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How to reinvent yourself
by Jessica Alba

In just a few short years, she went from being a hot starlet to an eco-crusader and savvy entrepreneur. All it took was passion and a single-minded focus on protecting the earth, for her kids and yours.

BY KATE SULLIVAN PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAMES WHITE

“Every five years, I feel like I’m a completely different person,” says Jessica Alba. Just Google her bio and you’ll see the pattern: In 2000, the actress launched her career in head-to-toe black leather on the TV series Dark Angel. By 2005, she’d emerged as a full-blown movie star in Sin City and Fantastic Four. Flash to 2011 and she’s a mom of two, eating leftovers off her kid’s plate and worrying about how harsh chemicals affect their well-being. And while she’s still headlining movies—the Sin City sequel promises to be a summer blockbuster—phase four is well under way for Jessica in an office park in Santa Monica, CA.

That’s where this 32-year-old heads up the Honest Company, an online purveyor of nearly 60 natural, eco-friendly products that include organic skin-care products for moms and kids, nontoxic household cleaning goods, and 100-percent biodegradable baby wipes. During
“I feel proud of what Honest has done so far,” says Jessica. “This is a business I can pass down to my daughters.”

her pregnancy with her first daughter, Honor, now 5, Jessica researched herself into a fervor over petrochemicals and parabens in everyday items like skin lotions and household cleaners.

“I had always tried to live a sustainable lifestyle, but had been focused on what was best for the earth,” she says. “Being pregnant, that shifted to be about what was best for human health. I didn’t want anything in my home that could make my children sick.” In her research, she picked up a copy of Healthy Child Healthy World: Creating a Cleaner, Greener, Safer Home by Christopher Gavigan; the book was a revelation. “It breaks down the effects of certain chemicals,” she says. “I thought, If there are safer alternatives, I want to use them.” By the time her second daughter, Haven, arrived in 2011, Jessica and Gavigan had founded the Honest Company. And last year Jessica put her clean-living message out there with her own book, The Honest Life: Living Naturally and True to You.

The Honest Company office has a quintessential start-up look and feel: There’s a wall of garage doors that roll up to let in fresh air, a rainbow of bikes jammed into a rack under a row of helmets, and even an actor-level handsome guy wiping down the coffee bar of a small in-house café. It seems like a dream environment for working moms. The hallways are lined with shadow-boxed Honest diapers, and there are pictures of babies everywhere, including large frames showing off staffers’ kids under the words “Our Honest Family.” There’s even a dedicated nursing room.

“It’s really cute!” Jessica tells me.

She’s right; cuteness abounds. But Honest is no vanity project. Currently, the company is expanding its Web-only business to brick-and-mortar retailers like Costco and Whole Foods. Sales have jumped from $12 million to $60 million in less than two years, sparking $52 million in venture-capital funding to develop new products and expand the e-commerce site. And Jessica really does put in a 40-hour week here. Our interview is interrupted by check-in meetings on everything from an upcoming focus group to the packaging of a new housewarming kit, with a sidebar about a stray dog (we’ll get to that in a minute). Jessica’s impossible-to-miss hot pink desk is crammed between two others, and next to her Mac there’s a framed photo of her husband of nearly six years, Cash Warren, who has a warm smile and salt-and-pepper hair. “He’s always had it, but now it’s major,” she says with a laugh. “I think it’s from having daughters.”

Perched on a couch for her REDBOOK interview, Jessica is the epitome of hip-mama chic in an oversize beige sweater, ripped jeans, burghundy patent-leather booties, and a felt hat with a feather thatmaybe one in 10,000 women could pull off. All this, and she’s an eco-crusader? We can hardly stand her flawlessness, until she leans over to grab a can of Diet Coke. Human, after all, and she’s the first one to admit it.

REDBOOK: That’s some desk!

JESSICA ALBA: I got it off Craigslist. I have a problem. I love vintage furniture, and refurbishing is one of the most eco things you can do.

RB: How did you get into living greener?

JA: I grew up in Southern California, so I lived through the drought, and we were always turning off lights to save electricity. Also, as a kid, off and on, I lived with my grandparents, who grew up during the Depression. They had five repurposes for everything, so I always had that mentality. My family had the blue bin for recycling, though we didn’t compost—I do now. Thank God the composter is out back by the trash cans, because it stinks; someone has to figure out a way to make them not stink!

RB: But you haven’t gone crazy about giving up chemicals?

JA: I’m drinking a Diet Coke! And I still use retinol in my skin-care routine because it works. It makes me look younger; retinols are the only thing that really plumps up that collagen. But when I was pregnant, I didn’t use them.

RB: Paraben-free and eco-friendly products tend to cost more. Any way around that?

JA: Honest isn’t the cheapest, but we are accessible. Not everything has to cost money. If you want to try two things that don’t: Take off your shoes at your front door—why track all those outside chemicals all over your house? And start to read labels. Just know a little more about what you’re putting into and on your body.

RB: In a video for the Honest website, you kissed your daughters on the mouth, which was very adorable. But REDBOOK did an online poll about mouth-kissing kids and our readers were wildly divided. Some people were icked out.

JA: Really? Why?! It’s your baby. People allow dogs to lick at their mouths. The people who didn’t like it—do they have children?

RB: I don’t know. That could be a factor.
"I didn’t want anything in my home that could make my children sick."
JA: I don't think they do. [Jessica grabs a colleague who is passing by. “Do you kiss your kids on the lips?” Jessica asks. “REDBOOK did a poll and some people think it's gross.” “My kids are probably the only people I kiss on the lips,” her colleague says. “My daughter likes the open-mouth kiss.” Jessica, laughing, mimes a child going in for a messy, mouth-open smooch. “There are a lot of things that I thought were gross before kids,” her coworker replies. “Now, I eat their leftovers.” “Oh, for sure,” Jessica says.]
RB: In that same video for Honest, you said that your priorities completely changed after having kids. How so?
JA: Just putting the emphasis and focus in my life on something that's bigger than me and my career. It's about these little people I brought into this world—their happiness and health and well-being is on me.
RB: In your book, you said that some of the best parenting advice you'd gotten was from other women in “Mommy and Me” classes. How important are other moms in your life?
JA: It does take a village to raise a kid—and the new village is really the Internet. I don't buy a product before I read reviews of it online, see a YouTube video, or read about it on a blog.
RB: Are you still in touch with the “Mommy and Me” moms?
JA: They're some of my closest girlfriends.
RB: Is it weird for them that you're famous?
JA: It's weird when we're doing normal mom things and there's paparazzi around. That's the only thing that makes everyone uncomfortable. Honor's aware of them. I just tell her it's no big deal, that it happens to everybody.
RB: But it only happens to certain people. You'll see a celeb's baby waving at the camera and wonder, What's going to happen when that child doesn't want his picture taken anymore?
JA: They don't want their picture taken now. I have a very strange relationship with the whole thing. I have to be cool about it because I don't want my kids to feel anxious. They feed off my energy, and the more chill I am, the more chill they're gonna be. But you never get used to it.
RB: You and Cash have been together for 10 years now, married for six. What's changed?
JA: So much. It goes from just getting to know someone to being family. I mean, it's permanent.
RB: What's something that you've recently compromised on?
JA: Well, I was always super-stubborn. I really wanted everything to be my way, and I only knew my way. Cash softened me up. He always sees the glass half-full; he's very loving and supportive. But he's very much a boy. All he watches is sports. Fantasy football is so annoying—there's always a game on. Though he says I'm addicted to Instagram, so it goes both ways!
RB: What's your biggest challenge as a parent?
JA: Time. Figuring out how to best spend it. I make mistakes. I try to forgive myself and move on.
RB: There can be a lot of pressure for women to project the image that they have everything under control.
JA: Yeah, but I don't think I project that image. I'm a mess. I come in to the office like a damn tornado. Oh, my goodness! Is that a puppy? [A colleague approaches with a toy-size dog and explains that she found it in her backyard. Jessica scoops it up for a cuddle.] I have two dogs at home. A rescue pit-mix who is so sweet and a dachshund with a pug that pews every time we leave the house just to make a point. Oh, can I take her too? [Laughs] My husband would freak out!

**BEST BETS FOR ECO STYLE**

**H&M Conscious Collection** The giant retailer's micro-collection is affordable and on-trend.
**Eileen Fisher** One of the largest clothing companies to implement an environmental initiative, it features clothes that are eco-friendly in addition to being comfy and easy to wear.
**Alternative Apparel** This brand provides a huge selection of styles while adhering to strict standards, including lines that use only earth-friendly dyes and 100-percent organic materials.
**Begoodclothes.com** An online shopping destination dedicated to socially responsible, eco-friendly, and fair-trade apparel and accessories.
**ASOS Green Room** The affordable U.K.-based retailer has a section on its website dedicated to sustainable fashion.

“*My style is different every day,” says Jessica. “I tend to dress for my mood.*”
Top: H&M, $49.95.
Jeans: Citizens of Humanity, $178 (Citizens uses modern technology to reduce the amount of energy required to produce denim). Heels: Casadei. Large ring, Misia Jewelry. Midi ring, Elahn. Earrings, Alberto Parada.
"I don’t think I project the image of having everything under control. I’m a mess."