

erika christensen



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by Sylvia Karcz

Myne dress
Dana Rebecca earrings

photography by Chris Fortuna
stylist Sophia Coloma
styling assistant Hanni Fox
hair David Cox @ celestine agency
makeup Terri Apansewicz @ cloutier remix
location Siren Studios los angeles

Erika Christensen is very excited about her new cycling craze. With bike rides consistently averaging 40 miles or more, the 28-year-old actress is, literally, always in motion. Erika has been acting since her young teen years, crossing seamlessly from television to film productions both large and small, and in many ways, she has shown evidence of that same determined and explorative spirit from the very start.

While most audiences may recognize her face from impressive roles in movies such as *Swimfan*, *The Upside of Anger*, *The Perfect Score*, *Flightplan*, and most famously, *Traffic* – as Michael Douglas' troubled, drug-addicted daughter – Erika Christensen's career has been going strong for decades. The initial choice to pursue acting, she explains, was basically a "no-brainer" from the start.

"I had seen it not from the side of an audience member going, 'Wow, I want to do that,' although that happens to me all the time now. I had seen it from the side of being on stage," she says of her first intro to acting as part of an amateur performing group in Los Angeles. "Seeing people's faces in the audience and then feeling the rush that I got from being on stage and connecting with people and being creative – that's what really made me go, 'This is what I want to do.' And I want to keep doing it."

But to say that a natural aptitude for performance is the only driving force behind Miss Christensen's success would be to undermine the compassionate and all-around radiant young woman that shines regardless of whether the cameras are actually running. Raised in the LA area for the majority of her life, where she is currently starring as one of a handful of wonderfully complex characters in the acclaimed NBC series *Parenthood*, Erica emanates a certain self-assurance and audacity. It isn't surprising that she went after her passion at such a young age and has never looked back since. Acting seems to be in her blood.

"Essentially, what is really fun is a character that discovers something about themselves. A character who discovers that they're capable of a lot more strength than they ever knew, or a lot more violence, or a lot more love," Erika says about what attracts her to a role. "There's a real curiosity about the human condition. No matter how unglamorous or how inspiring, there's no reason to be alive except for people. We're all here together."

And that curiosity and genuine love of people is pervasive in her life. "I just love engaging in humankind," she says, when asked what she likes most about living in Los Angeles and New York. "I love being part of a crowd. I truly enjoy the physical sensation of being smashed together with everyone." That separates Erika as an actress. She is a young woman who is more interested in human discovery than in the spotlight, and one who prizes the challenges and rewards that the film industry presents not only on a personal scale, but on a much larger and complex social level as well.

"I don't want to be overly dramatic, but movies do kind of shape our views, and they can define the times," she continues. "And it's really obvious, for instance, when you're watching movies from the 1940s, how different the viewpoints were and how different we've all

become; how we've all evolved. It's somewhat of the chicken or the egg, but hopefully that's what movies do," Erika says about the powerful role of the media. "Most of the time, you see people in a movie go through something that's pretty rough, and they don't always have such a good time, but they come out the other side of it and it's pretty inspiring. Number one, hopefully you can find the humor in it, number two, hopefully you can learn from it, and number three, its okay, its part of life, and everyone has their own story. And that's great."

Matched with a pragmatic awareness and understanding of the current times and issues, Erika is also keen on noting that although she is no politician, she is an active citizen who is not weary of speaking her mind. "I know that even though I have strong feelings, I still have so much more to learn. I don't think things have been going well, and I do vote, because I know that's the rule – that you can't hate on what's happening if you didn't contribute," she says. "Philosophically, I'm a supporter of free market, and technically, that's what we have. But something even free-er would be effective in my mind's eye."

"I'm proud of the fact that there has been such major dialogue," she continues. "I think it's really cool that everyone's gotten so involved. There's been such an outcry, for instance, in Arizona [with the immigration law]. It's interesting because nearly everyone's first instinct is, that's ridiculous, and that's not okay. But the intention behind actions and the way that they are actually executed are not always aligned."

Erika is also not shy about relaying her frustrations with prescription drug abuse and, ultimately, the sadness she has about artists that have perished as a result of it. "It's so avoidable. That's what makes me angriest," she says. "I think there has to be real honesty coming from the side of the doctors that are prescribing them, and further beyond that, from the pharmaceutical companies on what kinds of side-effects are possible. It's just so ironic and counterproductive. It has to be personal and individual responsibility for your own self and your own health. Maybe some recognition that there are emotions that we all experience and that's okay. We're not supposed to be happy about everything. So if you go through something really rough and you're feeling really hurt by it and really temporarily destabilized, it's okay. And it's appropriate to experience emotions and not be happy-go-lucky all the time."

But as someone who has had her own share of challenges to face in life, Erika's resilient nature and contagious optimism are evidence that with the right spirit, the possibilities are truly limitless. "The challenge, besides literally healing, has been not allowing myself to use hardship as an excuse for anything," she says about overcoming the major obstacles that have come her way. "Because that's the real danger, besides physically being alright. I find that every so often, that idea still creeps into me. It's okay, because no one really knows what I'm up against. But that's not productive, because it doesn't matter. I don't know what other people are up against either."

And if this very no-excuses-type attitude and roster of work is any testament to what she is capable of, Erika Christensen is bound to keep riding along, full force.