts Per Billion*, featuring fellow *Sin City* alums Josh Hartnett and Alexis Bledel; and, on the lighter front, Chris Rock’s directorial project *Finally Famous*, which sees Dawson playing a *New Yorker* writer as a foil to Rock’s artistically stunted comic genius. “I’ve known Chris for a long time,” she says. “He kind of wrote this project for me.”

But this doesn’t mean she’s ready to abandon the world of fantastical menace and mayhem so masterfully epitomized by *Sin City*. When asked about her dream role, Dawson says, “At some point, I want to do a heaving chest, corset drama—with vampires.” ☞

SEBASTIAN GUNAWAN *Red* collection top, \$700
LOREN STEWART 14-karat yellow gold ear cuff, \$250; 14-karat yellow gold 3-D triangle diamond ear pin, \$275; 14-karat yellow gold three-bar ID rings, \$375; 14-karat yellow gold mini ID ring, \$275; 14-karat yellow gold slit ring, \$1,300; 14-karat yellow gold open knuckle ring, \$250

PHOTOGRAPHER Tony Duran STYLIST Lauren Sample
GROOMER Marcus Francis MAKEUP Kara Yoshimoto Bua

