



An

BY JIM COLUCCI

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AMER

Age-defying television personality Mary Hart has been covering Hollywood as part of *Entertainment Tonight* for almost three decades. She offers *Watch!* her insider perspective, and the final word on the industry pressures to look "forever young."

IO CAN Beauty

Coral one-shoulder gown (\$650) by Rickie Freeman for Teri Jon, Saks Fifth Avenue (saks.com). Miss Dior patent platform pump (\$590) by Christian Dior (dior.com). More is More diamond bracelet (\$33,000), Ambrosia Town & Country bracelet (\$3,600), Capri two-tone stone long drop earring (\$9,900) and large Monaco ring (\$3,600) by Judith Ripka 18K Couture Collection (judithripka.com).



Blush crepe satin one-shoulder gown (\$6,160) by Douglas Hannant, Richard's, Greenwich, Conn. (douglasshannant.com). Black satin and white leather wooden platform sandal with Swarovski crystal heel (\$1,195) by Giuseppe Zanotti Design, Giuseppe Zanotti Design Boutique, New York, 212-650-0455, (giuseppe-zanotti-design.com). Signature "Starr Burst" black and white diamond earring and bracelet, Onyx and diamond bracelet (prices upon request, Black, Starr & Frost, blackstarrandfrost.com).

In the summer of 1982, broadcast television consisted of only three networks. The VCR was still considered a luxury. And Mary Hart was the brand-new anchor of a fledgling evening show called *Entertainment Tonight*.

Hart, who had come to Hollywood after stints on local shows in Iowa and Oklahoma, and as the co-host of Regis Philbin's first, failed daytime talk show, soon caught the eye of *ET*'s producers. In the 27 years since, the former Miss South Dakota has become one of the most recognized personalities in the world of entertainment broadcast journalism. She has been inducted into Broadcasting & Cable's Hall of Fame, and honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She's become well-known for her fundraising on behalf of the Children's Miracle Network, and is currently the leadership chair of the New Hospital Campaign at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. Even Hart's shapely legs once took on a notoriety of their own, when they were insured for \$1 million by the British firm Lloyd's of London. ("That was a long time ago," jokes the seemingly ageless Hart, modestly.)

As showbiz continues to change, Hart remains a constant, a steady and driving force behind the scenes at *ET* and a familiar face in our living rooms. Now, at the Four Seasons hotel in Westlake Village, Calif., we turn the cameras on the longtime anchor, scoring some industry dish and an insider look at one of TV's powerhouse programs.

Watch!: *ET is famous for its coverage of the big awards shows. What has it been like covering the Oscars, Emmys and Grammys for so many years?*

For many years, we had one-on-one rooms at the Academy Awards where we could talk to someone in depth and with a personal touch. However, the Academy did away with those rooms a number of years ago. That has been a great disappointment, because it's so exciting to hear from the stars right after taking that Academy Award into their hands. We still have that at the Emmys and Golden Globes, where I also have a great big platform for the arrivals—the first one as people get out of their limousines. So in a way those two shows are much more fun for me, because I talk to the stars as they arrive, and I talk to them after they win. At the Oscars, it's just not the same. There are literally thousands of reporters, including *ET*'s, from all around the world, and it's just a huge chaotic scene. But you know what, it's still fun. Because as gorgeous and glamorous as everybody is for the other awards

shows, there's an extra edge to the way people look at the Oscars, where the diamonds are twice as big.

W!: *Can you reveal some of the interview tricks you've learned to get celebs to open up?*

First of all, having done the homework, seeing the film or reading the book. You can't fake that. And I never sit down with a list of questions. It's more about being spontaneous, about listening to the answer and asking a related follow-up. Certainly there are major points I'll have in mind that I want to cover. But sometimes I don't get to them because something else is much more interesting.

W!: *What happens when an interviewee has some tricky scandal going on, something where you know it's going to be a really sensitive topic?*

First of all, I acknowledge it. I say, "I know this has been a terribly difficult year. And I really just would like you to know that we're thinking about you. Would like you to share some of your feelings about it?" I think that you have to ask the tough questions, but you can do it in a nice way, so the people don't feel like they're under attack. The stars who are experienced and comfortable with themselves, who know the business and are cool about it, will know how they want to answer. It's the ones who say "Don't ask this, don't ask that" who have always made me chuckle, because there's always a gracious way to not answer a question.

W!: *What has changed about celebrity journalism since the start of ET?*

We were the first ones on the block, and for many years, it was our territory and only ours. I was reminiscing a bit the other day with one of our staffers who has been here for 20 years about how it used to feel like family. We often did shoots at home with the stars. We would photograph them with their kids, and it was all very comfortable. Today, out of necessity because there are so many outlets, you rarely see at-home interviews. Instead, there's a junket in an innocuous hotel room, and everybody gets their 10 minutes with each actor—or less. It's a factory. But we still do get them somewhere exclusive. Last year, when the latest *Indiana Jones* was about to premiere, I went to Malibu with Harrison Ford. He showed up alone on his motorcycle, we sat at this great Malibu bar and we did the interview. It's not easy to do that anymore, but fortunately because we're still No. 1, we get those exclusives. But we have to fight so much harder.





Marbled green print silk one-shoulder "Katherine" dress (\$3,105) by Vassilisa, 25Park.com (888-525-7275, vassilisa.co.uk). Tan leather "Atlas" peep-toe platform sling with metal etched heel (\$1,095) by Christian Louboutin (Christian Louboutin Beverly Hills, 310-247-9300 and NYC-Horatio, 212-255-1910, christianlouboutin.com). Cream and gold "Daphne" hat (\$575) by Eric Javits (ericjavits.com). Orange "Lugano" Italian leather suitcase (\$1,800) by J. Crew (jcrew.com). Triple-strand pavé ball necklace (\$350,000), wide multi-cabochon cuff (\$45,000), estate wide cuff (\$19,000), gothic estate large marquis drop earring (\$8,600) and Monaco ring (\$9,900), all by Judith Ripka 18K Couture Collection (judithripka.com).

W!: *Are celebrities also more guarded these days, because there are so many more ways their every move can be reported?*

Definitely. Today you can see any faux pas on YouTube a million times. There has been a trend toward even more personal knowledge of the stars, more up-close and in your face. Certainly the increase in the paparazzi's hunger for photos has made many situations downright dangerous. Sometimes I look at these stars and I don't know how they even cope. That's why at *ET*, we've always tried to maintain the highest ground. We fight hard to preserve the class of the show.

W!: *Through all your years at ET, what interview was your toughest "get"?*

The toughest star to get at home was always Elizabeth Taylor—getting to go to her house and sit in her living room for a couple of hours, with all the famous art, the jewelry and the photos and personal memories was a huge coup. That's what I love, Old Hollywood, because these are the stars I grew up with. When I was the first person to talk to Kirk Douglas after he had his severe stroke, at home with his wife, Anne, I was moved to tears. Kirk was so brave. He actually speaks much better today, but it was tough for him, and so courageous.

W!: *Was that your most emotional interview?*

Yes, that and Richard Pryor, when he was suffering with multiple sclerosis. He had been a horrible interview when I first met him in the '70s, when I was doing a talk show in Oklahoma. In the 1990s [when he was] deteriorating rapidly, I went to his house. We talked about how things had changed, what a different person he was. He got emotional apologizing to me for being such a jerk when we first met. He was extremely candid, and I was so impressed. I went from disliking him intensely to really caring for him. I went back for a whole series of interviews right up until a few months before he died. I brought e-mails and letters from fans, and we sat there and we wept together. Those are the really special moments that I think are unique to me and to *Entertainment Tonight*.

W!: *Now thanks to ET's long run, things like that are saved for posterity.*

The unfortunate thing is, there have been so many wonderful interviews where we could have let it run for 45 minutes straight. In the format of the show, which moves so quickly every night, we have time for only two or three minutes at the max. Now we may carry it over for a few nights, and sometimes we can let those pieces run six

to seven minutes on the weekend show, but I've always just cringed because I know how much more is in an interview that we don't end up airing. The saving grace is we have the best vault in show business. It's terrific. When a new film comes out, we can say, "We knew Tom Hanks way back when," "We knew Madonna before anybody had ever heard of her."

W!: *Any confrontational interviews that stand out?*

The one glaring memory for me is Jane Wyman, when she was doing *Falcon Crest*. Here I was talking to this Old Hollywood star who had made it, had fought for her status as a movie star, and then a television star, and was as tough as nails. We'd had a wonderful conversation—and then I made the mistake of asking about [her ex-husband] Ronald Reagan, and every bit of oxygen was sucked out of the room. She just glared at me. Apparently it was a known commandment that you *never* ask Jane Wyman about Ronald Reagan. People just didn't do it, and everybody knew but me.

W!: *Over ET's nearly three decades on the air, what has been the biggest challenge in keeping up with the times?*

The Internet. It's 24/7, and so we're constantly updating, making sure things are correct, trying not to expend energy on chasing untrue stories. Although you'd think after all these years it would be a snap to do the show, it's actually more demanding than ever. But it's also more exciting. For example, about five years ago, each of us on camera got voiceover recording capability at home. For many years, we would send the show off on the satellite at around 12:30 or 1 in the afternoon, and that would be it. Now, we have the capability of updating the show, from home, on a very late basis—even if it's just for the West Coast. If there are new facts coming in or somebody passes away, we can change the show here as late as 4 or 4:30. We really do take pride in being on the forefront of technology, with our graphics, our music and the whole presentation of the show, which we update every couple of years. And when we went HD in September, it was a huge deal. Our set is always so high-tech and razzle-dazzle, and we're really proud of it.

W!: *Speaking of updating the look of things, do you ever see the old shows and cringe at the styles? At what either you or the stars are wearing?*

I have naturally curly hair, and so when I look back at the '80s, with my big frizzy hair and shoulder pads bigger than pro football players had, it's an absolute crack-up. And some of those geometric prints. You look back and go, "What was I thinking?!"

W!: *Are journalists prone to the pressures that actresses are, to look forever young and beautiful?*

Not as much, but certainly, it's important when you're on camera to look as good as you can. We all feel that pressure. For me, it is not chasing the eternal fountain of youth, but instead about trying not to get paranoid when you're constantly surrounded by these beautiful women from the big screen and the small screen. It's all about having a down-to-earth perspective. They are who they are, and I am who I am. But do I want to be proud of myself and look the best I can? Absolutely.

W!: *As they say, there's always a new crop of 22-year-old girls arriving in Hollywood every day.*

Yeah, and you know what? They all want my job. But that's OK. I take pride in the fact that I've been here for 27 years, doing the same job, working with so many of the same people. That contributes to why we're still No. 1. When you have long-standing relationships, it builds on the trust. So when we say we want to be first on the set of *Angels & Demons*, we get that privilege because we've known Ron Howard since almost the time he was Richie Cunningham. It means a lot to people.

W!: *And after all those years, you also have that same long relationship with viewers. But what don't we know about Mary Hart?*

That I listen to news incessantly, whether on radio or on television. That I'm really an outdoors person, in my boots and jeans, hiking a trail in Montana or skiing or windsurfing. I'm more comfortable in that casual mode than I am even dressing up for Hollywood, which I do five days a week.

W!: *Do fans and viewers approach you like they know you? What do they say when they meet you?*

It is the nicest possible response. And it's usually, "You're in my home every night, and I feel like you're part of the family." I was skiing this past winter in Montana, and I had a gentleman come up to me at lunchtime and say, "Mary, thank you for all of the years that you have always had a smile on your face. We love the show, and we love you." It was just that simple: thank you. 🍷

Photo Editor: Meagan McLaughlin • **Producer:** Chris Ross

Photo Assistants: James Acomb (1st), Michael Pool (2nd)

Digital Technician: Nelson Machin

Styling Assistants: Nanci Grasso, Mytsy Liaw

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Location: Four Seasons, Westlake Village, Calif.