



SCENTS AND SENSIBILITY

The Constant Gardener's award-winner Rachel Weisz takes on Burberry and comes up smelling like a rose. By Megan Deem

It's hard to imagine Rachel Weisz—variously described as “very smart,” “incredibly intelligent,” and “brilliant”—at a loss for words, but such was the case at the 2006 Golden Globes. “I was having profound thoughts,” Weisz says of the moment her name was called as best supporting actress: “*Don't step on your train, don't step on your train, don't step on your train.*”

That train was attached to the shimmering copper Donna

Karan gown that Weisz, then five and a half months pregnant, wore to accept the award for her role as murdered human-rights activist Tessa Quayle (opposite Ralph Fiennes) in last summer's small but searing *The Constant Gardener*. The 35-year-old actress, who describes herself as “shaped like a woman, not like a beanpole,” says she favors clothing that is “classic but elegant, with a modern edge.... Tailoring is key

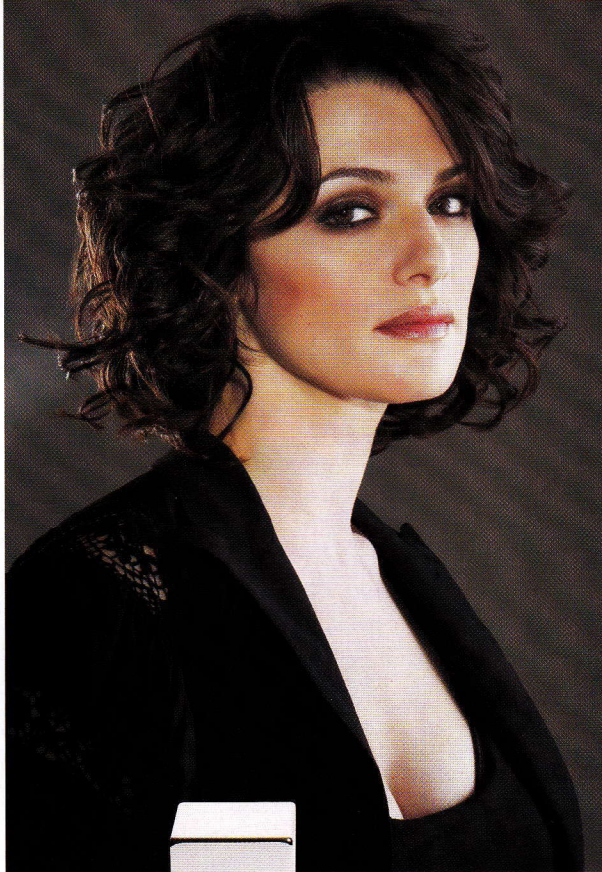
for me.” Okay, her version of womanly is the only-in-Hollywood kind: Nearly at the end of her second trimester, her sole concession to impending motherhood was to buy more ample bras. “I’m still wearing my jeans, just with the top button undone,” she offers cheerfully.

“In every picture we saw of Rachel, she looked very accessible and so natural and easy,” says Burberry designer Christopher Bailey, who hired the London-born and -bred actress as the face of the house’s new perfume, Burberry London. “And those are all the words we kept saying that this fragrance should be about.” (Think peony, jasmine, clementine, and sandalwood.)

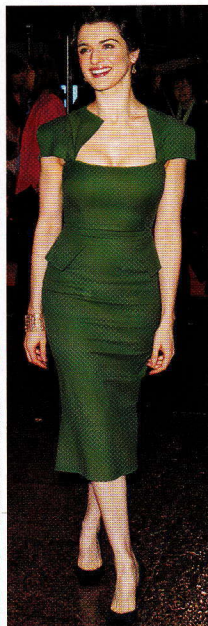
“The perfume encapsulates the spirit of London,” Weisz says. “It’s beautiful, subtle, and light. Burberry has such class and history, and I love things with a real history.”

She is, in a sense, the twenty-first-century English rose, with raven hair and flushed porcelain cheeks—but also an honors degree in English from Cambridge and a devotion to the fitted designs of Roland Mouret and Narciso Rodriguez. Rodriguez, for his part, is utterly devoted to her. “Rachel is my fantasy, my muse, my perfect body type,” he says. “To create the red dress she wore to the 2003 premiere of *Confidence* is what I dream my job is.”

In between the Golden Globes and the Screen Actors Guild awards and the Oscars, Weisz was preparing for the birth in New York of her first child (due in May) with her fiancé, filmmaker Darren Aronofsky, the indie director of *Requiem for a Dream* and *Pi*, which he also wrote. Parenthood isn’t the couple’s only joint project. This fall, Aronofsky’s *The Fountain* hits theaters, and it stars Weisz and Hugh Jackman as lovers in the sixteenth century, the present day, and 500 years in the future. As Weisz’s character dies of a brain tumor, Jackman searches over time for the elixir that will save her. It was he who thought to bring Weisz onto the film, which has been in development for six years—longer than Weisz and Aronofsky have been (they



Star turns: (Clockwise from top) Weisz in a taffeta jacket with lace details by Jean Paul Gaultier, \$2,235, at Ikram, Chicago; in a “really well-cut” Roland Mouret at the London premiere of *The Constant Gardener*; in a red Narciso Rodriguez at the Manhattan debut of *Confidence*; Burberry London Eau de Parfum



met through mutual friends five years ago). “I said to Darren, ‘Have you considered Rachel for the part?’” Jackman recalls. “He wasn’t sure how it would be for everyone on set, but I said to him, ‘She would be so perfect.’”

Weisz was intrigued, but, she says, “Darren and I discussed how it is when you’re partners at home but your partner becomes your boss. The film is incredibly important—and so is the relationship.”

“They were very professional. There were no *Hi, darling’s*,” the wry Jackman says, though he does concede that “it was a little weird to make out with her in the bath” while her boyfriend was standing a few feet away behind the camera.

Weisz has long seen herself as part of a larger team, including technical crew, makeup, and carpenters, and brings no diva attitude

to the process. *Constant Gardener* director Fernando Meirelles says working with her “was the best experience I have ever had with an actress. I’ve never seen anyone so dedicated to her job and with an obsession to do it better each time.”

She insists she’s no activist, but her experience on *Constant Gardener* clearly shook something in her. She helped found a charity (www.constantgardenertrust.org) that is building bridges and schools in the Kenyan slums where the film was shot. And she has become an active supporter of the United Nations’ World Food Programme. “There are over 300 million hungry children in the world,” she says. “If I wasn’t pregnant, I would have gone out in the field.”

Which is very admirable, but happily, there seems little chance that she’ll turn into a finger wagger. “She’s one of the most generous actors I’ve ever worked with,” Jackman says. “She’s also cheeky and very funny.” (“I think I’m silly,” she says).

And though Hollywood is intent on offering her the “dramatic British girl” parts, she wants to do comedies and is developing two, one set in Britain, the other in America. “I’ve thought up some ideas and found gifted writers to do the screenplays,” she says. “I’m much more suited for comedy, but nobody knows that yet.” □