

By Poppy King

GREAT  
COLOR!  
GREAT  
FORM!

## paint it red

How Jerry Hall's cool attitude and sexy pout turned young Australian Poppy King into an international lipstick whiz.

**i**wanted to be Jerry Hall before I knew she existed—before I knew about Studio 54, before I knew of the Rolling Stones, before I knew what it meant to be blonde, and even before I became obsessed with red lipstick. I was eight years old, and I wanted to be an adult straightaway, now, this minute. My father died of cancer when I was young, and my older brother went away to school, so I was mostly alone with my mother, a knitwear designer who traveled to Europe several times a year. She would return from her trips to Paris and London with amazing trophies from that far-off world—Maud Frizon shoes, Sonia Rykiel sweaters, Biba lipsticks in their mysterious dark tubes, opaque and intense smelling, ready for me to play dress-up. These exotic objects transported me out of our apartment above a store in downtown Melbourne, away from the rattle of the tramcars rolling down the street, and right into the center of late-seventies glamour.

Although I was really more prim than precocious, I couldn't wait to wear heels, go to discos, have boyfriends, use makeup. A few years later, when flipping through one of my mother's *Vogue* magazines, I came across Jerry Hall and found out that she did all of these things. All legs and lips, she possessed two of the most coveted pouts in the world, hers and Mick Jagger's. And rather than hiding behind her man, Jerry stood fearless and alluring beside him, the way I felt a woman should be. There was an exuberance to her sexuality and a confidence in the way she faced the world; you felt she was in control of her destiny. Jerry looked strong and dressed strong—red bikini, red lipstick, red nail polish.

At my very conventional school I was a misfit: the only Jewish kid, pale and unathletic. When we were asked in grade three to sing our favorite song in music class, the other girls sang hymns like "Morning Has Broken." I chose "Touch Me, *nostalgia* >68

**WHOA THERE!**  
IN A RED BIKINI  
WITH LIPS SLICKED  
TO MATCH, HALL'S  
SELF-ASSURED SEX  
APPEAL AS SEEN  
IN *VOGUE*, 1977.

# nostalgia

## THE JERRY EFFECT

**COLOR MY WORLD**  
HALL, SHOT BY HELMUT NEWTON FOR *VOGUE* IN 1974, INSPIRING THE AUTHOR'S CHERRY LIPS ON HALLOWEEN, 2004 (FAR RIGHT).



At this point I made a decision that was probably best taken by an inexperienced young person, because if I'd thought too hard about it, it would never have happened: If I couldn't find the right lipstick, I was just going to have to make it myself. So I sat down one afternoon in the midst of college applications and other uninspiring activities and pulled out the phone book to look up cosmetics manufacturers. It was cold, and I was sitting

cross-legged on the floor huddled against the heater in the living room of the latest apartment that Mum and I were living in. After a couple of hours of dialing I eventually hit on someone who said they could make me whatever type of lipstick I wanted, which meant they could even make me a Jerry Hall lipstick.

It wasn't too long until I had a business partner whom I persuaded to invest the start-up dollars required to get my first range made, and was having a meeting with the chemists who owned the manufacturing facility I had tracked down.

I had brought with me some lipstick samples to show them the type of colors I wanted, including an old brown Biba lipstick of my mother's, a congealed and pungent talisman. When it came to showing them a red, I didn't really have the right example, so instead I tried to explain it. "Kind of like this," I said, swatching some lipstick out on my hand, "but more daring, brighter—you know, more Jerry Hall in her Studio 54, Andy Warhol days." Two pairs of puzzled-looking middle-aged male eyes looked back me. Neville and Paul had no idea what I was talking about. Their only understanding of the Factory was the one we were standing in right now in a light-industrial Australian suburb called

Even if I could never look like Jerry Hall, as long as I had lips, I, too, could paint them red and enter a world of glamour

Bayswater. But somehow we worked it out and ended up with seven amazing shades of lipstick and a business that catapulted me so much farther than I had ever imagined lipstick could.

By making the lipstick I wanted come true—with the help of Neville, Paul, and Jerry—in many ways I made the life I wanted come true, as well. *Vogue* wrote a page about me in 1993, when my line was bought by the new Barneys store on Madison Avenue, and made my career. I moved to New York, worked for a big corporation, then quit and launched a new line, Lipstick Queen.

Jerry, of course, was there only in spirit—gorgeous, brazen, sexy spirit. But I did get the chance to tell her this one day. About five years ago, I spotted her in Fred Segal, Santa Monica, ran out to the rental car, grabbed a red lipstick sample from the trunk, and tapped her on the shoulder. "Excuse me, Jerry Hall?" "Yes?" she said with a lovely smile. "I just wanted to give you this red lipstick that I made, because you inspired it." "Thank you," she said, and I walked away, not wanting to bother her further. After all, it was I who should be thanking her . . . those were the lips that changed my life. □

"I Wanna Be Dirty," from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a musical my mother loved and that we would dance to around the living room. Given these traits, it was perhaps not surprising that I was fascinated by the idea of transformation: from rags to ball dress, ugly duckling to swan, struggling Australian teenager to bold and beautiful Amazon. And I learned that lipstick was a means of doing this, a tool of instant transfiguring power that could make me feel like Jerry Hall even if I could never look like her. True, I had blonde hair, but it was the bushy rather than the flowing kind. I had legs, but not the type that can "make a grown man cry," as her boyfriend sang. Mine managed only to raise me to an unlofty five foot three. But what I did have was lips, and as long as I had lips I, too, could paint them red; and as long as I had red lips I, too, could enter a world of glamour. Intense red is said to quicken the heart rate and prompt the release of adrenaline into the bloodstream. That was the effect I wanted to have. The Jerry effect.

But by the time I was old enough to attempt my own version of Jerry Hall, I couldn't find the shade that would do it. Pink and muted colors were all the rage, and lip gloss, neither here nor there, that looked great on my sporty school friends but not on me. Heavy pigmented shades, the kind associated with a more dramatic forties look, were out. Exhaustively, I patrolled the counters of the local department stores looking for the ultimate red lipstick, but nothing I picked up had the requisite oomph, the spirit, the rock 'n' roll. Where was Biba now that I was able to wear it? It had shut down long ago.