

Alessandra Balazs

She grew up in Paris, lives between New York and Los Angeles, goes on adventure holidays to Machu Picchu and Tanzania (chased by buffaloes and mambas). The golden and reckless life of the daughter of Katie Ford, heiress of the famous modelling agency, and André, owner of the coolest hotel chain on the planet. And the unstoppable penthouse «collector». She would like a future on the big screen but, as her father has taught her, the important thing is to «live life to the max».

By Lulu Berton
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Photos by Alberto Guglielmi for *Style*

With father André owner of the famous chain of international hotels, including the Standard in Los Angeles, the Mercer in New York and the Raleigh in Miami, the young Alessandra Balasz could give herself more airs and graces than Paris Hilton, yet it seems she prefers to keep life simple and to keep her privacy. Before accepting to do the interview, her specific request was not to answer questions about her father's relationships, the lady-killer who hit the headlines a few years when he was connected to Uma Thurman and, more recently, to the rocker Courtney Love. Alessandra welcomes *Style* into the master suite of Hotel Chateau Marmont on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles. It is one of the renowned hotels belonging to the family and dates back to 1929, with its decadent charm and layout identical to that of Château d'Amboise in the Loire Valley. It was restored in 1990 under architect Craig Ellwood, with nine cottages and four bungalows added to the 63 rooms already existing. The Chateau, favourite destination of the stars, made history as the place where John Belushi died from an overdose. It's where The Doors skidded down the hallways on motorbikes in the heady days of partying, and where Brad Pitt took



refuge in one of the villas, hidden in the large surrounding park, for six months after the break-up with Jennifer Aniston. Here it is quite easy to run into Hollywood stars such as Quentin Tarantino, Cameron Diaz and Sofia Coppola and, in the place where screenplays for *The Day of the Locust* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* were written, Coppola filmed her latest movie, Somewhere, where the protagonist, Johnny Marco, ordering two lap dancers, helps himself to the eccentric room service, has sex with other guests in the hotel and breaks an arm when falling in a state of drunken stupor. Alessandra, who knows the Chateau Marmont like the back of her hand, prefers to speak about her mother, Katie Ford, daughter of Eileen Ford (and founder of the famous American modelling agency), head of the family business for years before becoming the ambassador of the humanitarian organisation Free The Slaves, with spokespeople such as Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher. 20 year-old Alessandra moved from New York to Los Angeles a few years ago and enrolled at the University of Southern California where she is studying Acting.

When did you decide that you wanted to be an actress?
I think I always wanted it, even though I had to beg my parents to send me to drama school. In the end they gave in, but my professional career started when I found an agent at 17 years old.
What was your childhood like?
Absolutely the best. My parents are fantastic, they brought me to museums, wanted me to try various sports, and they always insisted on the importance of being curious and challenging yourself. I used to go horse riding for years, until I found out that I was more interested in men...
Are you with anyone at the moment?
(Pause). Best not to speak about it.
What moment with your parents do you remember?



It was on holiday in Tanzania. I went on safari with mum, dad and my sister. But it turned into a nightmare. A black mamba, the most poisonous African snake, slid into our jeep. While we were trying to get it out, we were blocked by a herd of elephants who were feeding their cubs and were in no mood to move out of the way. It seems surreal but it didn't end there: there was a furious buffalo that charged at us. We were terrified, when chimpanzees started bombarding us with poop. A film, something between a horror and a comedy. It finally seemed all over when we got back to our lodge. A hut above a huge sequoia. But as my dad entered it he stepped on a scorpion! I'll never forget that day. A really unforgettable holiday!
Where did you grow up?
In Paris until I was three, even if I see myself as a New Yorker through and through. I love walking around New York, with no particular place to go, breathing the air and capturing its incredible energy. I also like going to museums, like the MoMA or the Metropolitan. Now that I live in Los Angeles I enjoy the sun all year round, and I'm outside whenever possible, going for long walks at the Canyon.
Describe your father in three qualities...
Creative, adventurous and loving.
What lessons did you learn from mum and dad?
Mum taught me generosity and compassion,

while my dad taught me to live life to the max.
What is your relationship with André like?
Fantastic, we are like best friends. Dad is the perfect travelling partner, and I still remember our incredible and unforgettable holiday on Machu Picchu in Peru. His love for life and desire to discover the world are really contagious.
Your parents have been divorced for many years. How did it affect you?
It didn't at all; they have remained very close. When they separated their houses were just over a block away from each other so it was very easy for my sister and I to see both of them.
With your mum head of Ford Models, did you ever think about becoming a model?
I just tried once when I was little, it was a photo shoot for the brand Limited Too. I remember that it was summer, but when winter came around my desire to be a model vanished forever.
Do you like fashion?
Very much so. Above all because it transforms into art when it becomes self-expression. I like dressing up in high heels and designer suits but I love the simple look, jeans and T-shirts.
Which director would you like to work with?
Martin Scorsese because I think he has a unique talent. Taxi Driver, The Departed and Raging Bull are some of my favourite movies.
And which actresses are role models for you?
Christina Ricci, Rachel McAdams, Jodie Foster and Meryl Streep. They've got great charm and a vast repertoire.
What are the qualities that you look for in a man?
Ambition, kindness and honesty. A confident man with the will to experiment is very attractive.
What do you look for in a friend?
Loyalty. I've got a lot of male friends as I grew up with lots of male cousins, but having said that my little circle of close girl friends is extremely precious.