

# NYLON

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March 2005

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# CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE

**EVAN RACHEL WOOD**  
HAS BUSTED HER  
ACTING CHOPS IN  
ENOUGH ANGST-RIDDEN  
ROLES TO LAST A  
LIFETIME—AND SHE'S  
ONLY 17. MARGARET  
WAPPLER TALKS TO  
HER ABOUT WHAT IT'S  
LIKE TO TAKE A WALK  
ON THE LIGHTER SIDE.

JACKET BY MARGARET WAPPLER

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JASON NOCITO

STYLIST: KUSUM LYNN, HAIR BY PETER BUTLER FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PRIANO, MAKE-UP BY RACHEL GUDWIN FOR MAC AT MAGNET LA.

# HOLLYWOOD HAS NOT BEEN EASY ON EVAN RACHEL WOOD.

Sure, she received raves (and a Golden Globe nomination) for her breakout performances in *Thirteen* and the critically-lauded, cult ABC family drama *Once and Again*, but she earned them the good old-fashioned way—through hard, teeth-gritting, soul-exposing work. At 17, Wood has already portrayed her fair share of disturbed characters and harrowing moments onscreen. In *The Missing*, she played a headstrong pioneer's daughter who was kidnapped, beaten, and nearly raped. In *Once and Again*, she had an eating disorder and a romance with *The O.C.*'s Mischa Barton—all while being devastated by her parents' divorce. In *Thirteen*, she showed off a thong, made out with losers, cut herself regularly with a razor blade, and was slapped until she bled.

So you can see why the actress was all too relieved to step into the shoes of the “playful, non-judgmental, open-minded,” and, most importantly, “very sane” character Lavender Wolfmeyer in *The Upside Of Anger*, a film about a family of young women struggling to relate to their embittered mother after their dad deserts the clan. Though this dramedy starring Joan Allen as the spitfire matriarch and Kevin Costner as her down-and-out drinking buddy may be dark, for Wood it was “really nice. I didn't have to shed one tear. I never had to do anything crazy. It's really the closest to me—or this certain side of me—you'll probably ever see onscreen.”

In fact, the hardest thing Wood had to do for *The Upside of Anger* was keep it together during a fantasy sequence that required large amounts of blood to be shot out of giant syringes at herself and screen-sister Keri Russell. “It was the worst!” she says. “We could only do the scene once, so we couldn't laugh. There was a countdown, 5-4-3, and our knees were shaking because we wanted to laugh. We knew we were going to have to look up, and then turn to face each other, wide-eyed, cov-

ered in blood. So we got the blood on us, and we got about halfway through looking at each other—and then we just fell on the floor and died laughing.” Even the most morbid of scenes can be hysterical when you've done enough of them.

It's easy to see why Wood has been singled out for the intense roles time and again. A petite blond with aqua-blue eyes who fidgets nervously and often issues a curt, “so, yeah,” after she's finished answering a question, she has a presence that's both demanding and serious, even in the sunny confines of a casual West Hollywood breakfast spot. She keeps her herringbone coat buttoned up and a colorful woven scarf knotted around her neck for the entirety of the interview, and as we're about to leave, I find out why: At a sleepover last night at a friend's house, she spilled soda all over her shirt and decided it was best not to wear it today. “Yeah, I'm dressed like a stripper,” she says, blushing and shaking her head. Refreshingly, Wood doesn't try to cover up her embarrassment now or at any other time so that she can fake the beaming, carefree starlet. She's age-appropriately and authentically self-conscious, sarcastic and melodramatic, beating herself up, for instance, when she can't think of a word: “Oh,” she says, holding her forehead in her hand, her eyes squeezed shut. “I'm going crazy. I can't think of it. Let me make sure your tape recorder gets this long pause where my brain isn't working. Oh my god!! What is that word?”

It's these very qualities that make Wood a natural choice for dark comedies. She's filmed a string of them lately, including the upcoming features *Pretty Persuasion* (which premiered at Sundance), a sexual harassment satire, and the fantasy-tinged bittersweet love story *Down in the Valley*, in which she swaps spit with the equally brooding Edward Norton. In addition to her self-deprecating humor, she has the discerning sense of

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an outsider. When I ask Wood, who recently passed her high-school equivalency test, if she’s interested in college, she winces and fiddles with her napkin. “I don’t know,” she says. “Some days I think college would be really fun and other days I think I wouldn’t get along with anyone, and I wouldn’t be happy.” When pressed to explain further, she smiles shyly, and adds, “I always feel like I don’t fit in with most people, the majority of the population. And at a lot of the colleges I’ve been to, everyone’s always drunk so I don’t know if I want to be around that all the time.”

For most of us, college was that magical place where we learned about good music, stopped doing embarrassing things to our hair, and finally met some like-minded people, but Wood already seems to have a head start on all that—especially when it comes to her tastes, which are unconventional, spirited, and fairly informed for someone her age. She’s giddy about the Arcade Fire, says she’s just now getting into Interpol, and loves Beck and Bob Dylan. As far as movies, Wood raves about Takashi Miike’s cult hit *Gozu*, “the only movie that made me laugh, scream, and cry,” and the ’80s slumber-party staple *Labyrinth* takes the cake as her all-time favorite, if only for David Bowie’s Jareth the Goblin King. “Oooh, David Bowie,” she says, slowly rubbing her hands together. “I’m sorry; more boys need to wear eyeliner.” Now that she’s started, Wood proceeds to tick off a short but concise list of other favorite boys in eyeliner, beginning with Ewan McGregor and ending with Gael García Bernal.

Few preferences reveal as much about Wood as the roles she desires to play in the future. Born in Raleigh, North Carolina to theater buff parents—both are actors and her father runs the prestigious Theatre in the Park—Wood was “pushed onstage as a baby and [has] been hooked ever since.” It’s no surprise then to hear that the two plays

she hopes to do “before I die” are *Les Miserables* and *Romeo & Juliet*. Yet, Wood also longs to star in “a really good classic horror movie. You never see them anymore. What happened to *Rosemary’s Baby* and *The Omen*? Those are horrifying movies, even today.”

Ultimately, it’s this kind of insightful versatility that makes her so appealing to watch. Whether she’s a shoplifting wannabe hoochie or an insolent deer-gutting pioneer princess, Wood brings the whole range of her presence to her projects. Considering the fact that she’s already worked with luminaries known for their chameleonic natures, from her beloved Cate Blanchett (“I want to marry her!”) to Holly Hunter, Nicole Kidman, and Al Pacino, Wood seems well on her way to achieving that special brand of fame—the type that comes not from the greased lightning of a fancy stylist and a savvy publicist, but from the kind of grit and perseverance that feels more old Hollywood than new, the kind of talent that would earn both sniffing respect and fearful sidelong looks from a Joan Crawford or a Bette Davis.

When no one knew who she was, Wood rarely got nervous, even around bona fide movie stars. For these last three films, though, she’s been petrified. Comedy is unfamiliar territory for her, but she also admits that it’s because she’s getting older and therefore more aware. With each new movie, she worries that she won’t be able to pull it off. “I’ve talked to a lot of actors about this, and they all go through the same thing. You think, ‘Oh my god, I don’t know how to act. I’m so screwed. How am I going to do this?’ But the truth is you dive right back in. And you pick up where you left off.” It sounds remarkably self-assured, but then Wood stops abruptly and a tense, pensive expression takes over her face. You can practically see the gears turning: *Did that sound stupid?* No way. Hollywood’s newest ingenue has it all figured out—she just doesn’t know it yet.