

BYRDIE

ON THE VERGE

Byrdie Bell isn't just a Manhattan It girl with a thing for motorcycle jackets, Neil Young and yoga. She's a budding actress with indie flick street cred, and quite possibly the next big thing to hit the silver screen.

BY PAIGE BOWERS
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Shot by *Palm Beach Illustrated* on location at Mondrian South Beach, Miami

Jewelry provided by House of Lavande, Palm Beach

Black mixed wool mesh cut-out dress, similar styles available at Salvatore Ferragamo, Palm Beach; satin headband with leather glove detail, Dolce & Gabbana, Bal Harbour.

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It's a tricky business, paying one's professional dues. Consider the aspiring writers who have sorted faxes and fetched coffee for years in hopes of seeing their name in print. Or the budding painters, who have toiled in obscurity and sold their pieces for next to nothing, hoping to be discovered. There are the dancers who have gone to countless auditions, the singers who have sung in dive bars, the personal assistants who have dreamed of having assistants of their own.

And then there is Evelyn Byrd Bell—Byrdie to her peers—the Chicago-born daughter of Palm Beach resident and *New York Times* best-selling author Ted Bell and Greenwich, Connecticut-based jewelry designer and photographer Evelyn Lorentzen Bell. Descended from Norwegian royalty, the 24-year-old model/actress easily could have lived off her lineage. Instead, she chose to follow her own path, training at some of the world's best acting academies and taking roles in independent films to build her résumé.

And so far?

"I've been killed [on-screen] three times," Bell explains, matter-of-factly. "Twice in the bathtub and once with poison."

Clearly, Bell is not your mama's socialite. Yes, the statuesque blonde is widely photographed and active with a handful of Manhattan charities, but she has a refreshing candor that puts her in quite a league of her own.

Consider this morning-after post from Bell's Twitter feed during Fall Fashion Week: *Woke up on a couch. Pissed, I maniacally start looking for my clutch and six-inch heels. Then realize I'm home and had fallen asleep reading.*

Right when you start thinking she's a naughty little good time girl, Bell shows you in conversations and Twitter vignettes that she's really sort of a fabulous (albeit occasionally clumsy) homebody with a sweet soul

and wicked sense of humor. And where some starlets try to hide titillating details about their lives, Bell is a fairly open book, even owning up to the Internet video where she talks about her piercings (13 by her own admission) and former life as a downtown Goth girl.

"I think it's incredibly important to be honest," she says. "I am who I am, and I would never cover up or hide anything because I think that's what makes us all so interesting."

Bell's acting aspirations started when she was just 7 years old. An only child with an active imagination, Bell says she still remembers sitting on the floor of her parents' apartment with her best friend and talking about her dream.

"[The friend] told me I shouldn't be an actress because they get shot," Bell recalls, pausing for effect until her listener realizes that the friend didn't seem to understand Bell would be shot with a camera and not a gun.

A year later, Bell moved to London when her father became worldwide creative director of Young & Rubicam. She returned to the United States soon afterward, living in Greenwich until 1999, when her parents divorced and she moved to Manhattan with her father. In Manhattan, Bell attended the United Nations International School and began her theater training at the prestigious Herbert Berghof Studio and the British American Drama Academy. Then, her father married longtime Palm Beacher Page Lee Hufty, and she went from being an only child to having two stepbrothers.

"I always wanted brothers and sisters," says Bell, who is frequently in Palm Beach to spend time with her family. "When you go on vacation as a family, you spend a lot of time alone when you're an only child. The knowledge that [my stepbrothers] are there is comforting."

During this time, Bell was finding her way, taking



Puff-shoulder dress, belt, cancan thigh boots in brocade fabric, Louis Vuitton, Palm Beach, Palm Beach Gardens and Boca Raton

Black and white silk strapless crinoline gown, Oscar de la Renta, Saks Fifth Avenue, Palm Beach, Palm Beach Gardens and Boca Raton



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acting classes and studying philosophy. Faced with either teaching philosophy or acting, she enrolled in the Stella Adler Studio of Acting in 2005.

“It changed my life,” Bell said. “It was really amazing to be around like-minded people and to be accepted without judgment. All people want to be accepted, but I maybe wanted more than others to be liked and to fit in. That’s a hard thing to do, to find your place. It’s not exactly presented to children. It’s something they have to seek out.”

After graduating from Stella Adler in 2007, Bell debuted in the Wendy Wasserstein play *Uncommon Women*. She also appeared as herself in the Rolling Stones documentary *Shine a Light*, and has had roles in film shorts and plays.

Friends and colleagues believe her future is bright.

“Without a doubt, Byrdie is very special,” says director Jill Andresevic, who cast Bell to play herself in the upcoming documentary *I Heart New York*. “She is so true and natural on camera. And when you think of what an It girl is, this person who has the promise of being something really significant in popular culture, I can’t help but think of Byrdie. She’s extremely intelligent, has a great sense of humor about herself and a great outlook on life. She’s amazing and I really believe she has the potential to be the next Charlize Theron or Nicole Kidman.”

It’s worth noting that Theron and Kidman are both Oscar winners, a fact not lost on Bell, who says she was overcome when Andresevic compared her to the two icons. Judging from Bell’s Twitter feed, she is eager to live up to that expectation, chronicling various auditions (“Starting to feel very comfortable at these *All My Children* auditions...Hmmm,” she tweeted on May

1), photo shoots (among them *Glamour*, Bloomingdale’s and Lord & Taylor) and girl-about-town adventures (at Bryant Park for Fashion Week, wearing a Dior gown tailored for burlesque performer Dita Von Teese, appearing on fashion blog “The Sartorialist”) that indicate her star is very much on the rise, regardless of what some mean-spirited bloggers may write. One snarky post on “The Fashion Spot’s” message board read “Byrdie Bell is apparently an actress” and was punctuated with an eye-roll emoticon.

Friends like Julia Collier and fashion writer Derek Blasberg note that Bell can be sensitive to that judgment and criticism. Blasberg says it is a “nuisance” that Bell graduated from high school and became a young adult in New York at a moment when “many girls could find themselves in front of cameras and be famous for nothing. ... Because of her youth and appearance, I fear some people think of her as a mere Manhattan socialite.” Collier argues her friend is more of a “downtown, edgy It girl ... someone who is extremely normal and down to earth. People who don’t know her well don’t get that.”

Bell says her socialite persona may have worked against her because “a lot of women who are perceived as socialites aren’t believed to stand for much.”

“I obviously would like to think I’m not that way,” she adds. “But most females subjected to that label probably feel that way also. I also think it’s dependent on who is making the judgment. There’s the whole vast clump of people saying things where I really don’t care what they think. But when it comes to the people I respect and admire, it can be frustrating when I’m not given the opportunity to assert myself and say who I am and what I stand for. But I don’t believe in fighting against it. I believe in being myself and going with the flow.” ♦



Dress, Roberto Cavalli, Bal Harbour



Naeem Khan white chiffon draped gown with jeweled halter necklace, available by special order, Neiman Marcus, Palm Beach; hair comb, Leah C. Couture Millinery, New York.



Ivory and noir re-embroidered lace and tulle asymmetric gown, Monique Lhuillier, Los Angeles; Reem Acra earrings, Saks Fifth Avenue, Palm Beach.

BYRDIE'S PICKS

The actress dishes on her favorites from charities to dream film roles and delicious destinations.

CHARITIES: nPlay, a childhood obesity foundation; Fountain House, a self-help program for people recovering from mental illness; charity:water, a charity that brings safe drinking water to developing countries.

DESIGNER: Ann Demeulemeester. "She is so cool. Her pieces have a lot of Gothic influences, and the color palette is black, white and gray. Plus, the construction, structure and design are just so interesting."

DREAM FILM ROLE: An eighteenth-century period piece, à la Helena Bonham Carter

MUSIC: Neil Young. "I love his voice so much and think [his album] *After the Gold Rush* felt like where we were when the economy collapsed; he was talking about the end of excess and a return to an interest in spirituality."

DESTINATION: Greece. "Whenever I go there I feel this overwhelming sense of peace and home, which doesn't make sense to me because I have no roots there. It's magical in a way I've never experienced."

WORKOUT: Yoga. "Most of my family are gifted athletes and that's difficult for me because I'm not."

BOOK: "I read three or four books at a time. I love Russian literature and I also like *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran. Recently, I've been reading the Indian philosopher Osho."

MOVIE: "*True Romance* is a perfect movie from start to finish. I have a tendency to be very critical but it didn't have one single missing component."

PIECE OF CLOTHING: Leather motorcycle jacket by Rick Owens. "If I ever lose that jacket I don't know what's going to happen."

PALM BEACH HAUNTS: Her father's boat, Island Video, Hamburger Heaven, cocktails at The Breakers' Seafood Bar



Cheetah silk dress, gladiator platform heel, Michael Kors, Palm Beach; belt, Louis Vuitton, Palm Beach, Palm Beach Gardens and Boca Raton; black python clutch, Salvatore Ferragamo, Palm Beach.



Reem Acra jersey turtleneck and crystal necklace, Saks Fifth Avenue, Palm Beach

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