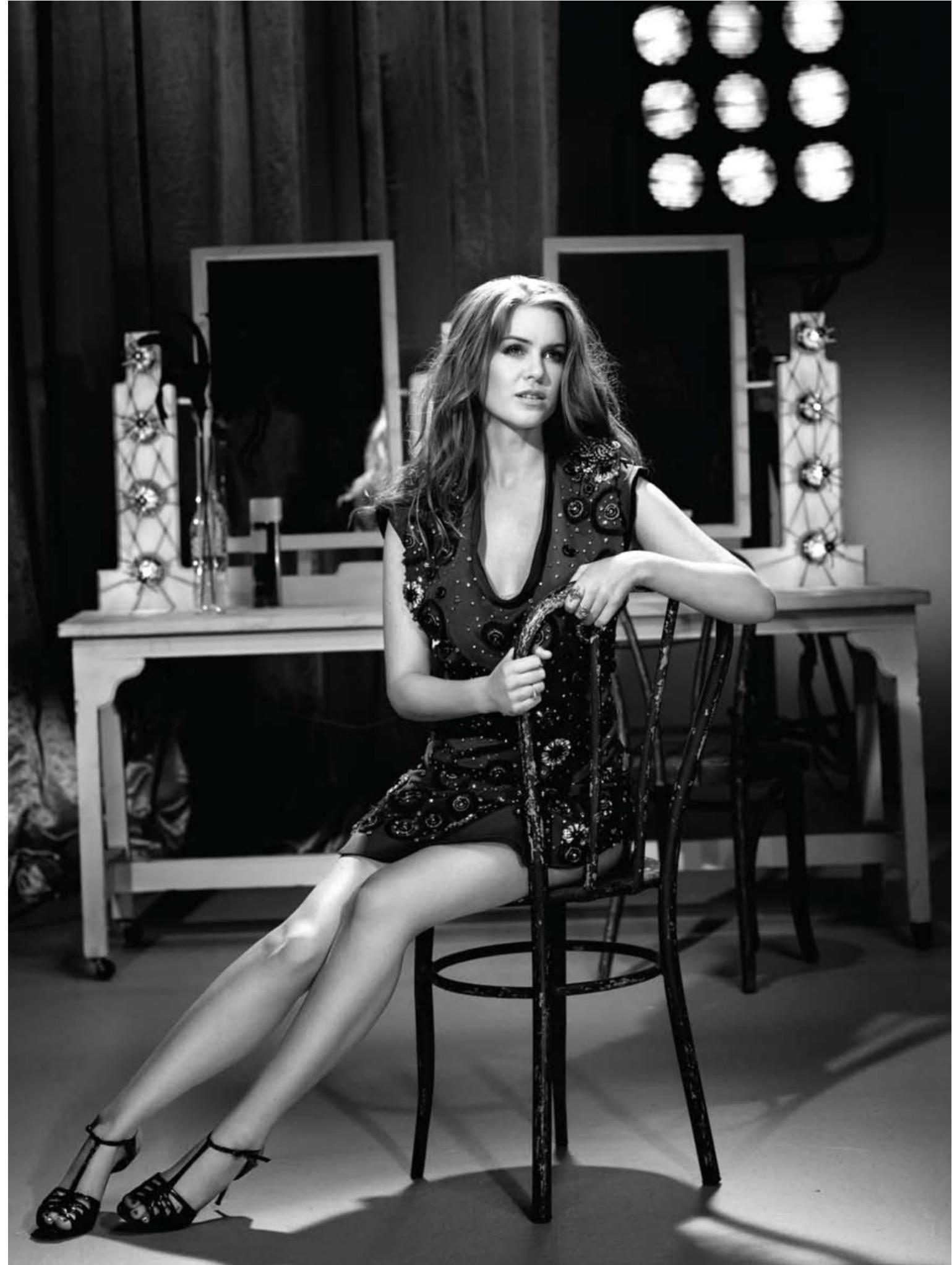


# Red Hot

WORDS SARA  
MOHAZZEBI  
PICTURES MARK  
ABRAHAMS

Not content with having to slog it out with the ubiquitous blonde bombshells of Hollywood, Isla Fisher decided that to get ahead she needed to get funny. Now after a handful of hilarious and critically acclaimed roles, she's being hailed as the next Lucille Ball. We ask, has glamour and giggles ever looked so good?





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hen Isla Fisher walks into the suite at the Ritz Carlton in Manhattan on a cold blistery February morning, her vivacious energy and happy-go-lucky nature instantly makes you oblivious to everyone and everything around you. Even though Isla, 33, is stunning with

her long red hair and petite frame, it's her broad smile and fantastic sense of humor that makes her stand out in a room.

It's easy to see why film producer Jerry Bruckheimer had Isla in mind when he decided to turn novelist Sophie Kinsella's best-selling book *Confessions Of A Shopaholic* – the story of a credit-card happy Becky Bloomwood whose love of shopping leads to disastrous and hilarious consequences – into this spring's hot movie release. He cast Isla as Becky in her first starring feature film role.

"Isla is the modern-day Lucille Ball," says Jerry. "She stole the show, and our hearts, in the blockbuster film *Wedding Crashers* and the romantic comedy *Definitely, Maybe*, so when it came time to cast this role, she truly brought something special to it."

When I tell Isla that Jerry and co-star Hugh Dancy see her in the same light as her comedic heroine, Lucille Ball, she can't help but smile and says "I'm so flattered. I grew up watching *I Love Lucy* and I'm so lucky to get to do what I love." Isla may be lucky in that she's currently scoring some of the biggest comedic roles for actresses, but it's more than luck that's got her up on the big screen.

Born in Oman to Scottish parents (her father was employed by the World Bank at the time), Isla has been working hard since moving to Australia as a child. By age 18, she had already written two young adult novels and was on the popular Australian television show *Home And Away*. Isla says "around 18 or 19 years old, I realised I wasn't going to be the blonde bombshell that stood in the corner and everyone just flocked to her. That's when I discovered how to be funny, and that being funny was attractive in its own right." But it

wasn't until Isla moved to Paris to study clowning at the renowned Jacques Lecoq International Theatre School [whose alumni include Geoffrey Rush and Emma Thompson], that she found her niche as a comic actor. She is the first to admit that "I don't shy away from ridiculing myself whatsoever. I love improvisation and physical comedy. I think one of the reasons I got the job is that I'm willing to make a total fool of myself."

After her studies at Jacques, including theatre and miming, Isla moved to London where she met her fiancé, comedian and actor Sacha Baren Cohen (creator and star of *Ali G*, *Borat*, and *Bruno*). These days, the couple of seven years and their baby daughter, Olive, split their time between Los Angeles and London, where both of them are busy juggling parental duties and their movie careers. Unlike many celebrities whose every detail of their life has become public knowledge, Isla simply doesn't discuss her relationship with Sacha or their daughter. "Motherhood is personally my favorite topic of discussion but my daughter deserves her privacy, as does Sacha," she explains.

In fact, not only does the actress not reveal anything about her personal life, she tries to not read anything that's written about her. She recalls: "I had gained about 60 pounds when I got pregnant with my daughter and I read something where I was being knocked for gaining weight and I was pregnant. I just remember being emotional and hormonal and my feelings were really hurt. So I made the decision not to go down that road. If you read and hear all the lovely things that are written about you, you also have to read and hear the bad."

Fortunately, despite many conversations being off limits, Isla still has plenty to talk and laugh about, particularly how excited she was to play Becky Bloomwood. From the first time she read the book to her last day on set, Isla felt a real connection to the character and was committed to bringing Becky's charm, optimism and infectious sense of humour – that millions of readers had fallen in love with – to life. It seems as if the role of Becky could have been written for Isla – both of them are unpretentious, comfortable in their own skin, animated, and also have the endearing ability to laugh at themselves or get you laughing with them pretty quickly. Director PJ Hogan (*Muriel's Wedding*, *My Best Friend's Wedding*) put Isla's talent for improvisation ►

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# “I’m willing to make a fool of myself”

and physical comedy to good use when the actress asked if they could shoot a scene where Becky thinks her dance moves are brilliant but are actually quite terrible. “There was no choreographer necessary,” says Isla. “All of those moves were mine and mine alone.” She also admits she was thrilled to put her clown training to good use for some of the other scenes in the film.

But it wasn’t all fun and games preparing for her role as Becky, as the dedicated actress attended meetings for an Overspenders Underearners group which she says “sounds really funny, but is actually really sad and heartbreaking. I met so many people whose lives were ruined by this addiction. And I was amazed to learn about the different types of shopaholics that exist. There are trophy shoppers, image shoppers, collecting shoppers, bargain shoppers... every kind of shopper!”

Nevertheless, Isla reminds us that *Confessions Of A Shopaholic* is, “an escapist movie and it’s meant to make you laugh.” The release of the film, like Isla’s comedic delivery, couldn’t be more perfectly timed. With debt and consumerism on everyone’s mind during a difficult economic period, Isla believes that, “Becky Bloomwood learns lessons that we’re all learning lately, and I’m really proud of how it was executed.”

When I ask Isla if she shares Becky’s passion for shopping, she starts to laugh and says she shops rarely and poorly, and doesn’t quite share Becky’s talent for finding the finer things in life. Even though Isla is immaculately dressed in a pair of black McGinn shorts and jacket, with a striped Richard Ruiz top, black tights and black patent-leather Jimmy Choo heels (her assistant helps her remember the designers), she confesses her favorite clothing purchase to date is “a red and white cheesecloth top that I got in Marrakesh at a market store. It didn’t seem spectacular when I bought it, but every time I wear it something really great happens, or I get a lovely compliment.”

So, what’s the busy actress (who is currently working with actor Johnny Depp on the animated film *Rango*) up to next now that she’s wrapped up her role as the ultimate shopaholic? The answer is lots of travel. With her family living in Greece, Isla visits several times a year and has the Middle East in mind as a holiday destination for the future. “I’ve been to Jordan and the Sinai desert, which was gorgeous. I’ve also been to Dubai, which was so great. I loved it. But I’d really love to go to Oman one day.”

Until her next holiday, or the reprisal of her role as Becky for a possible sequel, Isla has her hands full and is grateful for how her life is unfolding. “I’m the happiest I’ve ever been in my whole life,” she says and, on that note, we say goodbye.

Hours later, as she walks down the red carpet at the world premiere of *Shopaholic*, you forget Isla’s just a regular girl who you laughed a cold winter morning away with and see why this talented, hilarious redhead is poised to become an international superstar. ■

