

COVER GIRL

THE RISE OF SOPHIE MONK

THOUGH THE *POPSTAR* CHART
TOPPER IS A MEDIA SENSATION
DOWN UNDER, SHE'S STILL A
GORGEOUS CULT FIGURE IN THE U.S.

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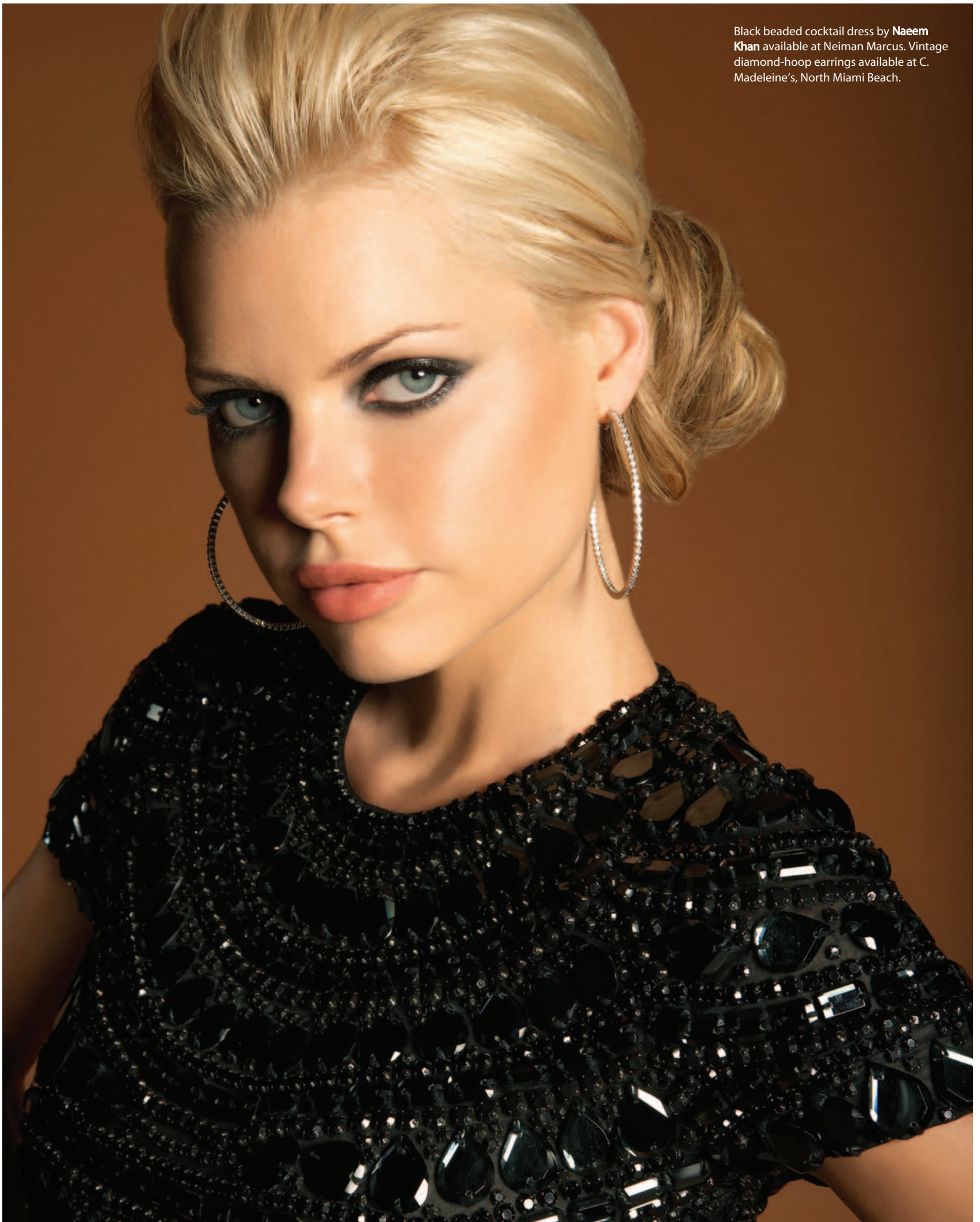
Auguste Rodin’s *The Thinker* is an iconic artwork, a manifestation of mankind not only as philosopher and poet, but also creator. It is a pinnacle of human expression—but it is the last sculpture I would expect a Venuslike Sophie Monk to remind me of on first sight. Outside Porto’s Cuban café—about as close as you can get to Miami street life in Burbank, California—Monk is sitting on a sidewalk planter, chin in hand, with a thoughtful scowl.

“Oh,” she says with a start, looking up at me and instantly smiling. “I’m auditioning every day,” she adds, explaining what had her rapt in thought: juggling the four scripts she is studying as well as a visit from her brother. “How am I going to do it all in time?” Not that Sophie is complaining. “I have so much fun when I’m working, and I get very bored if I’m not.”

The latest Australian import to grace us with her potential, Monk, 27, could be classified as an overachiever—classically trained in opera, she coordinated her own tour as a pop singer before turning her sights to acting—if she did not also have the healthiest attitude imaginable in this hectic industry. “It’s not about being famous for me. It’s not about credibility. I don’t want to win any awards,” she says as we take an outdoor table. “I just want to have fun and enjoy it.”

That might seem hard to believe, since most people come to Hollywood to court fame. But Monk, in a way, came here to get away from it. If this were Sydney or Perth or really anywhere in her native land (okay, she was born in England, but raised down under), she would be surrounded not only by fans but also paparazzi. “Yeah, we’d have cameras here,” she sighs, pointing to the street. “That’s the worst.” But, she adds, “That’s how I got an [LG] endorsement! The cameras came up and I grabbed my mobile phone!”

Monk first became a household name there in 2000, courtesy of her role on the reality-television series *Popstars* (“Going from nothing to that was a bit of a shock to the system”), which begat the Spice Girls/Pussycat Dolls-style group Bardot (touring Asia and Europe on gold and platinum



Black beaded cocktail dress by **Naeem Khan** available at Neiman Marcus. Vintage diamond-hoop earrings available at C. Madeleine's, North Miami Beach.

SOPHIE MONK



Sequin gown by **Naeem Khan** available at Neiman Marcus. Ring by **Roberto Cavalli** available at Roberto Cavalli, Bal Harbour, Village of Merrick Park.

Beaded ivory gown by **Reem Acra**
available at Saks Fifth Avenue, Bal
Harbour. Gold necklace with citrine stones
by **Erica Courtney** available at
ericacourtney.com.



SOPHIE MONK

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records), and then more success as a solo singer and morning radio-show host—all the while endorsing everything from Expozay bikinis (in ads so hot, the street posters were stolen) to tires. “I thought, I could do another album, or try something random. So I packed up and came here. I got to start over fresh.”

In California, despite her 10-plus looks—and being named as Nicole Richie’s new gal pal—she is quite blissfully left alone, as our quiet chat proves. Perhaps that’s something to do with attitude. For a woman who might give Angelina Jolie serious competition in hotness if she wanted to (she has the same supple lips, eyes you could drown in, a body that is impossible to ignore), Monk is unbelievably down-to-earth.

Wearing a casually cute print dress and simple hook earrings, Sophie admits, “I’m a woman against my will. I hate getting my hair done. I hate getting my nails done.” (They are, in fact, cut short and unvarnished.) “It’s because I’ve been in a chair getting my hair and makeup done for shoots since I was young. My friend’s like, ‘Go do something nice for yourself,’ and I’m like, ‘That is not nice for me.’”

“I’m ridiculously independent. I swear to God, sometimes I think that I’m a man. I’ll walk down any alleyway.” She also does not have a catty bone in her body. “I get along with everyone,” she adds, almost apologetically. And she even refers to the racy Pleasure State lingerie line, her latest endorsement, simply as “underwear.” In fact, though she says she is “really into” Pleasure State’s exquisite, high-end designs, she confesses that she does not wear them at home. “It’s not practical. I wear the ugliest underwear...I don’t know why I’m telling you that!”

Monk’s uncommon beauty is matched by her uncommon ability to laugh at herself within a role, be it David Hasselhoff’s floozy secretary in *Click or*, more substantially, the marriage-threatening “best man” in the romantic spoof *Date Movie*. Sophie makes no bones about preferring comedy, though she sees it as harder than drama, especially for a woman. “There are not many female roles in comedy. They’re usually the straight person.”

Still, nothing is imminent to make her a household name in this country. While she feverishly courts more film and television roles, *Sex and Death 101*, a dark comedy reteaming Winona Ryder with writer/director Daniel Waters (*Heathers*), is currently on the festival circuit. And *Spring Breakdown*, an ensemble comedy with Amy Poehler, Rachel Dratch, Parker Posey and Amber Tamblyn, has been delayed until next year.

Singling out Poehler in particular as both a continuing friend and mentor, Monk, in a rare moment of seriousness, emphasizes the importance of working “with the best people I can.” Asked for a role model, she quickly replies Goldie Hawn (“She has nailed it,” both personally and professionally), while her musical icons include Janet Jackson, Justin Timberlake and, right now, Rhianna.

And lest anyone familiar with her music think she is abandoning that path, Monk insists nothing is further from the truth. About her next album, still taking shape, she cannot say much, except that it may include a song co-created with “boyfriend” Benji Madden of Good Charlotte (the track is initially intended for a Pleasure State ad), and another one with, of all people, Snoop Dogg. “I filmed an MTV commercial with him in Australia,” she explains, and then adds with a laugh that she was offended he did not hit on her.

Monk still travels back to Australia regularly—every three months, at least—and is looking forward to seeing her two sisters and new nephew on the next trip. “I’ve never seen a family tighter than ours,” she says. “We’re still in the same house since I was a little kid, and my parents are still together.” Raised on Australia’s Gold Coast, she started singing lessons at eight, got into dance lessons (ballet, tap, modern) and “acrobatics,” opera, and, after an unremarkable school career (despite being elected “school captain,” i.e., class president), took a job as a singing Marilyn Monroe impersonator at Movie World, a Universal Studios-style theme park. Then she decided to audition for *Popstars*.

“It was a nightmare, really,” she says, “all these girls in a house with a camera. It was fun, but it felt like I was on *Big Brother*.”

And if everything about Sophie so far strains credibility, get this: After achieving nationwide notoriety in Australia, “I never got asked out on a date once,” she insists. “When I got here, guys started asking me out, and I thought, All these guys are desperate! I still don’t get it.” Maybe she—and Ozland’s male population—should take another look at her own *Maxim* UK pictorial.

Madden actually met her when they were both in an L.A. karaoke bar less than a year ago, but wasted little time before giving her a tasteful, not too showy diamond engagement ring last December. (Showing it, she laughs, “It needs a clean. It probably has fake tanner in it.”) And even though she says it is hard to get used to calling him “fiancé,” Monk insists they are crafting wedding plans, but not making them public. She is also looking forward to having kids, just “not right this minute.”

Sophie’s work is her hobby, she insists, and relaxation for her is as simple as going to the beach or the gym or meeting friends at her favorite vegetarian-friendly restaurant, Sur. She admits she takes little seriously. “I’m pretty bad. I don’t know how much money I have, I don’t know where it’s going—I need to be baby-sat!”

As Benji pulls up in his sleek black Lexus sports car and gentlemanly opens her door, Monk’s closing thought is just as refreshingly open and self-effacing as her first: “I’m faking my way through,” she says. “I just got lucky. I really don’t know what I’m doing. No one does.” 📷



Strapless dress by **Dolce & Gabbana** available at Dolce & Gabbana, Bal Harbour. Vintage earrings available at C. Madeleine's, North Miami Beach.

Photographer represented by Ray Brown Productions, New York.

Styled by Jessica Paster/Magnet, Los Angeles.

Hair by Jonathon Hanousek/EA Management.

Makeup by Justin Henry/ArtMix Beauty.

Photographer's assistants are Ted Itamura, Tommy Clark and Tom Patton.

Stylist's assistant is Sherrie Hoke.

Digital imaging by Aladdin Ishmael, Rondi Ballard and Tyler Jennings/Al Digital Imagination.

Shot on location at Siren Studios, Los Angeles.