

# style.



BEAU GREALY

**NEW CHAPTER**  
Actor Phoebe Tonkin has entered her thirties feeling excited, ambitious and at home in New York.

Neuw Denim cotton jacket, \$199.95; neuwdenim.com. Chanel leather pants, \$16,040, metal and crystal earrings, \$880, white-gold and diamond bracelet, \$15,300, yellow-gold bracelet, \$10,050, and leather boots, \$2,200; 1300 242 635





Chanel cashmere and alpaca sweater, \$4,040, cotton pants, approx \$8,820, white-gold and diamond earrings, \$7,500, white-gold, yellow-gold and diamond ear cuff, \$9,000, and beige-gold necklace, \$4,050; 1300 242 635. OPPOSITE: Chanel wool jacket, \$8,420, and yellow-gold bracelet, \$10,050; 1300 242 635

# PHOEBE,



# REDIRECTED

Gone is the teen drama star who has enraptured us since the age of 16. In her place: a newly confident actor-turned-director, fashion icon and eco activist who has started her thirties with daring new personal and career ambitions

by **RACHEL SHARP** photographed by **BEAU GREALY** styled by **LUCY WOOD**



Chanel wool dress, approx \$13,610, white-gold and diamond earrings, \$7,500, yellow-gold bracelet, \$10,050, and beige-gold ring, \$4,850; 1300 242



“The people I have around me are all really solid, truthful, wonderful, smart women”





Bonds cotton tank, \$17.95; bonds.com.au. Chanel leather pants, \$11,820, and white-gold and diamond earrings, \$7,500; 1300 242 635

## It's Tuesday night in Chinatown, the hustle-bustling Lower Manhattan enclave sandwiched between trendy Tribeca and the bar-filled Lower East Side.

Here, ensconced in her new apartment, in her new city, newly 30-year-old Phoebe Tonkin, the girl with the anime eyes, is embarking on a new life of sorts.

It also happens to be where she's stretched out talking to me for this interview. "I've always loved New York and wanted to live here," she explains of quitting actors' mecca Los Angeles after eight years. "I guess I'm more of a city girl." Coinciding with the July 12 birthday that heralded her fourth decade of life, Tonkin's choice of habitation means more than just a new postcode. In California, she lived with close friend and fellow Australian actor Bella Heathcote. In Manhattan, however, she lives alone in a typically compact but lovely apartment she intends to transform into a makeshift movie-editing suite throughout August. "There's a lot of change, but it's good change," says Tonkin of her chic new digs, personal situation and career tangent.

In what's probably her most daring professional move to date the (let's be honest) really, really beautiful actor who famously began her career at age 16 on children's television series *H2O: Just Add Water* has switched sides of the camera. Inspired partly by Mark Webber, the American actor-director husband of her best friend and fellow actor Teresa Palmer, and backed by impeccably connected Australian publicist-turned-film producer Jessica Carrera, Tonkin wrote and directed her first movie earlier this year, a short film titled *Furlough* starring Ryan Corr alongside rising stars Milly Alcock and Markella Kavenagh. "I'd gone through a break-up last year and I wanted to branch out and explore other things, and [*Furlough*] felt like the perfect opportunity to do that," she says of the low-budget labour of love that's still in post-production. For now, she's keeping her maiden script's summary close to her chest ("It's tricky to talk about without revealing too much"), but Tonkin is happy to confirm the directorial bug has bitten hard. "Mark is such a big inspiration for me," she notes of Webber, who recently finished his fifth film, *The Place of No Words*, in which

Tonkin cameos. "He really is just an artist who just wants to create and make films. I think the two of them [Webber and wife of five years, Palmer] just sit around talking about films and thinking of ideas for future films. They're a real powerhouse."

The love and admiration clearly runs in the other direction, too. On Tonkin's 30th birthday, Palmer took to Instagram

with a candid snap of them together, the caption below reading, "Happy birthday sissy and godmother to my children," followed by heartfelt prose on what her three boys (including step-son Isaac) loved most about "Auntie Phoebe". Equally close confidante Lara Worthington's birthday Insta post accompanied a picture of the swimsuit-clad pair aboard a boat in Capri. "Happy day of birth my beautiful friend," the model and beauty entrepreneur wrote. "Both my family and I couldn't live without you! Most selfless human I know. We love you, especially Rocket and Racer."

Phoebe laughs when I note this very public outpouring of love from her friends, which also included Heathcote and American actor Britt Robertson, via such a modern, digital method. Famously tight as the young Aussie acting collective in Hollywood may be, Tonkin has chosen her closest carefully. "I hope that I'm a pretty good judge of character, so I definitely surround myself with similar-minded [people] with similar morals."

It was just before daybreak across Paris back in 2017 that a terribly jet-lagged Tonkin took the work phone call that changed everything. After almost five years of increasing fame on successful *The Vampire Diaries* spin-off series *The Originals*, she'd landed a grittier, homegrown role on four-part SBS series *Safe Harbour*, a psychological thriller about friends on a sailing holiday who encounter a boat overloaded with asylum seekers. So desperate was Tonkin for the part, she wrote a letter to director Glendyn Ivin professing her admiration for the storyline and its social undertones. It was the closest she's ever come to begging for a role, and it worked. Ivin went on to win a Best Direction ACTAA Award for the series. Tonkin would never view her profession and its potential the same way again.

"[*Safe Harbour*] really changed my mental trajectory [around] filmmaking and [idea of] what being part of an incredible project was," Tonkin reveals. "Working with



Chanel cashmere cardigan, \$11,820, white-gold and diamond earrings, \$7,500, and leather and grosgrain heels, \$1,150; 1300 242 635. Levi's cotton shirt, \$79.95; levis.com.au. Ambra nylon and elastane briefs, \$10; at myer.com.au





Glendyn was such a life-changing experience for me. It just opened up so many different ideas of what this industry can be. It shifted everything for me.”

Her follow-up move was another Australian original production: *Bloom*. The critically acclaimed six-part series—which also starred Bryan Brown, Jacki Weaver and Ryan Corr (whom Tonkin later tapped for *Furlough*) and aired on streaming service Stan—has just been confirmed for a second season. Tonkin’s thrilled she’ll be back to shoot round two in October, but especially pleased she’ll be home for the Aussie summer.

The only matter Tonkin won’t be drawn on during our lengthy conversation is a Reddit-based rumour she’ll appear in season three of sci-fi TV series *Westworld*.

On Instagram however, she’s not so tight-lipped on other subjects. Slotted between the well-heeled event photos and behind-the-scenes selfies are thoughtful posts spruiking social, environmental and even governmental change. Earlier this year she was persuaded by close friend and fellow actor Carson Meyer to lobby California’s congress after the pair met at a charity dinner hosted by Chanel for the US Natural Resources Defense Council. “I kind of assumed very ignorantly that I’d be making posters and standing outside protesting but, no...when you lobby, you need to go home and learn pages and pages of specific statistics and facts, then go into a room and sit opposite congressmen and women and really try to convince them to sign new bills.” The result? Their campaign to have neurotoxic pesticide chlorpyrifos banned in California worked.

What makes Tonkin so fascinating—and different to the legion of beautiful and talented actors also kicking goals in the US—is her ability to effortlessly mesh that social- and eco-change spirit with old-world Hollywood starlet glamour. At the 2017/18 Chanel Métiers d’Art collection runway show in Hamburg, she looked breathtakingly regal in a midi-length black Chanel tea dress and stilettos; her poise and style credentials saw her steal the red-carpet limelight from dozens of fashion A-listers.

Even her off-duty look is delightfully polished. “My default style? A good pair of jeans, nice shirt, ballet flats and a little Chanel bag,” she told me several years ago when she was guest of honour at the Portsea Polo in the outer south-east of Melbourne. It’s a signature look that hasn’t changed much since then. It’s little wonder Chanel has embraced her as an ambassador for the past two years.

Our conversation drifts naturally to the subject of iconic designer Karl Lagerfeld’s recent passing and his long-time colleague Virginie Viard who stepped into the house’s most coveted creative role. “I met Virginie at a party last week when I was in Paris,” she says, noting her trip to see the Chanel Haute Couture autumn-winter 2019 show, the designer’s first solo collection. “She’s just so beautiful, humble and obviously so talented. I think Chanel represents really strong, empowered, elegant, educated women, and her collection reflected that beautifully.”

So, away from the film sets and glamorous runway front rows, how does an Australian expat in the Big Apple with more than five million followers on social media celebrate her milestone 30th? “I flew from the Chanel event in Paris on my actual birthday and then all my best friends [apart from Teresa] were there in New York when I landed.” That birthday crew included Heathcote, Robertson, Shelley Hennig and Australian stylist-turned-Matteau designer Ilona Hamer, whose runway show

Tonkin recently opened at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Australia. “We walked around and went vintage shopping in the Lower East Side that day. Then on Saturday we went to Ilona’s office and had a rooftop party, which was amazing.”

Unlike many who work in a profession that appears to favour youth, Tonkin sees the big 3-0 as a milestone but not a millstone. This is one elegant woman who’s legitimately excited. “Everything has sort of fallen into place...I just feel more confident [now] in myself and in my passions.”

As for where she’d like to be when she enters her forties, Tonkin is non-specific with details but crystal clear on the big picture. “I’d love to work with the directors I want to work with and have...a balance between being creative, travelling and eventually having kids and a family. That’s honestly the goal. For now, though, it feels kind of momentous to be turning 30 and to be in a new city. [I’m] really just excited to begin a new chapter in my life.” ■

“Everything has fallen into place. I feel confident now in myself and my passions”



Chanel wool jacket, \$8,420; pants, \$5,490; yellow-gold bracelet, \$10,050, and leather and grosgrain heels, \$1,150; 1300 242 635

**Hair:** Sascha Breuer  
**Make-up:** Kara Yoshimoto Bua using Chanel  
**Manicure:** Nettie Davis