

They're hellcats,
spitfires,
and all kinds
of trouble...
and now
they rule.

**Mary Ellen
Gordon**

on the rise
of the
redhead

red alert



Red, hot, and mod: Julia Roberts's newest shade

Flipping through a family photo album, I come across a picture of my mother from New Year's Eve 1945. She's twenty-one years old, and her wavy updo nearly pops out of the photo, despite the fact that the picture's black-and-white. She is a redhead. Or strawberry-blond, as she puts it.

Two pages later, there's another picture: a large, colorized portrait taken the following year. She's wearing an olive suit and a hat with violet orchids and black netting. But her hair... it's dark with highlights nearly as green as her suit.

When I asked her what happened to her beautiful hair in that picture, she didn't

recall. "I don't remember the color being off at the time," she said. "Maybe the photographer didn't quite know what to do with red hair."

More likely, he was afraid of it: Redheads have been the subject of superstitions, prejudices, and guarded distances practically since time began. A friend tells me that in Russia, redheads are considered devils. Larry Kirwan, a redheaded Irish playwright and front man for the band Black 47, says that in Ireland, redheads are thought to possess magical powers. "That can be good or bad," he says. "If things are going well in the town, they might thank the local redhead. But by the same turn, if the potatoes aren't growing..."

Renowned singer/song-

writer Tommy Makem tells of another Irish superstition: "The first walk you take on the first day of the New Year is called First Footing; it's considered very bad luck if the first person you encounter on that day is a redhead. It's a strong superstition."

Yet—call it reverse chic—suddenly, everyone wants to be red; it's hotter than platinum-blond was last year after Julien D'Ys transformed Nadjia Auermann into the world's reigning ice queen. Hair colorists say they don't remember ever having so

many women request red. Natural or not, redheads are all over the runways, the movie screens, the streets. At the fashion shows, punky, scarlet-haired Sybil, the cool Meghan Douglas, and the brilliantly irreverent Kristen McMenamy ruled the runway. Linda Evangelista went red—Ultress Y43 Auburn, to be exact—for her first Clairol television and print ads, which appeared mid-August. On the big screen, Susan Sarandon and Julia Roberts seem to go more red at every turn.

Natural redheads, many of whom were insufferably persecuted as children for their flaming (intimidating? envy-provoking? just different?) hair color, are reveling in their newfound popularity. Amy >

beauty



SCOTT DRICKEY (HAIR BY MICHEL ALEMAN FOR FREDERIC Fekkai BEAUTE, MAKEUP BY VINCENT LONGO FOR M.C.M. SALON)



KRISTEN MCMENAMY



MEGHAN DOUGLAS



LINDA EVANGELISTA



SARAH FERGUSON



LAURA LEIGHTON



ANGIE EVERHART

The rush for red: a few of our favorites.

Alkon, whose long, rippling hair is an artful—and natural—blend of red, orange, and gold, fully believes that being among the 8 percent of the population with naturally red hair makes her a peacock among, well . . . pigeons. As for aspiring redheads, she says, mere dye does not a redhead make. “There should be an exam,” quips Alkon. “It takes an inner fire to be a redhead, a certain flamboyance of spirit. The test would ask things like, ‘Do you cross boundaries, take risks? Are you adventurous, mischievous?’”

Alkon has hit upon something here. Just look at the words used to describe a redhead’s color: flaming, fiery, voluptuous. These terms do not indicate shyness of any order. Just as the latest wave of young women have turned traditionally sexist trademarks such as the Playboy Bunny on their heads by adopting them for their own, women who choose to become redheads are flying in the face of convention, turning the power of the negative into a stance of defiance.

I decide to float my theory past a few experts. “Intuitively, it makes sense,” says Michele Lamont, a professor of sociology at Princeton University. “There’s a playfulness, a uniqueness to being a redhead.” She thinks for a minute. “You could also argue that red is

unique personality,” says Molly Ringwald, who dyed her brownish hair bright red when she was fourteen and now prefers a more subtle auburn. “The redheads I know are all a bit left of center. For a lot of people, it doesn’t work. Many men are not attracted to women with red hair. But for those who are, it’s almost a fetish.”

Sharon Dorram, a colorist at Peter Coppola Beauty Salon and the genius behind Nicole Kidman’s seemingly natural reds, says it takes more than the right skin coloring to make a redhead: “It takes courage,” she says. “It’s eye-catching and vibrant. It’s the ‘other woman’ image of someone sexy, dynamic, and absolutely confident.”

Todd Oldham—a designer who counts many redheads, including Sarandon, Roberts, The B-52s’ Kate Pierson, and Tommy Boy Music head Monica Lynch among his best friends and customers—is unequivocal in his regard of redheads: “It’s the boldest you can go; it’s the sexiest color,” he says. “There’s a delicious perversity to it, a vixen quality.”

Given these personality characteristics commonly attributed to redheads, I wonder: Can a redhead be “made”? Of course, say hair

Aspiring redheads: Do you take risks? Are you adventurous?

a way for these women who are icons in the culture to stand out.” From another standpoint, Lamont observes, red has a subversive, almost punk connotation. “[Going red] could be a way of setting oneself apart from the conformity of the ’80s, the Reagan years, and the conservatism of today.”

Jack Feldman, a professor of psychology at Georgia Institute of Technology who researches the way people make judgments about one another, compares becoming red to other subtle forms of rebellion, like tattooing or body piercing, that don’t actually challenge the status quo. “We tend to want to be noticed for only those ‘extremes’ that are already valued,” he says. In other words, a visit to one’s colorist doesn’t constitute a march on Washington.

Nonetheless, going red often symbolizes a great deal to those who dare to take the plunge. “It’s absolutely part of establishing a

colorists—within limits. “I’m getting requests for strong, nonapology copper,” says Beth Minardi of Minardi Salon. “But if the skin and eyes won’t support it, I won’t do it.”

“It’s so glamorous that everyone who starts out with mild red wants to get hotter,” says Constance Hartnett, color director at Frederic Fekkai. “I’m getting requests for very red colors—hot red, blond-red, copper-red. But it’s certainly not for everyone. There has to be a certain warmth to the skin.”

Louis Licari, who turned Evangelista into a redhead, says the warmth of red is its biggest plus. “Warmer tones are much friendlier to most skin types. I’ve never seen more reds than we see today. It’s true that if you choose to be red, you choose to be noticed, but there are also a lot of softer blond-reds now.”

“Still,” Licari cautions, “being a redhead is not for the shy and demure.” I couldn’t agree more—just ask my mother. □

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