

A photograph of Lucy Liu, a woman with short dark hair and red lipstick, wearing a black, one-shoulder, ruffled dress. She is sitting on a white stool, leaning forward with her right hand on her hip and her left hand resting on the stool. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# True COLORS

*A successful movie career almost didn't happen for LUCY LIU, as she fought against her parents' wishes and racial stereotypes. She talks to TIFFANY BAKKER about prejudice, taking on a man's role and her search for love*

*Photographs by MARIANO VIVANCO  
Styling by TRACY TAYLOR*

If it had been left to Lucy Liu's parents, she would never have become an actor. "They wanted me to have a nine-to-five job with a title," she explains. Luckily, someone else in her family was more supportive – and is the person Liu still credits with having the most influence on her career. "My brother, John, let me stay in his apartment. There was no kitchen, it was just a room, and I slept on the floor with him, while his roommate was on a bunk bed," she remembers. "He also paid off my credit card from college. Without him, I don't think I could have taken [acting] on."

Dressed down in pants and a T-shirt – Liu's mantra is: "If it's not comfortable, I don't want to wear it. I like pieces you can make downtown or uptown," – the actress surveys the natural grandeur of Central Park laid out before us from the window of a lavish penthouse suite high up at The Carlyle hotel in New York's Upper East Side and exhales, "Everything is so quiet up here," she says in awe. Growing up in the bustling New York borough of Queens, the

daughter of Chinese immigrants, she admits to being frustrated by her parents' initial lack of support. They were highly educated, forced to do menial jobs in their new country. Her parents struggled, she explains, and they didn't want the same for her. "After their struggle, they just really wanted to see me struggle in a different way, in a more obvious way, maybe something they could understand – she's at college struggling, but then she will be a banker or a doctor. They understood that."

In the flesh, Liu looks younger than her 44 years (something she attributes to "good Asian genes"). On screen she can be intimidating – known for her take-no-prisoners, straight-talking personas in roles such as Ling Woo in *Ally McBeal*, O-Ren Ishii in Quentin Tarantino's

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Previous page:  
Dress by Gucci.  
This page: Top by  
Maison Martin  
Margiela; skirt by  
Burberry Prorsum



Dress by Lanvin



*Kill Bill* and Alex Munday in the *Charlie's Angels* franchise. Off-screen she is worlds apart, in truth appearing somewhat vulnerable and even a little defensive, though it may just be shyness. "I'm not good with attention," she confirms.

**B**izarrely, Liu likes to refer to herself in the collective "we". Not as though she's talking about herself in the third person, rather that, between her agent, her manager and assistants, she sees her career as a group effort. She peppers conversation with "we try to do things that aren't specifically Asian roles", "we strive toward something that's not as obvious". It's a little odd (especially for an actor), but plays into how Liu likes to shift the attention away from herself. For despite her high-

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profile career, she has remained something of an enigma. There has never been the slightest sniff of scandal, her private life kept, well, private. (She says she doesn't do anything "interesting" in tabloid terms.)

Liu has been linked to various men over the years (most recently, in 2010, she was said to be dating billionaire financier Noam Gottesman), but currently her relationship status seems a little foggy, even to the actress. "It's a mixed bag right now," she laughs. "It's a giant question mark for me, as well. I wish I could answer – I wish I knew the answer myself!" In the past she has talked of wanting kids, but says: "It just hasn't happened yet," adding that she might do it alone at some point.

Liu is proud of her achievements, but admits she gets annoyed when people can't – or won't – think of her outside of that "action" box: "I wish people wouldn't just see me as the Asian girl who beats everyone up, or the Asian girl with no emotion. People see Julia Roberts or Sandra Bullock in a romantic comedy, but not me. You add race

to it, and it became, ‘Well, she’s too Asian’, or, ‘She’s too American’. I kind of got pushed out of both categories. It’s a very strange place to be. You’re not Asian enough and then you’re not American enough, so it gets really frustrating.”

Liu’s wary of playing the racism card, but admits that she had to “push a lot just to get in the room”. “I can’t say that there is no racism – there’s definitely something there that’s not easy, which makes [an acting career] much more difficult.”

In her latest role, she’s breaking down barriers in a different way: in the CBS television series, *Elementary*, the most recent reboot of Sherlock Holmes, she plays a female Dr Watson. This time around, Holmes (Jonny Lee Miller) is a slightly Aspergic, recovering drug addict, working for the NYPD.

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CREDITS >  
Creative Director: Jo  
Baldwin. Hair: Keith  
Carpenter at The  
Wall Group. Makeup:  
Ayami Nishimura. Nails:  
Maria Salandra. Fashion  
assistant: Sofia Catania

“It was a challenge,” admits Liu. “It’s so steeped in history, you want to keep that temperature, but acclimatise people to something new you’re shifting them towards.”

**D**uring her 22-year career, Liu has moved between television and movies, taking on projects that inspire her. Ask her to reflect on her favorite roles and her answer is *Lucky Number Slevin* and *Watching The Detectives*, two movies she admits “not many people” have seen. “Both are special to me because I didn’t have to do any kind of action or karate kicks. It was just about the acting, and I was able to stretch my muscles in them,” she smiles. “Well, figuratively, anyway.”

With that, Liu is off, uncomfortable with the amount of time she has spent talking about herself. She’s keen to get the day’s makeup off and maybe do some painting. As she heads for the door, she pauses to give me a long hug. It’s completely unexpected, but honest and warm, much like Lucy Liu.

**SHOP LUCY’S SHOOT ▶**

Dress by Hervé Léger

