

## COVER GIRL

# Clear as a Bell

*Kristen Bell's unpretentious Midwestern grounding keeps her unfazed by Hollywood and her own rising stardom*

BY E.C. GLADSTONE  
EXCLUSIVE PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEVE ERLE

**T**his woman is going to make someone a fantastic wife. It's not the first thought you'd expect to come to mind for a young Hollywood hottie, and when it does, smack in the middle of a late-afternoon chat with television (and soon, big-screen) sweetheart Kristen Bell, I actually blurt it out loud.

"Hey, thanks!" Bell responds, so sincerely that it only cements the image.

And it isn't just because of the 27-year-old blonde's shimmering eyes and mood-altering smile. Or her charmingly breathless tardy arrival at our meeting—dressed Annie Hall-style in a straw fedora, navy jacket and Uggs—explaining that she just got back from an overnight trip on the back of "a friend's" motorcycle. Kristen's marryability has more to do with her impressively centered sense of self, her equal appreciation for subjects serious and silly, and her enthusiasm for what she admits might be considered "boring" activities.

"I love to go on walks, I love to knit," she lists. "My roommate Amy and I love to find different Martha Stewart recipes out of *Real Simple* magazine." Her idea of a perfect Sunday is getting coffee and a newspaper and hitting some hot open houses. Last summer, rather than go clubbing, the former star of *Veronica Mars* and new cast member of über-hot *Heroes* convinced her friends to join in an overnight camping trip in her backyard, a wildlife-filled wonderland in the Hollywood Hills.

Clearly grounded with Midwestern values, this Michigan native also admits she's both thrifty with her spending (she succumbed to the urge for Christian Louboutin heels only this year) and conservationist. She brings her own bags to the grocery store and grabs the soaps and shampoos when she stays in fancy hotels. In car-obsessed L.A., she proudly drives a Saturn. "I have so many beautiful things in my life, material or otherwise," she explains, "that to keep indulging makes me feel almost uncomfortable."

We meet at M Café de Chaya, the kind of place where K-Bell (as friends call her) is quickly recognized not as someone famous but as a regular. The macrobiotic luncheonette (ironically, just spewing distance from Hollywood's favorite artery-clogger, Pink's hot dogs) is a slice of heaven for this long-time vegetarian who has no need to seek out the limelight.

Her new film, *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*—in which Bell plays the title character—is "by far the biggest movie I've ever done," she says, which has led her to an unfamiliar and slightly exhausting amount of self-promotion. Diving into the world of producer Judd Apatow's improv comedies was "phenomenally intimidating," Kristen confesses, but shooting at the Turtle Bay Resort on Oahu helped allay her anxieties. "It was be-yootiful," Kristen says with a sparkle, singling out experiences like yoga on the beach and swimming with horses (both for scenes that were cut from the film) as the most memorable. Not that she's complaining, but Bell, who also shot her three seasons of *Veronica Mars* on the beaches of San Diego, isn't much of a surf-and-sand person in real life.

"Noooo. I think I'm the only person in Los Angeles that doesn't appreciate

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## KRISTEN BELL

*The moment Kristen's sweet sincerity feels like it's starting to cause cavities, she'll turn serious, and deftly fend off any inquiries into her romantic life.*

Lavender top by **Marlova** available at **Blonde, Athens**.

Dress by **Betsey Johnson** available at Cherry Bomb, Atlanta. Shoes by **Jimmy Choo** available at Jimmy Choo, Phipps Plaza.



## KRISTEN BELL

the weather," she says. "I'm from Detroit, and I love the cold. I love bundling up. It makes me feel secure. I get intimidated by a really sunny day, because it's like, now we have to do something outside, we have to do something relaxing. I always get really excited when it rains, or when it's hot-chocolate weather, because there's no expectations." When asked if she'd rather be back in New York (where she attended NYU for two years before getting her Broadway break), Bell answers "yes" so quickly you'd think she's on a game show.

And as you read this, she's spending three months in the Big Apple filming *When in Rome*. Her only regret about returning there is having to leave her canine housemates—two rescued corgi mixes named Lola and Mr. Shakes, as well as Sadie, a Labrador-retriever refugee from Hurricane Katrina. "I'm a homebody," confesses Kristen, who's equally enthused about video games (Guitar Hero, Rock Band...Mario!) and good books (on her night table: *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert and Mark Had-don's *A Spot of Bother*).

Bell's childhood sounds refreshingly normal, with a few asterisks—such as the fact that she wanted to change her name to Smurfette, or Matthew, at age four (she also gave all her dolls male names, including Kevin, a pink rag doll she still keeps on her bed). Eventually she settled on answering to Annie (her middle name, which is what her family still calls her). Her most rebellious act at Catholic school—at least that she'll admit—was rolling her skirt too high to pass the "pop-can" test.

When it comes to her physical attributes, Kristen is more proud of being chosen "Queen of Geek Chic" by *Geek* magazine than her rankings in more mainstream men's magazines. "I think it's the ultimate flattery," she says. "Because the definition of geeks, it's people who like what they like 'cause they like it. They're not trying to fit in." It probably didn't hurt that she had a role in *Fanboys* (shot in 2006, but just released recently), playing the cutest *Star Wars* freak you've never met. She also provided narration and a body scan to the videogame *Assassin's Creed*. "That's for real gamers," she says, "and I'm not even going to attempt to claim that that's me."

Bell is a geek in her own right—of the musical-theater type. In March, she and *Heroes* co-star Zach Quinto got to live out a minor fantasy, performing a number from *Bye Bye Birdie* at an Alzheimer charity benefit. "We've been dying to sing together. We sing [current Broadway musical] *Spring Awakening* in the car all the time," she confesses, admitting her iPod play list could easily be mistaken for that of your average gay man. "I really want to go back to Broadway and go do a classic musical, do some Sondheim."

Almost instinctively, the moment Kristin's sweet sincerity feels like it's start-

ing to cause cavities (apparently everyone she's ever worked with is the most wonderful person on earth), she'll turn serious and deftly fend off any inquiries into her romantic life, which may or may not involve fellow Michigan export Dax Shepard.

"My personal life is not your business," Kristen says politely as she plays with the modest gold-heart pendant around her neck. "It's not something that I want on display." Bell says that is for her own sanity. "I don't ever want to completely lose a sense of myself and totally become what the public sees." She is made anxious by the phenomenon of "becoming important to people you don't know." The narrator of television's *Gossip Girl* doesn't begrudge the paparazzi—too much. "You can definitely shield yourself from them. What you can't do is outrun them. They are the fiercest drivers you've ever seen. They put everyone

else on the road at risk." As for the photogs who regularly camp outside her house, she shakes her head. "Why does anybody care what I'm getting at Ralph's [supermarket]? That's not interesting. Who cares!?" What interests Bell more is doing what she can to help Invisible Chil-

dren, an organization started by friends to rescue and rehabilitate juvenile warriors in Uganda. She's also a spokesperson for the Helen Woodward Animal Center, an animal shelter based in Santa Fe.

"I've had a lot of very, very lucky breaks, and I'm very grateful for them," she says. Her first, arguably, was getting the dual roles of a banana and a tree in a suburban-Detroit Raggedy Ann & Andy musical at age 11. When she scored the part of Becky Thatcher in the Broadway musical version of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (which led her to leave school after her sophomore year), she reveals, "I ran up and down the hallway of my building crying." Just three days after arriving in Los Angeles she landed an appearance on hot cable drama *The Shield*. And more recently, she wormed her way into what's become an increasingly significant role on *Heroes*, after meeting some of the show's writers and confessing she was a "psycho fan."

Bell admits the perception of her in Hollywood may present some limitations. "I'm not pretty enough to play the pretty girl and not homely enough to play the awkward girl," she says, but she's thrilled to have already portrayed such varied characters in nearly every genre and every medium. "I don't ever want to play the same role over and over again. I don't want my value to go up because of who I am as Kristen Bell. I want to remain an actress."

There's just one more thing her future husband will want to know. Does she still have her Catholic-school uniform? "Oh, sure. I tucked that away when I was 18. I'm gonna wear it on my wedding night!"

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www.zappos.com. Shoes by Jimmy Choo  
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