



# Your Beauty Mark

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE  
TO ECCENTRIC GLAMOUR

Dita Von Teese

WITH ROSE APODACA

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The Ultimate Guide  
to Eccentric Glamour

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**DITA VON TEESE**  
WITH ROSE APODACA

  
DEY ST.  
LITERATURE  
AND ARTS PUBLISHERS



Albert Sanchez and Pedro Zalba

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# DEDICATION



Albert Sanchez and Pedro Zalba

For Misty Whiteaker and James Stone. The eccentric beauty of your individual spirits will live  

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on.

– *Dita*



Albert Sanchez and Pedro Zalba

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Dedication

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Marking the Spot

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**Imagine that: Dita, Aleister and I conjure beauty to live by.**

Albert Sanchez and Pedro Zalba

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# Preface

*Is she for real?*

I'm nearly always asked this when anyone learns I know Dita Von Teese. Sometimes it comes in a whisper, pregnant with snarky anticipation for something that will confirm their misconception. Other times, it's voiced at full volume across a dinner table, shushing fellow guests, eager to hear confidence revealed.

And nearly always, the initial response that pops to mind is the observation O. J. Berman (played by the great character actor Martin Balsam) conveys to leading man Paul Varjak (George Peppard) in the film version of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*:

*"She's a real phony. You know why? Because she honestly believes all this phony junk she believes in."*

Now, don't misunderstand me. I do not believe for a nanosecond that Dita is a phony by dictionary definition.

In *Breakfast*, when the Hollywood agent tells the lovesick Paul that Holly is a real phony because this once small-town girl *believes* in the crocodile-kitten-heeled life she's conjured in Manhattan. Holly Golightly, there is a wonderfully exhilarating truth to it. In this context, the "phony" is the drama of makeup, hair color, and wardrobe. It's the flair of speech and mannerism. And, of course, the adopted name—be it Holly Golightly or Dita Von Teese or that of her friends RuPaul or [Raja](#) [Catherine Baba](#). Or it can be insisting on a single name, like the hair guru featured prominently on these pages, Danilo, who prefers to drop the family-given Dixon altogether.

These individuals each had the courage and determination to cultivate the eccentric beauty within them, to hone it as art form and turn it into a career *and* a lifestyle. They have manifested who they truly imagined themselves to be. And there is nothing fake about that.

Besides, the gal who started life in a Michigan town before conquering the world as the queen of burlesque and a bona fide fashion icon is no Holly Golightly. She is neither naïve nor indecisive. She is no gold digger, having always made her way in this world through grit and grace. Nor is she a woman running from her past; her mother and sisters are every part of her showbiz family. And since I first met the pretty young go-go dancer, then known as Heather but already transforming into Dita about a quarter century ago, she has wowed the world and her friends with a relentless work ethic.



Dita is also candid about the kinds of topics most private, let alone public, figures wouldn't even imagine broaching. Yet she also has the good sense and style to know when to keep matters of her private life to herself. She is more real than any reality star.

As for other uncertainties that bring into question her "realness," allow me to set the record straight:

*Yes, she really lives the life.* Even her "casual" look at home means a pretty garden dress or lace slip à la Elizabeth Taylor in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The only time I have ever seen her in jeans in the last quarter century? You'll have to read about it in [The Experiment](#).

*As for brains, boy, has she got them.* You cannot reach the height of the neo-burlesque world and maintain that stature, keep a small army employed, and fashion a signature empire without a very good head on those porcelain shoulders.

*Yes, she did earn that skin and body.* Okay, so some of it is due to genetics (you should see her mother, Bonnie!). And she has always copped to whatever "work" she's undergone—she shares it all again in [chapter 19](#). Otherwise, the work is all perspiration and dedication. When I stayed with her in Paris, after an evening out dining on our favorite cockles and Champagne, she was off the next morning to a local Pilates session before I'd emptied my first cup of tea. She frequents ballet and other classes in cities she travels to the way most visitors do the local landmarks. Oh, she enjoys herself at the dinner table—with moderation and without failing to eat smartly the rest of the time.

*Yes, Dita does her own hair and makeup 99 percent of the time*—unlike 99 percent of the celebrities out there with their own beauty guidebooks. So she very much deserves to have her name on this one. In the majority of photographs featured in this book, Dita has done her own hair and makeup. And little or no retouching was done on the step-by-step photographs and a few of the glamour shots. As someone who at age thirteen started wearing a cat eye, swiping on red lipstick, and teasing my hair, I deeply appreciate that she brought me on board to collaborate, write, and creatively direct this book. I get her. And I get how real all this "phony" stuff is to those of us who bask in it.

*Yes, it was an experience.* While this book admittedly took longer than either of us imagined would, we weren't about to put her name on something that wasn't the best we could make it. That's integrity. And it's an experience I will forever cherish.

As for the other most-frequently-asked query, weighed down most of the time with some

skepticism: is she *really* nice?

Yep. Dita is no phony.

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—ROSE APODACA

*Los Angeles, 2015*



Scott Nathan

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## INTRODUCTION

### *Making Your Mark*



You've read and heard it all before:

Downplay the eye makeup if lips are bold and red.

Or play up the eyes and keep the lips nude.

*Nude?*

As nearly naked as you can catch me in the act onstage, I am not about to pucker up in a lip shade formulated to look *natural*. For me, it's a painted eye, a heavily penciled brow, and a swipe of crimson lipstick. Just as the true laws of nature intended.



Douglas Friedman

Rules? You're going to tell me Marilyn Monroe, Hedy Lamarr, and Rita Hayworth got it wrong?

In my book, they got it very right. Through the magic of beauty, including some tricks outright extreme for their time, these mere mortals transformed themselves from pretty to divine. The glamorous eccentrics remain powerful weapons of mass seduction worldwide more than a half century later, painted pouts and all. If that goes against the rules du jour, then in my book, it's all about breaking the rules!

From burlesque show to fashion runway, magazine cover to music video, I've undergone more strokes of red lipstick, bursts of hair spray, boxes of blue-black hair dye, and pats of powder in a month than most drag queens dream of in a lifetime.

For most, my claim to fame might center on my part in reviving the art of burlesque, epitomized in my hallmark swirl inside a towering martini glass, in barely more than a flash of Swarovski-covered pasties. For others, it's about my dedication to pinup style, from cat eye to seamed stockings—a commitment that has taken me to the red carpets of Cannes and Hollywood in spectacular couture gowns I'm very lucky to have had the chance to shimmy into, as well as onto the pages of *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* (and on the best-dressed lists, no less!).

Others might have heard of me as the headlining confection at an amfAR fund-raiser for AIDS research in São Paulo or for a fashion house gala on the Champs-Élysées. Or it might be the performances on stages in New Orleans and Moscow, Beijing and Berlin, and points in between and beyond. Then there are those still living under a rock who simply relegate me as that stripper once married to a rock star. Amusing as that is, darlings, no individual should be the sum of her mates in this life!

Every time I find myself before the spotlights, I pinch myself and have a kind of Dorothy-in-Oz moment, marveling how this girl from a small Midwestern town ended up in such an enchanted life.



Luca Teuchmann/WireImage via Getty Images



Scott Nathan





Penny Lane

I like to believe it's because I am a sucker for beauty. It's what gets me up with each sunrise and what gets me through countless leg lifts at the barre, and through the yank and pull of a corset within a fraction of an 18-inch waist.

Beauty is my art. It's my nourishment, my salvation.

It's what brings me joy. I live to surround myself with everyday things that are beautiful. I serve my home-baked petit fours on porcelain pedestals and sip tea from flowery teacups, charming gifts from my flea market treasure hunts. I keep cosmetic brushes in vintage vases cast like the heads of ladies, complete with glamorous dos and makeup. I always carry a pretty compact, maybe one I scored for next to nothing on eBay.

I would never be caught in a tatty robe or sweatpants . . . even by Aleister! (That would be my Devon Rex cat.) A sweeping satin dressing gown can be had for a meow on Etsy or other vintage sources, and it will put you in the mood for a big night . . . or morning.

Beauty, glamour, even luxury need not be determined by one's bank account. True luxury is using the silk robe or teacups every single day. I'll always take a secondhand party dress or a \$5 scarlet lipstick over the most coveted jeans (not that I'd ever be caught dead in jeans). A beautiful thing doesn't have to be new or even particularly valuable or precious, as long as it is a thing to behold.

To live a life beautiful is the ultimate *joie de vivre* in my *livre*!

While I have an art deco walnut buffet filled with silver spoons now (pretty ones I picked up at the antiques flea market), I didn't exactly come into the world with one between these ruby lips. West Branch is a small Midwestern farming town in Michigan named by lumberjacks, and it is where I grew up. It's a universe away from the colored klieg lights of Hollywood and Paris (just ask my fellow Michiganders Sherilyn Fenn and Madonna). But weekend afternoons, my mom and I had a front seat on a rocket ship to those faraway worlds by way of all the old movies starring the most glamorous creatures—Betty Grable, Mae West, Carmen Miranda, Marlene Dietrich . . .



Sweet Sixteen in 1988 in a prom dress my mom made.

Dita Von Teese Archives



They were our muses, at least in our imaginations. Glued to the set, watching those movies, I was determined to apply myself, one lash at a time. Before I'd hit my teens, before I even understood what it all fully entailed, I had the most perfect and prescient realization:

“Why, I could paint my way to glamour!”

Be it reality or reel life, when it comes to beauty and glamour, I'm an honor student. I studied images in yellowed books and magazines. I watch old movies and I watch old ladies. I absolutely love those grandes dames (and I do mean dames as in *Mame*), with their aquamarine eye shadow and coral lip cream, hair piled high on their heads and wrapped in a fine hair net nightly so as to keep those do's intact until their next weekly standing appointment at the hairdresser. That's commitment I can

appreciate. That was my great-aunt Opal. I've channeled her many a balmy summer night.

So, in the great American way, I reinvented myself from a freckle-faced strawberry blonde to what you see now. I taught myself to dye my own hair. I still wash that blond right out of my hair with nothing more than a \$ 10 box from the drugstore. I also taught myself to do the cat eyes, the rouged lips, the lacquered talons with shimmering half-moons, and the beauty spot like a punctuation mark.

Writers and other cultural observers, some not always with the purest hearts, have made much ado about my transformations of hair color, body, even the name I was born with—Heather Renée Sweet.

Seriously, I've nothing to hide. This is no illusion. To call it that is to say that all this is something false, make-believe, something of a betrayal. To live looking any other way would be a lie. This *is* me.

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**“Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else.”**

—*Judy, Garland*

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I experiment and I fail and try again and again until I get it right. What a sense of accomplishment and empowerment I experience each time I give my hair a final blast of spray and my lips a finishing swipe of red. It would certainly make my life easier if I could simply let someone else do the work. I am grateful for all the generous offers from fashion and beauty houses to send over a glam squad before I attend their runway shows and VIP dinners. But I politely decline.



**Celebrating life at full coupe at the Vienna Opera House.**

Arno Burgi

Doing it myself is a matter of integrity and pride. I look forward to stepping out into the world and honestly stating, “Yes, I did this.” I love the confidence it gives me. I would feel a fraud otherwise. Truth is, it takes less time for me to do it myself. It is also so much more fun! Why would I deny myself such pure pleasure?

Why would *you*? Dear reader, we're in this together. Finding and making your beauty mark about living as your authentic, empowered self. If this is what the world calls being an eccentric

beauty, so be it!

~~I celebrate these transformations as birthrights, as facets of my art and my love of life. As~~ Christian Dior once said, “Zest is the secret of all beauty. There is no beauty that is attractive without zest.”

Call it zest or joie de vivre, over the years I learned that to make my beauty mark on this life I had to learn to do it myself. All this art and artifice doesn't come by accident. Nor does paying lip service to it. Turning reverie into rite is about seeing the glass half full. Life is better when we look better. Making your beauty mark in this great black and blue world means taking matters into your own hands, be it a lip pencil or hairbrush, and doing it yourself: DIY.

Backstage before the curtain rises, or before the twinkling flashes of a gala's press corps, it's just me at my vanity table. There is no makeup artist, no hairstylist at my heels everywhere I go. I can be ready for the world in just under twenty minutes for a day off-camera; about sixty minutes for a full-blown red-carpet close-up. I relish the quiet time alone with just my brushes and powders.

While I nearly always insist on doing my own hair and makeup, I admit that I occasionally surrender to the able hands on a big photo shoot. These masters of makeup, hair, nails, and wardrobe are as integral to a photographer's vision as the lens and lighting. I don't claim to be an authority on everything. That is why friends who are respected experts will be weighing in throughout these pages. What I am is a lifelong student of glamour with an insatiable need to sharpen my knowledge.

Even the virtuosos among these experts freely admit it doesn't happen without hard work. It always takes a certain level of faith to reach where they are in their careers. They have faith in their craft, and like any other craft, artistry and skill come by doing.



**Make your beauty mark and the pieces will fall into place.**

Albert Sanchez and Pedro Zalba

As one who absolutely adores beauty, I've got the faith. Do you?

I am a bona fide evangelist when it comes to beauty. One of my inspirations as a beauty crusader was the great French milliner Lilly Daché, who summed it up superlatively:



*“I think I’ve been doing this all my life because to me glamour is more important than bread and meat. Perhaps this sounds foolish because as my old cook has pointed out you can’t live on glamour. Perhaps, not. But without glamour I would not want to live. Without it there would be no excitement in life. If I talk too much about the thing called glamour, I can’t help it. I’m an evangelist who preaches his creed to anyone who will listen and even to some who will not. I am perhaps what you call overboard on this subject. Not everybody gets it, not everyone wants it, and that’s what makes us even more powerful and glamorous.”*

Amen.

For me, the *joie* remains in the doing. Beauty takes practice. And you know what practice makes perfect. So often, a stranger or friend will admire my look, and, in the same breath, hopelessly follow up that she or he can’t possibly achieve such “perfection.” I am not perfect. Who is? What is perfection anyway, but *striving* to be the best you can be!



**At Christmas a lifetime ago, Jena and me.**

Dita Von Teese Archives

Strive for glamour! Glamour is enchantment, wonder. It is standing out from the crowd, by way of flourish, manners, charm. Glamour is a thing of beauty—but it’s not about being born beautiful. Glamour doesn’t belong to those naturally stunning, or to the rich or the young. Hollywood has no monopoly on glamour. Nor do women. I know many a glamorous man, with tailored style and beautiful manners.

Glamour is the creation of beauty and allure, and anyone can achieve it. So . . . glamorize!

Beauty is duty!

Everyone has a chance. I have two sisters, and let me tell you, without any carousing at the party, that when we were all young girls, I did not outshine them.

Throughout my life, I've certainly heard I am beautiful and not beautiful in equal measures. I wasn't someone who received much attention before I learned how to do all this—and that's a fact.

I say, enhance what others might deem less than wow and make that your beauty mark. There's certainly so much that is lovely in the natural world. I enjoy a sunset or forest as much as the next romantic. But the so-called natural look? Ugh. Give me an emerald-shadowed lid and blue-black hair any day.

What thrill in artifice! It's even one of my favorite words. I love artifice in all its manifestations, especially when lavishly and deftly rendered. I admire the engineering feat of an architectural spectacle such as la Tour Eiffel. I treasure standing before one of Edgar Degas's painted dancers, or studying the exquisite hand-beadwork of a couture gown by my friend Elie Saab. I have deep respect for craftsmanship, for the artistry not only imagined but come to life at the hands of a gifted individual. How fascinating are those who *make* themselves look beautiful, more so than those who pop out of the womb blessed with the features of a supermodel?



**Sisters Forever: Jena, Sarah, and me as adults.**

Dita Von Teese Archives

I appreciate the time and skill that goes into the art of beauty. I am simply mad for the before-and-after makeover moment in a magazine or on TV. Give me a makeover montage in a movie and I just perk up. A make-under? Not so. I remember watching *The Phil Donahue Show* after school as a girl, where guests would be coerced into updating their look. These poor women looked absolutely tortured as their poufy bouffants were deflated into something loose and “natural,” and their colorful face paint was wiped away for something more contemporary. The make-under stripped them of what made them feel beautiful, even glamorous, right on national television for those at home to gawk at and mock. They just wanted them to be happy with who they wanted to be.

Does it make us any less beautiful if we *create* the appearance of beauty versus someone who doesn't have to do a thing? Does it make it worth any less? Or is it a worthier form of beauty? Like my great-aunt Opal with her coral lipstick, the beauty icons I have looked up to most happen to be those who have to get up earlier, stay up later, and, in between, work harder than anyone else. To them, it's a game to master and enjoy!



Mariano Vivanco

Consider Grable, Lamarr, Hayworth, or Dietrich—even silent-film star Dita Parlo, who never got to shine in American cinema but was a legend in Germany and whom I honor in name. These sirens ruled the screens decades ago. So why even now do they continue to captivate us? It's not because they were born stunners. It was their charm! Their mystique! Their makeup and style! They all took extreme steps in their quests. Without the grand play at cosmetics and coiffures, most of these women would not have stood out among the pretty chorus girls. But work they did, to reinvent themselves. These are women who redefined the very notion of beauty!

As a child, watching their films on Saturday-afternoon television, I, too, recognized that I could transform, reinvent, and in doing so, live the life I always dreamed of living.

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**“Don’t talk to me about rules, dear. Where I stay, I make the goddamn rules.”**

—*Maria Callas*

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That is why I have always found the greatest inspiration and kinship in those brave shapeshifters, those famously infamous eccentrics, lauded and lambasted for breaking the rules of dress, of behavior, of beauty and glamour, who endure in our imaginations as constant sources of inspiration despite their unconventional looks. I'm guessing, dear reader, that you have, too, if you've read this far!

The roster is like a roll call of eccentrics of the last century: Isabella Blow, Rossy de Palma, Dian Parkinson, Vreeland, Margot Fonteyn, Kiki de Montparnasse, Elsa Schiaparelli, Marchesa Casati, Gala Dalí (whom I had the pleasure of portraying in a little art film called *The Death of Salvador Dalí*) . . .



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