Jessica Alba! On growing up in Hollywood & life with baby number two

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LIFE IS COMING UP ROSES FOR JESSICA ALBA, WITH A NEW BABY JOINING HER YOUNG FAMILY, AN EVOLVING SENSE OF SELF, AND A PASSION PROJECT THAT REVEALS A DIFFERENT SIDE TO HER.

by Colin Bertram
photographed by Chris Colls styled by Katherine Green

“I’ve been fascinated by fashion since I was a kid. I used to go through magazines—whatever my mum bought—and I would draw clothes on the models.”

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triding across her open-plan office in Los Angeles' Santa Monica, Jessica Alba barely turns a head. She’s a regular here; the five people working away at their desks go about their business, unfazed by her presence. Settling into a chair opposite, Alba smiles—a dazzler instantly familiar from many a movie poster and red-carpet appearance. She’s fresh from a planning meeting and lays her new iPhone 4S on the table next to her. These days, having the gadget within reach is more about maternal accessibility than a desire to check emails, text messages or Twitter feeds.

Alba, like any modern mum, has a lot on her plate. There’s baby daughter Haven Garner, born this past August, Haven’s headstrong older sister, three-year-old Honor Marie; her nearly four-year-old marriage to producer Cash Warren, 32; and Alba’s acting career. In almost 20 years she has leapt from small screen to silver screen—following bit parts, she broke out as the lead in the James Cameron-created series Dark Angel (in 2000), before making her mark in cinemas in Honey, Sin City, and Fantastic Four. Most recently, the California-born actress, 30, starred in Spy Kids 4—All the Time in the World and she’ll be heard later in 2012 as the voice of Lena in the animated Escape from Planet Earth.

But what Alba’s really excited about today is the new business venture that’s dominating her schedule. “It’s an eco household and baby product line,” she explains proudly of The Honest Company, a web-based enterprise situated here in Santa Monica. Set to launch this month, it will be marketed with the tag line: “honest baby products for the next generation”.

“Our core item will be diapers,” says Alba, adding that the idea behind the brand came when she was pregnant with Honor. “We also have household cleaning products and baby care products”. Alba is quick to stress that the range of environmentally-friendly items, to be available through the site thehonestcompany.com, will be “accessible and affordable. If something is healthy and non-toxic, it is usually at a premium price point. We aren’t going to be the cheapest, but certainly not the most expensive.” Early buzz is strong, with almost 7,000 followers checking out Alba’s frequent posts on the company’s Facebook page.

Such a venture reveals a different side to the actress, more commonly associated with big-budget blockbusters, a contract with cosmetics company Revlon, and being named on lists of the world’s most beautiful women. But this is no vanity project. “When I started to talk about doing something with consumer products, a lot of people were like, ‘Huh? Why not fashion or bags like most actresses?’” she says. “But this is what I am passionate about; it affects the health of not only my children, but all children.”

Not that Alba is short on sartorial savvy. “Today, she is the picture of effortless cool in a Vanessa Bruno blazer and fitted 7 For All Mankind jeans. Ask her about red-carpet staples, and she easily rattles off names like Lanvin, Versace or Dolce & Gabbana. “Her staples, and she easily rattles off names like Ralph Lauren, Prada and Diane von Furstenberg. “If I want to be more edgy,” she adds, “I will go with Proenza [Schouler], Ralph Lauren, Prada and Diane von Furstenberg. “If I want to be more edgy,” she adds, “I will go with Proenza [Schouler], Ralph Lauren, Prada and Diane von Furstenberg.”

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What did you find most surprising about becoming a mother? “That I felt completely different. I really came into myself as a person. Before, I was always working for my identity. And then you take the focus off of yourself. I was so focused on things that didn’t matter at the end of the day. Now I have what I do for a living in perspective. Working was everything to me, my entire identity, and once I got it out of my system, everything changed.”

What is different with the second baby? “I’m more relaxed. Every sneeze or runny nose or little bump on the head that would have freaked me out before… I am more

HONOR IS AMAZING WITH HAVEN, SHE ALWAYS WANTS TO HELP CHANGE AND FEED HER. IF HAVEN CRIES, SHE WANTS TO PUT THE PACIFIER IN HER MOUTH, KISSES HER AND TRIES TO MAKE HER LAUGH.”

“..."
easygoing with that sort of thing. And the sense of knowing that I can get Haven to stop crying. It was all new with Honor and I wasn't confident, and she could feel that so she continued to cry. That didn't happen a lot, but when it happened I felt like I would crack."

How does Cash feel about being the only guy in an all-female household? "He's totally great and a real hands-on dad. He's just such a nice, good person...His biggest thing is that he doesn't like the idea of them growing up and dating! He's kidding, but I can tell he's kind of thinking of the future already."

You started acting at 11. Is it true that if Honor wants to go into your industry you want it to be after college? "She has no choice!"

Really? "It's not even a discussion ['laughs']..." Do you think you were too young to start work? "For me, given my circumstances, no. But if I were to advise someone else I would immediately say don't do it. I think it is a lot of responsibility to put on a child's shoulders, and it forces you to grow up really fast. I wasn't forced to do it, it was always my choice. [But I ended up being] socially backward in many ways. I didn't know how to talk to boys and never went on group dates. I spent the majority of my time with adults and so I was completely bizarre in social arenas. I didn't know how to socialise with young people. I just went straight to [being an] adult. And then I waited for everyone to go through their adolescence and catch up. Because of that, I probably made some decisions as an adult that were very juvenile, decisions I wouldn't have made if I went through the 'growing up' stage in the regular way..."

When you were making a name for yourself, what were your career goals? "Being relevant to the box office. I wanted to be in as many hits as possible—the more commercial the better. I don't have a family that is in the business, opening that door for me, and I haven't been in, and am not in, a relationship with someone that can keep me on the map. So I had to do it on my own. I had to figure out how to put my stake in the ground so that I could stay relevant. That meant big, global, tent-pole films."

And now? "I still want to do [commercial films], I just want more of a balance. It really wasn't until I got pregnant that I got to sit back and look around and think, 'Gosh, I really appreciate that I get to do what I love for a living; this is beyond my wildest dreams.' But after spending time with my daughters, and knowing that I have to be away from them in order to do some of this work, the work has to be more satisfying." Spy Kids and Escape from Planet Earth are aimed at children. Was it fun doing a different genre? "It was so much fun. And my daughter watched it and liked it. I never really had done anything that had been appropriate for her."

Would you do it again? "Of course. But I'm by no means only trying to do children's movies from now on."

What has been your most satisfying role? "I really felt like a huge turning point for me was Dark Angel. That's when I was looked at not only as an adult—and treated like an adult—but also treated like an equal. I was 17 when I was hired. So, to be part of every piece of that show, starting from the concept, was the coolest of experiences, and that launched me into everything else. The others are more recent. The Killer Inside Me was pretty intense. It was fun and horrible at the same time. And Little Fockers—joining a franchise, having to spar with Ben Stiller and try to pull out some comedy."

You spent time in Australia filming the TV series Flipper when you were..."I ALWAYS FELT A BIT [DIFFERENT]—EVEN BEFORE I STARTED ACTING. I THINK THAT IS WHY I LIKED PERFORMING SO MUCH. I FELT LIKE I FIT IN SOMEWHERE, FINALLY; THAT I BELONGED TO SOME SORT OF COMMUNITY."
THE LONG AND (SUPER!) SHORT OF IT

Alba’s fantastic fashion five.

When you have a baby, everything changes; you’re in a completely different body for at least a year."

A teenager. What do you remember of that period? “I was living in Surfers [Paradise] so that was very different. It had more surfer mentality. I loved the hospitality, the simplicity of just being good to people. It’s like you are instantly part of the community, part of the family there.” Is there any actor whose career you are inspired by? “Hmm... Johnny Depp. It seems like he is always having the best time. He makes such bold choices and somehow gets to hang on to his anonymity a little bit.” Living in France may have something to do with it— they have strict privacy laws. How do you handle being a celebrity mother in LA? “I can’t stand it when [photographers] call my daughter by her name as if they know her. Honor doesn’t know any different yet and thinks everybody gets their picture taken everywhere they go. She’ll figure it out soon enough, so we try to not make a big deal out of it.” How do you think you will deal with the issue of public scrutiny as the girls get older and go to school? “I hope we can figure out a way to live somewhere else by then. I’ve wanted to live in New York for quite a while—at least to have a place there—and every time I bring it up, my mum is like, ‘What about my grandkids? You can’t take them away from me!’” Cash grew up in Southern California too, didn’t he? “Yes, his family is here but his mum lives in the south of France and we visit her often. But it’s like, do you live with the one parent while all the other parents are here? We do fantasise about living in the French countryside and flying the parents out a couple of months every year to stay. They’ll be retired by then and it would be nice to be able to provide that for everyone.” It’s very early after the birth of Haven and you’re in the middle of launching The Honest Company, but I have to ask: any thoughts on more kids? “It’s too early! It’s way too early! Someone else asked me that today; someone who has three children. I thought two were a lot—three is just too much. I keep thinking: no more, no more! But who knows how I’ll feel in the future. I love big families.”

Find out what Jessica Alba never leaves home without, at instylemag.com.au
Jessica Alba

“I’M WORRYING LESS ABOUT WHAT PEOPLE THINK [OF MY STYLE CHOICES]. IF I FEEL GOOD, THEN THAT’S IT.”

Bottega Veneta silk-chiffon dress, and leather heels. Vram for Gray Gallery white-gold, coral and diamond earrings, and platinum, sapphire and diamond ring.