



It's official. Rachel Weisz is the woman Esquire readers would most like to marry — which confirms you are men of impeccable taste. Nev Pierce falls in love with her during a typically entertaining encounter in New York

Photographs by  
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# TO HAVE AND TO HOLD



DANGEROUS RIDES AND processed meat will woo Rachel Weisz. The best date the Oscar-winning actress has ever been on was in New York's rickety amusement area, Coney Island. "There's a prehistoric rollercoaster there called The Cyclone. It's made of wood and literally falling apart." She rode it during an early encounter with The Wrestler director Darren Aronofsky. "It's kind of a museum piece. It does not look safe in any way." She laughs. She does this a lot. "It really terrified me. But I felt like it was an initiation test and if I said 'No', I wouldn't be his." After the ride, they went for a hotdog. "I think it was probably the best date of my life."

She has a knack, Rachel Weisz. Every journalist I've met who has interviewed her came away in love. And her knack isn't confined to hacks. The Women We Love poll revealed that if Esquire readers could pick any wife, most would make Ms Weisz their Mrs. *From this day forward, for better or worse.*

"Oh my God!" she says. "Really? To marry? So were there different categories? Like, to have sex with, have a drink with?" You don't get much past Rachel Weisz. Yes, there were. But her category is the best of both worlds, no? "Yeah, cos you get to do all of it!" She laughs. "That's interesting. That's so funny. I'm *marriable*. But I'm not married!"

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The irony isn't lost on us, though anyone wishing to take their nuptial desires beyond these pages, take note: the London-raised 39-year-old now lives in the Big Apple with Aronofsky. The lucky bugger.

So why is she Wedlock Option Number One? The main reason is obvious. Today, at Esquire's New York shoot, apologising when an occasional train of thought derails ("My brain is just so empty!"), she looks, well... Adulatory essays could be written about this, but there seems little point trying to disprove the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. So stop reading a moment and take another look... *For richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health.*



Her desir- and watch-ability are about more than her looks, though. As often noted, she has brains to go with the beauty: she read English at Cambridge, where she co-founded an award-winning drama group and subsequently scored a West End debut. Technical facility is one thing, charisma is another. And Rachel Weisz is astonishingly charismatic. In person, she is warm and attentive and takes questions seriously, even when they don't deserve it. On screen she is as empathetic as she is gorgeous. Rachel Weisz feels your pain. That's a blessing quite apart from beauty or well-honed acting craft. That's what makes her a movie star and *objet d'amour*.

CARDIGAN BY DOLCE & GABBANA. BRA BY VICTORIA'S SECRET. STOCKINGS BY WOLFORD. BRIEFS BY WHAT KATY DID. SHOES BY JIMMY CHOO

Your friends may know her best as the sexually rapacious Brit abroad in *Stealing Beauty*, or as the sweet slapstick librarian in *The Mummy* and its *Return*. She was conspicuously brilliant, on stage and screen, in Neil LaBute's *The Shape Of Things*. But *The Constant Gardener* was the best showcase for her multiple facets. Playing an activist in Africa whose death is investigated by her husband (Ralph Fiennes), she appears in flashback, transforming from firebrand to lover, charmer and, sometimes, irritant. She was a real human being: a partner, not an accessory. It's a luminescent, layered performance and you can feel yourself, like

her on-screen widower, falling ever deeper for her. Having campaigned vigorously to get the role, snaring it with an impassioned letter to film-maker Fernando Meirelles, she nailed it and then delivered a gracious Oscar acceptance speech, while heavily pregnant with her son, Henry. Here was an actress unafraid of difficult characters, of being tough on screen. There are lots of girls in Hollywood. Rachel Weisz is a woman.

She is just as complicated and exquisite in this year's Oscar contender, *The Lovely Bones* — the Lord Of The Rings director Peter Jackson's adaptation of Alice Sebold's bestselling novel. In the script, Weisz's character reacts to her daughter's

murder by falling apart and having an affair with the investigating detective. It's a role many would have shied away from, but Weisz "likes complexity" and embraced it, even if the affair aspect was snipped from the final cut. "It probably, for some people, would make her unlikeable," she concedes, but you sense her loss and that of the film, though she is gracious about the supernatural thriller Jackson has created.

Her 2006 Academy success provided the luxury of choice, and she's worked constantly since, with a varied, smart selection of films and a wildly well-received return to the stage in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. This despite being a self-described →



falls in love with him: women, dogs, men... He's very magical. A lot of fun." Another is Esquire favourite Bill Nighy, who she first saw on stage, in *King Lear*, when she was 14. Then there's Jimmy Stewart. "I almost can't bear it when Katharine Hepburn picks Cary Grant at the end of *The Philadelphia Story*. I would always pick Jimmy Stewart, every time. Who else? I guess Lou Reed. I've been listening to him since I was a teenager. He totally does it for me!"

She's also thinks Constant Gardener author John le Carré is "pretty admirable", though the former intelligence officer has an unfair advantage, as she "has a thing for spies", having grown up wanting to be one. "And I think being an actress you almost are a kind of spy, finding out about different people and then posing as them, which is a lot of fun." Fun, that word again. Rachel Weisz is a lot of fun. She rattles through directors she would like to work with, from Almodóvar to Spielberg to Apatow to... European art-house darlings the Dardenne brothers (*L'Enfant*). "I doubt they'd cast me, though, I'm probably too much of a sell-out!"

I love — and comment on — the fact she wants to work with the Palme d'Or-winning Belgian social realists and the heartfelt but obscene American comedian

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"homebody". "I don't like travelling," she says. "Which is ridiculous. And it's not because I'm afraid of dying on the plane or anything. I just like to stay at home." It's one of the perils of her profession, I suggest. "Oh, I'm very lucky," she says. "Most people would be going, 'Shut up! Oh, I'm so sorry you get flown around the world and put up in nice hotels!' It's a pretty hilarious problem to have."

She suddenly sounds excited, like she's sharing a secret. "There's this American comedian called Louis CK. Do you know who he is? [We do indeed, he contributed a feature as part of Ricky Gervais' guest editor special issue of *Esquire*]. He does

this routine about people who complain about travelling and the fact we now have to go through metal detectors... He's like, 'People! Get over it! You're up in the air, 5,000-fucking-feet. It's a miracle! What the fuck are you complaining about?' She laughs. "It does remind you, 'Wow, you're above the clouds in a tin bird, flying.' It's pretty amazing." This is the other thing about Rachel Weisz: she's quite a laugh.

The film she's currently shooting (political thriller *The Whistleblower*) and her next few potential projects are directed by women. A coincidence, she says, not an explicit attempt to redress the balance in a male-dominated industry.

FASHION ASSISTANT: RHIANNA RULE. PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANTS: STEPHEN JACKSON, KATIE FISCHER. HAIR STYLIST: KEVIN RYAN USING WOOLIE SMARTS R SESSION TOOLS. MAKE-UP ARTIST: GENEVIEVE FOR SALLY HARLOR. MANICURIST: ANA-MARIA AT TIMOTHY PRIANO STUDIO: SPLASHLIGHT THANKS TO RED DIGITAL CINEMA, B2-PRO AND OFFHOLLYWOOD

"I was getting worried that the men didn't like me anymore," she says, "But your readers' poll puts my mind to rest!"

She loves the bro-mance comedies of director/producer Judd Apatow, particularly *Superbad* and *Knocked Up* — "It's really cutting edge and risky and massively funny" — and she's looking forward to watching his latest, *Funny People*, with fellow fan Aronofsky. They first met in 2001, to discuss working together. He had just made drug drama *Requiem For A Dream* and she was on a press junket for action romp *The Mummy Returns*. Arriving at a café in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen, she got the studio chauffeur

to drop her off round the corner. "Because I didn't want this cool indie director to see me in this stretch limo!" she says. "But as I stepped out, he was waiting there. I was like, 'Argh! Shit!' I felt like such an idiot."

Nonetheless, it obviously went well. They produced *Henry* and a picture: time-spanning psychedelic love story *The Fountain*. She describes Aronofsky as quite different from the edgy, brooding man one might expect. "He's very unpretentious for someone who makes very arty, thought-provoking films. He's very Brooklyn." What of the other men the Woman We Love adores? One is her *The Brothers Bloom* co-star Mark Ruffalo, "Everyone

Apatow. "That probably sums me up," she says. "I think in a truthful way, in a very truthful way..." *To love and to cherish, till death do us part...* Heart and intelligence, beauty and buffoonery. This is a conjugal combination. With Rachel Weisz, you get to do all of it. She has a knack. 🧠

*The Lovely Bones* is out on 29 January *Esquire* flew to New York with British Airways and stayed at The Standard Hotel

TO SEE A BEHIND-THE-SCENES VIDEO FROM OUR PHOTOSHOOT WITH RACHEL WEISZ, GO TO [WWW.ESQUIRE.CO.UK](http://WWW.ESQUIRE.CO.UK)

