

FEATURES



HEATHER HEMMENS HITS HOLLYWOOD

BY JON STEELY, PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREW MACPHERSON, STYLIST PEGAH ANVARIAN, MAKEUP SAMUEL PAUL USING NARS COSMETICS, HAIR JENNIFER KIM

August 2011

“Being creative is the only way I know how to live,” says actor Heather Hemmens, relaxing on the

garden patio of the Chateau Marmont. “I don’t feel fulfilled if I’m not creating something, so I’m always looking for a vessel for the things I want to express.” In an industry where success is often determined by “who you know,” the arrival of Heather Hemmens stands as evidence that a career in Hollywood can still be achieved through discipline and a willingness to work hard. And it is with this level of self-command that the young actor has also acquired a firstdegree black belt in Kuk Sool Won karate and become a regular halfmarathon runner. “I’ve always believed that you should work as hard as you think you possibly can,” she declares, “and then work some more. Be a black belt at whatever you do.”

Coming from humble beginnings, Hemmens was raised in the small town of Waldo, Maine, in a house with no conventional electricity or running water. Obsessed with the TV shows she’d watch at her friends’ houses and inspired by the film roles of Cameron Diaz, Hemmens gravitated toward her high school’s theater scene, auditioning for local community productions and winning a scholarship to the Walnut Hill School for the Arts in New England.

At 18, armed with an intense desire to act on television, Hemmens moved to Los Angeles alone, with no connections or contacts. “Everyone put a fear in me,” she recalls. “They told me that I was too young and that I grew up in Maine and didn’t know what the world was like. And I always thought that no matter how ugly the world is, I still want to see it. There is definitely a danger in that, but there is also an independence and strength that comes from putting yourself out there. And you really need to develop that independence and strength to be an actress. Otherwise, you can be really torn up.”

Hemmens found an acting coach, Stan Kirsch, and immersed herself in the grind of Hollywood auditioning, working the usual string of odd jobs along the way. “I was a receptionist at a law firm,” Hemmens tells us. “I sold cars; I tried being a waitress. But then I got a job as an assistant to a TV producer and started going with him to pitch meetings at Fox and Warner Brothers and started really learning about the business. I began studying actors and acting and movies and absorbed as much knowledge about the craft as I could.”

Soon the budding star began booking small acting jobs — like *The Dukes of Hazzard* (2005), “CSI: NY” (2006), “CSI: Miami” (2007), and “Without a Trace” (2007) — creating a momentum that led to an audition for The CW’s competitive cheerleading series, “Hellcats” (2010- 2011). After seven callbacks, Hemmens won the role of Alice Verdura, a fun-to-watch, narcissistic, mean girl determined to get what she wants at any price. “I never really see Alice as a bitch. I always try to see her logic. She has a logic in everything she does and really believes that what she’s doing is the right thing. So when I approach her from that angle, she, as a character, makes much more sense to me. I like playing the mean girl. I don’t want to build a stereotype around

my acting, but playing the bitch is fun! It's fun to show your range when you're playing someone who is vulnerable and then lashing out the next minute, and then scheming the next minute, and then hooking up with someone else's boyfriend two minutes later. Never a dull moment!"

Hemmens' focus is now aimed at projects on the big screen. She is set to play the female version of D'Artagnan in veteran stunt coordinator Cole McKay's upcoming film, *3 Musketeers*. "It's an updated version of the book, with a lot of gunfights and martial arts. I'm honored to be doing my own stunts and martial arts and playing a spy who kicks butt and is very strong, someone who doesn't use [her] sexuality as a part of [her] power play. It's a hard combination to find in most female roles."

With a fierce determination balanced by a sweet and sincere disposition, Hemmens is an artist whose journey through Hollywood is just beginning. She has directed two short films — "Perils of an Active Mind" (2010) and "Designated" (2010) — that have garnered film-festival acclaim, and she aspires to direct a feature. The career and business sense of Halle Berry motivate her, the words of Maya Angelou move her, and her own nose-to-the-grindstone work ethic continues to propel her. "Nobody can push you as hard as you can push yourself," she says. "Once you tap into how to push yourself, nobody will ever expect more from you than you expect from yourself. Nobody else is going to ever demand from me the things that I really want in life. Nobody else is going to bring that out of me. When you learn to produce that energy yourself, that's when you attract all of those things to you." ▼

"Hellcats" reruns air through the summer on Tuesdays at 9PM on The CW.