

poppy king, the lipstick queen

with LISA RADON

At a time when a strong lip is on the rise, the new Lipstick Queen lipsticks are the *crème de la crème* in two versions: Sinner and Saint. The Sinners are highly pigmented rich, opaque, and glamorous.

The Saints are sheer, moist lipsticks with a touch of color. Lipstick Queen's creator, Poppy King, has done all this before. She started her first cosmetics line at the age of 18 in Melbourne, Australia. And Poppy, the resulting cult cosmetics brand (before there was such a thing), reigned for a decade in Australia as the lip brand, coveted internationally by those in the know.

LISA RADON What are your earliest makeup memories?

POPPY KING *My mother's lipstick from Biba! I got to play dress up with Biba and Mary Quant lipstick and Maude Frizon shoes. My mom was then and is now very chic. I wanted the lip of a '40s movie star. I finally realized that being pale was a feature, and a red lip worked really well with it. At the time—this is the '80s—all the lipsticks were blue-based. There wasn't a yellow-based red available. My mom used to go to theatrical makeup supply houses.*

LR But how did you know about blue and yellow bases?

PK *Well, I didn't. I just knew the result. A good lipstick will illuminate your hair, eyes, and skin. On the other hand, the wrong color just drains color from your face. Women don't trust the evidence they see in the mirror. They want to rely on what the woman behind the counter tells them. We need to be able to look in the mirror and really see.*

LR At 18, how did you know how to get in touch with cosmetics manufacturers?

PK *Well, I wish it was more of an exciting story, but I just picked up the phone book. Really. And the response was just amazing. We had great press. The business was always entirely customer driven, women asking for Poppy. I think if you do something in a genuine way, it will attract other people.*

LR How are you creating the lipsticks now? You select all of the colors...

PK *Yes, rose is based on the lips of an antique doll. I will take a ballet slipper to the chemist, and they will match it. Overall, it's very straightforward. No crazy packaging. No crazy scent. I'm into color and texture, into the product itself. I am personally involved in every aspect of creating these lipsticks.*



LR You design this great packaging as well.

PK *Yes, my inspirations were very Belle Époque—Aubrey Beardsley illustrations—but the color palette is strictly '70s rock album covers.*

LR You left poppy in 2002 to come to New York as Perscriptives vp of creative marketing. How did you come back to your own company again, to founding lipstick queen?

PK *In November of 2005, I quit to write a book, a guide to how to take an idea to reality in an unconventional way. I walked out of my fifth Avenue office with a job lined up as a waitress at Café Gitane in case it all went wrong. The book is part guide, part memoir. I thought about why I went into business in the first place. I was bored with lipstick again. Lips were all novelty. You didn't see pure female energy out there. I want fantasy, exuberance, romance, whimsy. I thought, "It's time to do it again!"*

LR So what's next?

PK *"Oxymoron." It's a matte lipgloss, blush for your lips. It's a romantic look. Very Jane Austin. You should see the packaging for that. It's Aubrey Beardsley meets Miami.*