

Queen MARGOT

All hail, the queen of Hollywood. At just 28 years old, Australian A-lister MARGOT ROBBIE – exploding onto our screens in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, notorious for *that* scene with Leonardo DiCaprio; Oscar-nominated as figure skater *I, Tonya*; fresh from playing Elizabeth I in *Mary Queen of Scots*, and currently Tarantino's muse – shines in roles that are raw and unreserved. And in person, she's equally real. *Vassi Chamberlain* meets the most divine, down-to-earth and determined actress in town

Photographer Yelena Yemchuk
Fashion editor Camille Bidault-Waddington



From the moment Margot Robbie walks into République on South La Brea in Los Angeles – speeding through the early-morning crowd like a blonde bullet – it’s clear who rules her roost. Maybe it’s her age, a millennial 28. But there’s more. The messages I get from her team asking what I look like, what I’m wearing, where I’m sitting, if I’m OK waiting a couple of minutes longer than scheduled, coupled with her immediately apologizing for the delay, even before she sits down, and then apologizing again how she feels terrible she won’t be asking me any questions – as in, having a normal conversation like regular human beings do – is unusual. It turns the attention onto you, the interviewer, rather than Robbie, the star, and in Hollywood, that is as rare as rocking-horse manure.

Robbie tucks into my breakfast. It’s OK, I tell her she can. I had half-offered to pick hers up from the counter when she arrived (we are at the very back – as requested by her team – of a very large space that used to be Charlie Chaplin’s studio, and where there is no table service), but because she’s a millennial she can hear my thoughts and says absolutely not. And because I am not a millennial I immediately push my plate of ricotta French toast with seared peaches, pomegranate and toasted nuts, towards her. Eat mine I say. I like that she’s eating my breakfast. Not many actresses would.

There is something very sweet-natured and endearing about Robbie – the way her demeanor rearranges itself into ‘serious Margot’ when my questions start, how she sits up straighter and eagerly looks me in the eye. “You are here to do your job,” she says, “and I respect that.” She’s also a natural grafter. When she was growing up in Gold Coast, Australia, young Robbie, like children the world over, sold lemonade on the street with her friends. Unlike most kids, she was fierce with the pricing. When I ask her how her mother would describe her, she says “determined”.

I would also add, ridiculously pretty. But leaving it at that doesn’t paint the whole picture of someone who also unexpectedly oozes class. There’s nothing specific – she’s in a loose pale-beige linen salopette, white vest and patterned damask slippers with two thin gold chokers, wound tightly around her neck, and twisted hoop earrings – she just possesses that undefinable and un-buyable, *it*.

Looks aside, few would disagree that she is an exceptional actress, who increasingly surprises with her role choices – her comic and satisfyingly satirical take on US figure-skater Tonya Harding in 2017’s *I, Tonya* (which she also produced), scored her the trifecta of Academy Award, Golden Globe and Bafta nominations for Best Actress. And she surprises again with her new movie *Mary Queen of Scots* in which she plays an initially thoughtful but increasingly hardened and uncompromising Elizabeth I, to Saoirse Ronan’s softer and more renegade, Mary. As with *I, Tonya*, her MQOS character is ugly-fied to a degree that will enrage those viewers who still haven’t recovered from the scene in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, where, sitting on the floor of a child’s nursery with her legs slowly parting, she exquisitely taunts Leonardo DiCaprio with the words: “Mommy is just so sick and tired of wearing panties.”

Transmogrifying roles are a well-worn territory for serious actresses who use them as a means to subvert the distraction of their beauty but highlight their acting chops. Critics fawn over them, less so the box office, and that has, at times, alienated a star’s appeal. Not Robbie, who innately understands that while it’s OK to mutate into someone other than yourself, at least do it in a movie that everyone is going to love. And *MQOS* does just that with its retelling of a story where the two central characters are women, and which feels modern and powerful but also sweetly engaging. It is presumably why she jumped at the chance to play Elizabeth I, although she says that the thought of taking on such a role initially

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made her feel surprisingly nervous. “She [Elizabeth I] is an incredibly iconic and historic figure. She’s been portrayed on screen by some of the world’s greatest actresses, including Cate Blanchett and [Dame] Judi Dench. Who am I to think that I could join that legacy? So initially I thought, ‘No chance, no way.’ I didn’t think I could pull it off.” She pauses, and laughs. “The movie hasn’t been released yet, so that’s still to be determined...”

One of the attractions for her was working with Saoirse Ronan. The pair had met at a dinner party at Richard Curtis’ house, and immediately got on. “I remember thinking, she is so freaking cool. And intelligent and grounded and fun. I had a major girl crush on her from >



Blazer, \$5,950, swimsuit \$1,000, and ring, \$3,300, all by Chanel



T-shirt by Calle
Del Mar, \$188;
pants by Proenza
Schouler, \$850;
necklace by
Chanel, \$31,600
Opposite: blazer by
CALVIN KLEIN
205W39NYC,
\$1,800; earrings
by Jennifer Fisher,
\$650; wedding
ring, her own





Bikini top by
Chanel, \$650;
earrings by
Jennifer
Fisher, \$650



Blazer, \$570, and shorts, \$350, both by Acne Studios; T-shirt by Calle Del Mar, \$188; bracelet by Goossens x Harumi Klossowska de Rola, \$866; belt, stylist's own

that moment on." The pair only meet on screen towards the end of the movie as they operate from separate courts. The person she has more scenes with is Elizabeth's would-be lover, Robert Dudley, played by Joe Alwyn. I tell her I only realized later he was Taylor Swift's boyfriend. "I know," she says, "I didn't know they were together either." We both agree how handsome he is.

She's currently working on Quentin Tarantino's highly anticipated *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* – set for release in July 2019 – in which she plays Sharon Tate (the wife of Roman Polanski who was murdered by the Manson Family), and which also stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Brad

One can only imagine what Hollywood made of the young Australian when she pitched up with her business-like plan. She says she has her Australian agent to thank for preparing her well. Perhaps, but what also strikes is not just her ambition, or the foregone conclusion of her success, but an innate self-awareness of who she is, what she wants and how she's going to go about it. It's something she makes sure her team remembers at their six-monthly check-ins, which always revolve around her mantra: Quality, Variety and Longevity. "We ask: 'Are we heading towards that, or are we starting to veer off a little?' And sometimes we are, so it's good to have those chats, to course-correct, check in and be like 'OK cool, let's get back on track.'"

It's tempting, at face value, to put her down as yet another balls-to-the-wall, ambitious narcissist, but unless I've been royally played, I'd say that's not Robbie

"Fake it till you make it, everyone's pretending they know what they're doing"

Pitt. Not bad. "Yeah but I'm barely on set with them," she says, giving less away than I'd hoped. Of Tarantino, she can't say enough. "That's a life goal," she says. "When I first sat down with my team in America and they asked me what I wanted out of my career and I said: 'Pie in the sky? Tarantino.' Everyone asks me: 'How is it, how is he on set?' I've been on sets for pretty much the last 10 years and I still walk on and think, 'This is soooooo coooooo! Look at that! That's amazing! Oh my gosh! I'm like a kid in a candy shop and then Tarantino walks on and he's got the same, if not more, enthusiasm and he's so excited. It's his film set and he's not jaded at all – he's just so happy to be there."

One of the first things she asked the *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill* director was if she should be wearing fake bosoms. "I'm very flat-chested," she says, pointing downwards, "and Sharon Tate was not. So I asked [Tarantino]: 'Any fake-boob situation?' and he said, 'No, it does not change the character.'" Did she contact Polanski to speak about his wife? "No, no, I didn't but he wrote a book and there's so much detail in there that I actually didn't need to."

It's fair to say that her ascent since she first arrived in LA for pilot season in 2011, has been fast. The then 20-year-old had completed three years on long-running Australian soap, *Neighbours*, and was hoping for a role on that year's *Charlie's Angels* TV reboot, but instead was hired on one-season wonder *Pan Am*, alongside Christina Ricci. Small roles followed in Richard Curtis's *About Time* and an adaptation of Irène Némirovsky's book *Suite Française*. But it was Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* that altered everything. Since then, the roles have kept coming: *The Legend of Tarzan*, *Suicide Squad*, *Goodbye Christopher Robin*, a scene-stealing cameo as herself in *The Big Short*, and the ultimate accolade, hosting the season premier of *Saturday Night Live* alongside The Weeknd.

at all. Sure, she's a good actress, but she's also a well-mannered grounded person who wants a decent career, someone for whom money is not the be all and end all. She's also quick to laugh at herself. "I say fake it till you make it, because everyone's pretending they know what they are doing and almost everyone doesn't." She pauses and smiles. "It's Monday morning and here I am dishing out pearls of wisdom."

That she is so comfortable in her own skin speaks volumes about what she says was a very happy childhood with her three siblings in Gold Coast. Her parents divorced when she was young and the family lived with her physiotherapist mother by the sea. She rails against those who try to portray her as a girl from the outback who came from nothing. "I had the best upbringing," she says. "I know that I can get by with very little money. I know how to do it. I've done it and I'm not scared of it."

It seems that upbringing has also stood her in good stead in her relationships both with men and women. Her love life has always been a frustration for the tabloid press because she's always been a one-trick pony. Her decision to marry Brit Tom Ackerley at 26 seemed unexpected for an actress in the ascendant. "I always thought 'Urrggghhh, being married sounds really boring.' I thought I might bite the bullet in my late thirties and see how it goes." But then she met Ackerley, on the set of *Suite Française*. He was third assistant director, and she was third on the billing after Michelle Williams and Kristin Scott-Thomas. Rather than schmooze with the stars, she hung out with the crew on set. They all got on so well that they invited her to move into the house they shared in Clapham, an unremarkable middle-class London suburb. After a year, she and Ackerley fessed up to their room mates that they were secretly dating. It upset the laid-back but delicate eco-system of the house. She jokes that warfare nearly ensued but soon settled down, and rather than move out, the couple stayed in >

Blazer by
CALVINKLEIN
205W39NYC,
\$1,800; top
and shorts
(sold as set) by
Adriana Degreas,
\$621; earrings
by Jennifer
Fisher, \$650



the house. It's only since moving to Los Angeles two years ago that they finally live alone.

The pair set up their own production company, LuckyChap Entertainment, with two of their original London flatmates. *I, Tonya* and *Terminal* were both produced by Ackerley. "I'm a great advocate of doing business with your partner," she says. "Being married is actually the most fun ever, life got way more fun somehow. I have a responsibility being someone's wife, I want to be better." They operate a three-week rule when apart. "Even if we both have to fly to a country in between where we both are for one night, we'll do it and then fly back to work the next day. And we speak all day, every day on the phone."

When the inevitable subject of babies comes up, her response is immediate and unequivocal. "No! Definitely not," she says, laughing. What about Ackerley, does he feel the same? "Three days ago my husband stopped by a dog shelter on the way back from the airport, and we now have a pit-bull puppy," she says. "We already have a two-year old who still acts like a puppy. I love him but he's a handful, and for the last three days I haven't slept. I'm like 'we're fostering her for the week' and my husband's saying 'No! We're keeping her' and I'm saying 'we absolutely cannot and if anything, you are now cementing in my mind that we cannot have kids. I can't cope with two puppies, let alone children!'" She should be careful, I warn her, it always starts with a pet. She pauses and looks up at the ceiling. "If I'm looking into my future 30 years from now, I want to see a big Christmas dinner with tons of kids there," she says. "But definitely not at the moment. That's 100 percent certain."

Her conversation is peppered with mentions of her girlfriends: Australians she was at school with since the age of five; her London Clapham gang, which also includes boys ("The second we land, everyone will be at the pub, people will leave work the minute they can, we even go on group holidays."); and a New York group too. And it speaks to her emotional security. "I can show you my phone," she says, picking it up. "It gives me palpitations, I have 80-something unread text messages right now, 500 WhatsApps and 300 emails..."

Close girlfriends include two of the British Delevingne sisters, Poppy and Cara, also both actresses. She went to Glastonbury with the latter who she met on the set of *Suicide Squad*. "I'm the boring person on the planet compared to those two," she says. "Cara would say, 'I'm going to this mud-wrestling thing tonight.' And I'm like, 'I have a meeting at 7am, I can't go mud-wrestling - it's a Wednesday night!' Talking about them is making me miss them so much. I'm gonna call Cara straight after this."

Fame is, of course, now her life. I suspect she chose to meet in a less obvious restaurant on purpose, rather than somewhere splashier. "It's just a strange thing - there's no other way of putting it." She says there are good parts

and bad parts, that she's constantly adapting because the level of fame constantly changes. "Your relevance in the current conversation changes, sometimes you're in everyone's face, other times you're not. There are moments when you feel the heat, then it cools off a little bit and you can breathe, and then something comes out of left field and totally side swipes you. So you're kind of on your toes trying to keep your head above water I guess." She says that when she's in Australia she feels a sense of responsibility to stop for selfies and have a chat. "I know what that means [to them]: 'Oh, I've seen a person from the place where I grew up, and now they've gone on to do this and now it seems possible for me too.' And that's a special thing."

But what about when she has no control of the situation, when she doesn't feel a duty to stop for every photo. How does that play with her? "I hate people taking pictures without asking, it's the grossest feeling and it happens all the time. Everyone's got a phone with a camera on them at every second of the day in every part of the world." Presumably, she now feels a need to be camera-ready at all times. She disagrees. "My view is that for some people, it's part of their brand to look a certain way. I've been in hotels where I've run into someone the morning after an awards ceremony and I know they were out, and they are 'on' - full face of makeup, full blowout and perfect outfit. That's their brand." So what's hers? "I want people to see me as an actor. I am not a model."

Maybe not, but she regularly appears on magazine covers and is considered one of the best-dressed actresses in the world. She is the face of Calvin Klein scent Deep Euphoria, and Chanel announced her as an ambassador to the brand earlier this year. Her look today - her chin-length bob is waved, her makeup discreet - would be catnip for a street-style photographer. Is she into fashion? "Not hugely," she says. "I mean, I appreciate it as an art

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form but it's not my passion." She tackles red-carpet dressing with the help of stylist Kate Young who also looks after Sienna Miller and Natalie Portman. But similar to how she chooses her roles, she steers the ship. "I let them do their thing and I then speak to the bigger picture. I say, 'I want this vibe and I want to give this impression; now I'll listen to you as to how we can achieve that.'"

It must be tricky gauging what people think about you - both professionally and personally - of the conversation and surrounded by people paid to say yes. "You've got to check yourself," she says, nodding. "But I don't know if I'd be subject to turning into a complete monster." Has she seen a difference in her [CONTINUED ON PAGE 216]



Playsuit by Onia, \$265; dress (worn as jacket), \$6,500; right hand, gold ring on middle finger, \$3,300, and white-gold ring on wedding finger, \$3,400, all by Chanel; left hand, ring, Margot's own; bracelet, \$445, and necklace, \$220, both by Alighieri

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Hair Bryce Scarlett at The Wall Group using Moroccan oil. Makeup Pati Dubroff at Forward Artists using Chanel. Nails Ashlie Johnson at The Wall Group. Production Preiss Creative. With thanks to Number 850 Hotel. Shot in Los Angeles on October 11, 2018

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE XXX] character since she’s become more famous, is she more spoilt, does she get angry, have tantrums? “The difference is I don’t like how cynical fame has made me,” she says. “And it upsets me because I’ve always been such a blind optimist. Always. But with every year that goes by it diminishes.” Can she define what she is cynical about? “People’s intentions,” she replies. “And that’s a sad thing—I don’t know how to undo that because you just can’t help it. Every time someone does something nice, there is a voice in my head wondering, ‘Are they being nice to me because they like me or are they being nice because they want something from me?’ It doesn’t matter if it’s a family member or a complete stranger, that voice in your head is always there and I hate that voice so much, questioning someone’s good intentions. But I’d rather be fucked over and still have a positive view of the world than be this cynical, sheltered, negative person who never gets fucked over. I’d rather get fucked over 10,000 times and still believe the best in people. So a couple years ago I just stopped and said to myself, ‘Yes, you’re gonna get screwed over, you’re gonna get your feelings hurt, people will be taking advantage. But, for the sake of your happiness and sanity, presume the best in people.’” It’s an exceptionally mature and emotionally intelligent way of looking at life. It strikes me, not for the first time in our conversation, how utterly different she is to many in her industry.

As far as professional criticism is concerned, she says she reads online reviews but avoids tabloid-centric platforms. What does she think the industry thinks of her work? “I often wonder that,” she says. “You know when you’re with friends and you’re like, ‘OK, what movie are we gonna watch?’ And then someone mentions a movie and everyone says, ‘Errr no, I can’t stand that so-and-so on screen, I just wanna kill myself, they’re awful!’ I wonder how many people out there think, ‘I cannot watch a film with… I hate that Margot Robbie.’ So yes, I do wonder how I irritate people, or if I do an interview, they’ll say, ‘Urgggghh, she’s so this or so that.’”

Of course there is only one topic in Hollywood at the moment. Has she ever experienced sexual harassment? “Yes!” She immediately replies. “But not in Hollywood. I struggle to find many women who haven’t experienced sexual harassment on some level. So yes, lots of times. And to varying

degrees of severity throughout my life.” Her mother would forward her articles about the dangers of backpacking before she set out with her friends. “She’d say to me: ‘Bye honey, have a lovely trip – and here’s an article that might be useful to you, you know, on how not to get raped.’ I’d be like, ‘Thanks mum, bon voyage!’” But a year on, does she think that things have changed for the better? “Definitely, definitely.” How? “In terms of people viewing it as a problem that they can say no to. Or even calling it a problem. I’ve said this before, but I didn’t know what constituted as sexual harassment until the #MeToo movement. I’m in my late twenties, I’m educated, I’m worldly, I’ve traveled, I have my own business, and I didn’t know. That’s insane.” Surely she must have been aware when a boundary was being overstepped. But she’s making the distinction, I think, between intimidation and actual physical assault. “I didn’t know that you could say ‘I have been sexually harassed’ without someone physically touching you, that you could say ‘That’s not OK.’ I had no idea. I now know because I’ve researched what constitutes illegal sexual harassment so as to have negative connotations for your job and how you get paid.” But more than that she won’t say.

On the day we meet, news breaks that Robbie is in talks to play a movie version of *Barbie*. Really? “Oh yeah, that,” she says. “That wasn’t meant to get announced. It’s still being figured out, hopefully it will all come together.” And if she had to say anything? “It would be something boring like, ‘I’m excited about this potential partnership with [the toy-manufacturing company] Mattel.’” I wonder where that project figures in her mantra. It seems an odd choice, but then again she is not stupid, so she’s either doing it for commercial reasons, or maybe she just loves the idea of being Barbie.

Before she leaves, I ask her about filming that scene in *The Wolf of Wall Street*. She laughs. “It doesn’t come across when you’re watching the movie, but in reality we’re in a tiny bedroom with 30 crew crammed in.” Mostly men? “All men. And for 17 hours I’m pretending to be touching myself. It’s just a very weird thing and you have to bury the embarrassment and absurdity, really deep, and fully commit.” And no one can argue she didn’t do exactly that.

The timer on her phone goes off and she leaves as she arrived, in haste, with purpose and another apology. ‘Again, I’m sorry…’

she says, as she picks up her small tan cylindrical bag off the floor. ‘The conversation was very one-sided. Hopefully I’ll see you again and we’ll actually get to chat.’ With that, one of Hollywood’s most bankable and likable stars disappears into the unknowing crowd. And I finish off what Margot Robbie didn’t of my breakfast.■

Mary, Queen of Scots is released on December 7 (US), January 18 (UK)