



CÉDRIC CHARLIER
Alpaca wool sweater
and crêpe lamé skirt.
Prada leather wedges.

It's a bright spring Sunday in Vancouver, and Zooey Deschanel, in town to shoot a film, has the day off. We've planned to meet in the lobby of her hotel, and she makes a jaunty arrival, jumping down the stairs in a tan trench. She's wearing it buttoned up and belted, like she's on a spy mission and trying to be incognito—except she's smiling, and those trademark bangs are cascading over her purple-framed sunglasses. Our destination is a fancy tea lounge nearby, but on the walk there we discover a park that has a large outdoor ice-skating rink with cement steps leading down to it. Now, in warmer weather, the rink's concrete surface has become a dance floor. A salsa class commences on one side, while a group of kids practice break-dancing moves on the other. We take a seat on the steps in front of four young women hard at work on a synchronized dance routine to "Call Me Maybe," which is blasting out of a boom box. In the golden afternoon light Deschanel has become silently enthralled. Then, in that earnest yet deadpan delivery that has made her a sitcom treasure, she says, "Well, it makes sense. Carly Rae Jepsen is Canada's sweetheart."

Deschanel could be America's sweetheart if she wanted to be. But a sweetheart has to be sugary and pastel-natured—sort of a human cupcake—and the actress has an edge to her sweetness. For one thing, she is fiercely independent—god forbid you ask her if she wants kids: "When I was married, that was the first thing people wanted to know. Like every woman is dying to give birth! *I don't think so.* Nobody asks guys that," she says, gaining steam. "And you go into a supermarket and every tabloid is like, 'Pregnant and Alone!' Stuck in this 1950s ideal of how a woman should live her life. That's not something that defines me at all." Deschanel's cornflower-blue eyes are hidden behind her shades, but she is talking loudly, animatedly, and her distinctive husky California drawl echoes around the rink. "This brings out the fiery feminist in me," she pronounces, and I look around, worried that people will recognize her and head over with their smartphones.

Deschanel is also no shrinking violet when it comes to work. The actress and musician, 34, approaches the business of being Zooey with the commitment of a company head. Let's just consider her 2014 schedule thus far: In March she finished seven months of shooting *New Girl's* third season, then went into promotion mode, traveling across the country to plug *To Tommy* from Zooey, her capsule collaboration with Tommy Hilfiger.

She's currently in Canada to film *The Driftless Area*, a dark comedy (she calls it "a prairie noir") co-starring Frank Langella and Anton Yelchin. After production wraps, she will go home for a couple of days before heading to Morocco to film *Rock the Kasbah*, a comedy with Kate Hudson and Bruce Willis. This month she returns to L.A. to shoot Season 4 of *New Girl*. In the middle of all this madness, Deschanel found time to record a new album (scheduled for a fall release) from She & Him, the indie folk duo she formed with songwriter-guitarist M. Ward in 2006. And she is already writing songs for their next album (she brought a guitar with her to Vancouver to work on tunes in her hotel room).

"Her work ethic is intense—there's nothing cute about it," says Ward. "When we're in the studio, there's very little time wasted."

Deschanel herself is matter-of-fact about her drive. "I don't know why, I just *love* to work. I love all my jobs—they provide rest from my other jobs," she says, shrugging. "The best way to make friends with me is to start a company with me." She's only half joking. In 2011, with her pals Molly McAleer and Sophia Rossi, she launched the hugely popular female-centric lifestyle site HelloGiggles, which delivers cheery posts about pop culture, love, and friendship and attracts some 2 million unique visitors a month.

It appears Deschanel has always been a creature of multiple pursuits. Growing up in L.A.'s Pacific Palisades, she would go from one project to the next in her bedroom, "drawing in one corner, writing or sewing in another," she says. Her father, Caleb, a cinematographer, and mother, Mary Jo, an actress, had always allowed her and her sister (actress Emily Deschanel) to have lessons in whatever they wanted. "I was lucky enough to have parents who were really, really supportive in terms of creativity. We only went clothes shopping twice a year, but every day of the week I had something else I was learning to do." She took piano lessons and sewing classes and made her own clothes, which means her partnership with Hilfiger was not your usual "slap an actress's name on a product" kind of celebrity endorsement. She was involved in every detail of the design process for the better part of 2013. The result is a range of nautical-inspired dresses as refreshingly unique and thoughtful as she is. (Those eye-catching numbers Jess wore for the cruise episode on *New Girl's* season finale? All were from the collection.) "There is an audience for more modest clothes," she says. "I *hate* that fashion could be something that excludes people."

Deschanel is only too familiar with style snobbishness. "I remember I was wearing a cute jacket, and I saw this well-known actress—who will remain nameless—with

WHAT WOULD ZOOEY DO?

Some of the men in her life (all friends and collaborators) imagine an alternative profession.



JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT

"A professor. She knows so much about movies, especially older ones. I would definitely take her film-history class."



JAKE JOHNSON

"A rock star. Zooey's a great singer and has a fantastic voice."



M. WARD

"A dog whisperer or pet psychiatrist. She loves animals of all kinds."

her stylist. They said, "Oh my god, that's so cute, where did you get it?" I told them, and it was not a fancy brand, and then they were like, "Oh...". I just thought, Do you not like it anymore because of the brand? That's so dumb. And you have just made yourself into a cartoon villain."

From the way Deschanel tells the story, it's clear she still feels like the artistic outsider, a role she says she played while growing up in Southern California. From kindergarten through 12th grade, Deschanel spent most of her school years at Crossroads in Santa Monica, the esteemed performing-arts prep school known for its famous alums (former students include Jack Black, Jonah Hill, Kate Hudson, and Gwyneth Paltrow). It sounds like an idyllic playground for budding creativity, but it was still high school, with some not-so-secure characters roaming the hallways. "Seventh grade was the ultimate low rock bottom—someone spitting in your face while you are on your way to your locker," Deschanel recalls, without any signs of resentment or anger. "Having to fight through those years makes you ready for the future," she says, almost wistfully. "I can snap back, I can make fun of myself before they do—I can do all of it. There's no way I can ever be as sensitive as I used to be, and it's sad to lose any sensitivity because it generally makes people very good at art."

It wasn't long before Deschanel had the opportunity to channel that newfound resolve. In the late '90s, while still at Crossroads, she landed a small part on the TV show *Veronica's Closet* but later decided to attend Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. It took less than a year before she got her big break—playing Patrick Fugit's older sister, a sardonic flight attendant, in *Almost Famous*—so she dropped out of school and moved back home. She went on to gain acclaim in indies like *The Good Girl* and *All the Real Girls* while rambling around L.A., performing in a now-defunct jazz cabaret act called "If All the Stars Were Pretty Babies" with actress Samantha Shelton. Poised to become the next indie-film queen, Deschanel made a conscious decision to create a persona. "I looked so different

"People will underestimate you. You're the only person who knows what you can do."

from movie to movie, people didn't realize I was the same person. Then they noticed," she says, referring to her distinctive long raven hair. "I do see the advantage of having something people can grab onto: 'Hey, I know who that is—she has bangs!'" Standout roles in hits like *Elf* and *(500) Days of Summer* soon followed.

But the bummer about branding, notes Deschanel, is that it can be hard for people to see you as anything else. For the *New Girl* actress the challenge seems to be proving her stature as a singer-songwriter, even though she has been making music just as long as she has been acting, and She & Him now have five albums under

HER HAPPY LIST

Even multitaskers like Deschanel need a break sometimes: The star reveals a few must-haves that make her smile.

THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF MELBOURNE

"I had the flu and watched a hard drive full of *Real Housewives of Melbourne*. All the women—as opposed to American women, who can be mean to themselves—are like, 'I'm beautiful!' all the time. I was like, 'Gosh, that's refreshing.'"



FACE OIL

"I put so much oil on my face, it's insane."



SEWING MACHINE

"I love making my own clothes, but it takes a lot of time. One of my best friends and I have sewing parties together. I tailored my prom dress!"



BATHS "I like taking time for myself—baths help me chill out. I consider myself an extrovert, but it's important to allow yourself to be alone and recharge."

their belt. With her slouchy posture and raspy voice, she gives off an almost indie-rock toughness, appearing less like an actress who sings and more like a musician who acts. "The thing that's funny about our society is that people love compartmentalizing," says Deschanel. "*Love. It.* You almost get mocked for wanting to do more than one thing."

As much as she is prepared to put herself out there creatively, Deschanel remains guarded about her private life. She will tell you only that she lives "in Hollywood," and when the conversation turns to dating, she offers up "no comment" in a polite, almost apologetic manner. (Deschanel filed for divorce from Death Cab for Cutie frontman Ben Gibbard in 2012 and has lately been spotted with *We Are Marshall* screenwriter Jamie Linden.)

"You have to be careful what you reveal," she says. "You invite people in and can't kick them out."

Fame, she observes, can make people weird. "I've seen a lot of people turn—sometimes it unlocks who they really are," she says. "They turn into celebrities who are separate from themselves. That's OK, but I just don't want to be like that."

By now it's late afternoon, and Deschanel has put away her shades. As we sit on the steps discussing the perils of being famous, she looks me straight in the eye with her huge blue eyes. "I *have* to be normal," she says in that wry delivery. "My mother wouldn't let me be any other way." ■