

SKY'S THE LIMIT

As her entrepreneurial and entertainment achievements reach new heights, Tracee Ellis Ross's charismatic presence is more powerful than ever.

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Full look by Patou.





Full look by Miu Miu; shoes by Valentino.

FOR TRACEE ELLIS ROSS, BEING BORN INTO A LUMINARY’S LINEAGE BROUGHT WITH IT A BEVY OF EXPERIENCES THAT MIGHT APPEAR SURREAL TO MANY.

Through her mother, Diana Ross, the star of *The High Note* had an extraordinary adolescence that included being photographed by Andy Warhol at age 11, as well as encounters with the music world’s most prominent stars. “Michael Jackson was a close family friend, and we would have Marvin Gaye routinely call our house,” she reveals. In addition to living in Rome at the age of four, Ross also resided in both Paris and Switzerland throughout her teens, learning French in the process. However, beyond the jet-setting and the cordial relationships with music industry titans, Ross reveals, the most rewarding aspects of her upbringing, like anyone else’s, were the intimate moments of nurturing and family bonding. “My mother made it very important to allow for a more ‘traditional’ family setting than one might expect, such as waking me and my siblings up every morning for school or putting us to sleep at night. She was very involved in our lives, and I am very thankful for that.”

Perhaps it is this insistence on the more ordinary aspects of life that has resonated with so many fans around the globe. Over the phone from New York, the actor speaks with a cheerfulness that is accentuated by her infectious laugh. She remains relatively sanguine about a gradual re-emergence from a year and a half of quarantine and limited social interaction. “I think the past 14 months have been a great time for self-reflection,” she admits. “You kind of reassess yourself, and what elements of your personality should be left in the past and what to carry forward into the future as you begin to confront a post-pandemic society.” This meant ridding herself of an all-encompassing fear that made it difficult to imagine a world outside a state of isolation. She seems more content than ever to approach her professional obligations and personal engagements with a renewed sense of enthusiasm. “Once

I became fully vaccinated and began resuming my life in a more traditional, pre-pandemic sense, I was really happy to notice that I had gained a little bit of softness in my figure due to the increased time spent at home. I can look at myself in the mirror now and be really excited about the person that I have become recently!” This body positivity also radiates throughout her Instagram account.

For many, the path to self-acceptance can be arduous. Ross admits that it took years to hone her confidence, stating “I was very shy growing up. It’s been a journey getting comfortable in my skin.” She continues to note, “It was when I realized I needed to stop trying to be somebody else and be myself that I actually started to own, accept, and love what I had and who I am.” Physically embodying this philosophy has resulted in an emphasis on “clean and hydrated skin, clean hair, and no makeup.”

An unsullied mane remains paramount to Ross, who was ruminating on the idea for her haircare brand Pattern as far back as the early aughts, when filming *Girlfriends*. Unimpressed with the options commercially available to the Black community with naturally curly, coily, and tight hair textures, she took matters into her own hands by testing a bevy of products on her tresses and jotting down their pros and cons, and filming this early experimental process. Since she did not have a background as a haircare chemist, the budding entrepreneur used these reels to explain what was missing in the market from a real-world perspective. Ross also notes how most treatments marketed to the Black community are actually tested on Caucasian hair, undermining their efficacy when used on vastly divergent textures. Initially, she was interrogated about her perceived lack of insight, “as if experiential knowledge was not valid,” she explains. However, her



Full look by Emilio Pucci; earrings by Schiaparelli.

LEFT

Dress by Schiaparelli; hats by Gladys Tamez Millinery.

determination remained steely: “It has been a lifelong dream of mine to actually fulfill the unmet needs of the natural hair community, and I was going to make it happen no matter how long it took.”

Fuelled by unrelenting drive, with an emphasis on clean ingredients, Pattern was finally introduced to the masses in 2019. One glance at the promotional imagery on the brand’s e-commerce platform reveals a range of individuals of all gender expressions and ages, challenging the ubiquity of adult women within beauty campaigns. “Haircare isn’t binary and should never be. Humans have hair, and however you self-identify, there will always be a need to treat it properly.” She elaborates that “our approach is to showcase the natural beauty of Black hair across a wide range of ages and identities.” Pattern recently partnered with Sephora to offer this groundbreaking line of haircare in Canada this fall, significantly broadening the brand’s reach on an international level.

Alongside her entrepreneurial endeavours, Ross is gearing up for the eighth and final season of her zeitgeist-defining sitcom *Black-ish*. Starring Ross as Dr. Rainbow “Bow” Johnson, an anaesthesiologist and mother of five children, the show humourously highlights a Black family manoeuvring through contemporary American society. Since the beginning of the series, the writers have been keen to address pertinent societal issues in a unique manner. “Our show is consciously authentic and honest,” Ross admits. “We’ve addressed colourism, racial identity, police brutality, politics, elections—you name it. We tackle current events and we anchor them in our history. We approach them thoughtfully with humour and nuance.”

Portraying Bow for close to a decade has led Ross to cherish this character and all her idiosyncrasies on a deeper level. “Bow is centred and confident. She knows who she is. She is not a wife wallpaper in her husband’s world,” a reference to her empowered presence throughout the series. “I love that she isn’t striving for perfection or attempting to uphold an ideal. She is flawed and ridiculous. She’s

a Black woman who is thriving. I find that, seven years later, I am still so interested in her.” Similarly, the actor is fascinated with the portrayal of an unconventional marriage throughout the series. She notes how, rather than being a “finger-waving wife withholding sex from her husband” fuelled by constant microaggressions, Bow and Dre (played by Anthony Anderson) have a loving symbiosis that prioritizes respect above all else.

After starring in *Girlfriends* at the turn of the millennium, and now *Black-ish*, Ross has been involved with prominent television narratives that amplify Black voices and stories for years. However, she reveals, more needs to be done at an administrative level within Hollywood to address the prevalent inequities across the industry. She also highlights recent programs that have successfully portrayed Black storylines in a meaningful way, such as *Atlanta*, *Insecure*, and *I May Destroy You*, the latter of which she notes as being “more than just a television show—it is transcendent art.”

While *Black-ish* may be coming to an end, Ross has other episodic projects in the pipeline, including the *Daria* spinoff *Jodie*. This animated series gives a spotlight to a character who mostly received secondary storylines throughout *Daria*. “I find it really awesome that we can allow a side character to become the main attraction by giving this very intelligent individual a chance to shine on her own,” she exclaims. In addition to *Jodie*, Ross also serves as co-executive producer and narrator for the docuseries *The Hair Tales*, which chronicles how hair is deeply reflective of the strength, identity, and beauty of Black women. Further, Ross is also producing *I Am America*, a 10-episode podcast focusing on real-life stories of courage that dispel outdated notions of the American identity.

With Pattern expanding into international markets and other captivating undertakings on the horizon, Tracee Ellis Ross is keeping her multi-hyphenate status active, ready to conquer this blossoming decade with ease. •



Full look by Louis Vuitton.



Full look by Prada.

RIGHT
Top by Valentino; earrings by Schiaparelli.

