

COOL AS ICE

Truth-seeker Diane Kruger, star of *The Host*, taps into the fiery passion beneath the impenetrable surface of her characters.

| By Andrew Myers | Photography by Yu Tsai for Contour by Getty |
| Styling by Martina Nilsson |
| Shot on location at Sunset Marquis Hotel, West Hollywood |

Black calf leather top with whipstitch detail, \$2,300, at Salvatore Ferragamo, Beverly Hills. Bracelet (on bottom), \$2,540, at Chanel, Beverly Hills. Low sandals in leather with brass ornaments and plexiglass heels, \$1,700, and pants, price upon request, both by Paco Rabanne. Sandals at Just One Eye. Pants at pacorabanne.com. Gold stud bangle and necklace, both priced upon request, by Glyneth B by special order at glynethb.com. Vintage Chanel necklaces at Resurrection.



Classic beauty, as illustrated by Hollywood golden goddesses Grace Kelly and Veronica Lake, is a rare quality often accompanied by an impervious façade and an almost annoying equanimity. At first glance, Diane Kruger appears to be a member of this elite category thanks to her famed Valkyrie veneer: Marlene Dietrich-high cheekbones, skin pearlescent as snow and a fleece of icy blond tresses. That's until you tap into the fiery passion bubbling just beneath the surface.

It's a winning juxtaposition that fueled the 36-year-old actress from her childhood in a conservative northern German village to an in-front-of-the-camera adolescence modeling in Paris and becoming a muse to Karl Lagerfeld. Now, as an adult, she's become an elegant Cineplex fixture in roles such as the mythic Helen of Troy (*Troy*, 2004), the glorious German film star-cum-Allied spy Bridget von Hammersmark (*Inglourious Basterds*, 2009), and the much-maligned Marie Antoinette (*Farewell, My Queen*, 2012). This month, Kruger—who proudly defines herself as a sci-fi geek (“I’m a *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* person”), makes her debut as an alien. She plays The Seeker, a complex, complicated villainess in Stephenie Meyer’s *The Host*, starring alongside Saoirse Ronan, Jake Abel, Max Irons and William Hurt. She even sounds like a fangirl when discussing her role. “But really, is she a villain or not? That’s the question,” says Kruger, choosing her words carefully as she’s forbidden to speak about the film in detail. “I mean, even the other aliens find her strange.” Cue fan forums and heated hashtag wars.

That sense of otherness is something Kruger understands. Born in Algermissen, Germany—a village so small it didn’t even have a *Kneipe* (bar)—she was part of an increasingly unhappy family. At age 13, together with her loving mother and younger brother, Kruger fled from her alcoholic father and their home in the middle of the night. “I was an introverted, angry child,” she says.

Her pivotal escape became classical ballet, which she started at age 2, when most toddlers are still toppling over. Did her mother recognize her tutu-worthy talent? “Hardly! She needed a nanny, some childcare, but we could never have afforded it,” Kruger laughs. “My brother went to karate, but that didn’t stick at all.” Dance, however, unstuck Kruger.

“When I was 6 or 7 I learned that through ballet and its physical demands, I could express emotion and be rewarded for it,” she says. “It was unconscious, but I felt free and valued.”

It also began an exploration of the arts that enriched Kruger’s later film performances. “There was live music in class, a piano player, and I really started to appreciate classical music, to feel it, to want to express it—and from that I played the clarinet,” explains Kruger, who later used her musical education when she became an actress. She prepared to play a Danish soprano in 2005’s *Joyeux Noël* by studying opera for three months and learned how to conduct an orchestra for 2006’s *Copying Beethoven*.

As a child, dance remained her first love. Kruger reckons that by 8 or 9 she was enrolled in summer sessions at London’s Royal Ballet, while studying the rest of the year at her local school. “It’s often written that I’m very disciplined, but that discipline comes from passion,” says Kruger. “I didn’t understand that at first, but as I got older I did.”

That discipline softened a watershed moment for Kruger—what she calls both a blessing in disguise and her first step into adulthood. “By 11, I realized I didn’t have the talent to be a prima ballerina; I was getting curvier, and it was getting harder for me to keep up with the other girls, no matter how hard I worked,” she says. “That’s a pretty sucky thing to find out.” It was a realization that only became more pronounced until, at age 13, Kruger sustained a knee injury that definitively prevented her from a professional career filled with pliés.

Unhappily back in Algermissen and in search of a creative outlet, she poured her energies into ballroom dancing. Neither foxtrot nor mambo lifted the gloom. “It was a very dark time,” she says. Fortunately, she also tried something else. “I started some modeling, and won the Elite Look of the Year in Germany,” says Kruger. And although she didn’t win the international competition held in New York, she did get a nod from an Elite scout who directed her to the City of Light. “‘Come to Paris, we’ll see,’ is what she said,” Kruger remembers.

Promising *Mutter* she would behave—and I did!—Kruger arrived in Paris at age 15. Within three years, she was singled out by Lagerfeld (to this day, Kruger remains a Chanel loyalist). She had booked so much work on both sides

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Chalk blouse with slash detail, \$1,890, and black patent leather skirt, \$1,990, both at Tom Ford, Beverly Hills. Silk satin shoes, price upon request, at Prada, Beverly Hills. Gold stud choker, price upon request, by Glynneth B by special order at glynnethb.com. Vintage belt and necklace.



MANICURE: CHRISTINA AVILES AT OPUS BEAUTY USING NARS | PHOTO ASSISTANTS: YONI GOLDBERG, WILDER MARROQUIN AND TREVER SWEARINGEN | DIGITAL TECH: WELLY LO | PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: DANYA MORRISON | STYLING ASSISTANT: HAYLEY CHAPLIN

Lamb leather minidress, \$2,325, by Dsquared2. Similar styles available at dsquared2.com. Earrings, price upon request, by Glynneth B by special order at glynnethb.com. Thigh-high stretch leather sandals with plexiglass heels by Paco Rabanne.

Hair by Mark Townsend for Dove Hair Care at starworksartists.com
Makeup by Angela Levin for Chanel

of the pond that she also took an apartment in New York and worked for a portfolio of clients that included Saint Laurent, Armani, Dior and Vuitton. “Before then I had never been called pretty, it was huge to be financially independent, and I loved the travel,” she says.

Nevertheless, by 23—bored with the repetition and missing the vital self-expression she’d had in ballet—Kruger quit posing and enrolled in Paris’ prestigious acting school, Cours Florent. “I really didn’t have anything to lose; I had savings and gave myself one year,” she says. Faced with an improv assignment on her first day, she quickly overcame her stage fright. “I had the same feeling as in ballet,” says Kruger, who likens the next two years to an idyllic collegiate experience—friends, learning, some foolery—combined with her familiar sense of discipline.

Rather than returning for the school’s final third year, she went to work. *The Piano Player*, a TV-movie shot in South Africa and aired in 2002, was Kruger’s professional debut. She worked alongside Christopher Lambert and Dennis Hopper, and from the latter she learned basics like, “If you can’t see the camera, the camera can’t see you,” and advice on technique. “‘Pace yourself, don’t blow everything on the first take,’ he’d say to me.”

Kruger worked steadily in the early aughts and married major French actor-director Guillaume Canet, sometimes called the Leonardo DiCaprio of France, in 2001. He directed Kruger in her first significant movie role in *Mon Idole*. Then came the trifecta of films in 2004. *Wicker Park* was Kruger’s debut in a major American film. “I had no agent in the U.S., so my French agent said to put myself on tape and send it, which I did.” Next came the epic *Troy*; and the action-adventure flick *National Treasure* followed. “*Troy* premiered at Cannes; all of a sudden everybody knew my name,” she says.

When *Troy* did not meet creative or critical expectations—“It was not the success we thought it might be,” she says—Kruger returned to Europe. There she accepted smaller films, focused on her craft and waited to feel inspired. “There’s a lot of fear in Hollywood, which is the most different aspect from French cinema,” says Kruger, who split from Canet in 2006,

and later that year began her current relationship with actor Joshua Jackson, star of Fox’s *Fringe*, which after five seasons ended in January. “We’re packing up this weekend,” she says, referring to her and Jackson’s move from the actor’s native Vancouver—where the last three seasons of *Fringe* were shot—and back to their home in Los Angeles (the two also share an apartment in Paris).

While Kruger lost out on Steven Soderbergh’s *The Good German*—a project she’d diligently tracked with her choice role going directly to Cate Blanchett—she didn’t fret. Or at least not for long. “What’s especially frustrating is when a script comes along that you love, with a part you feel was written for you, and the director won’t even see you,” says Kruger, referring not to *The Good German* but to a role she wanted even more: Bridget von Hammersmark in Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds*. Ultimately, Tarantino required Kruger to fly to Germany. “Then,” Kruger says, “he made me wait two weeks before he called.” But call he did.

The film was a personal triumph for Kruger and brought a slew of accolades on both sides of the Atlantic, including a SAG nomination for best supporting actress. *Basterds* also demonstrated that although Kruger could play an icy siren, she could shed her preternatural poise and apparent perfection should a scene demand it. It’s an able willingness that stems from Kruger’s hard-learned and -earned trademarks—self-expression, discipline and passion—and it’s allowed her to work in a rich range of roles in European and U.S. films. In 2011’s *Forces Spéciales*, she plays an abducted journalist in Afghanistan opposite Djimon Hounsou. In that year’s *Unknown*, a psychological thriller also starring Liam Neeson and January Jones, she’s a cab driver. And now she’s immersed herself in the part of a creature from outer space.

“It was very strange to go from Versailles [for *Farewell, My Queen*] to Baton Rouge [where scenes from *The Host* were shot], from playing a historical figure to one with no reference, based only on the imagination where you can do anything,” she says. Still, judging from her track record, Kruger’s Seeker will hone in on its own truth. Passionately. **A**