



VOGUE

DEC

NICKI MINAJ'S NEW WORLD

"I LOOK IN
MY SON'S FACE,
AND MY WHOLE
SOUL LIGHTS UP"



LADY IN RED

Paulson wears
a Proenza
Schouler dress.
Tiffany & Co. cuff.
Photographed
by Max Farago.

The Play's the Thing

For Sarah Paulson,
Branden Jacobs-Jenkins's
Appropriate proved an
irresistible lure back to Broadway.
By Alessandra Codinha.

On a cool, early fall day in Los Angeles, the actor Sarah Paulson, a person of palpable charm and sincerity, pauses over lunch to consider how she came to embody a series of unlikable, and occasionally truly awful, women. (Her CV includes roles like *12 Years a Slave*'s harrowing Mistress Epps, Linda Tripp, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*'s Nurse Ratched.) "I try not to judge them," she says finally. "I try not to think about how they're going to be perceived, because I don't think many people are thinking about how they're coming across in any given moment. People are, myself included, reactive and reacting to the environment around them."

If this sounds pretty elementary, you are probably not a Hollywood star, with all of the correlating concerns about likability and marketability that particular occupation >82

entails. “There are a lot of incredible actresses out there who are stars because they play themselves,” the Obie Award-winning playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins tells me on a phone call a few days later. “Sarah’s not like that. She’s a legit actress.” He calls himself a Paulson “early adopter,” admiring her in New York stage productions like *The Gingerbread House* and *Crimes of the Heart* in the aughts. “And then of course she became the queen of Ryan Murphy land.” (In the Murphy-verse, Paulson is a central figure and fan favorite, having starred in nine out of 11 seasons of *American Horror Story* in roles as varied as Hypodermic Sally, Tuberculosis Karen, a villainous Mamie Eisenhower, and a pair of conjoined twins.)

Now Paulson is appearing in her first stage production in a decade, Jacobs-Jenkins’s 2013 play *Appropriate*, which begins previews November 29 and opens December 18. The play, which is directed by Lila Neugebauer, follows the dysfunctional Lafayette family’s return to their ancestral seat in Arkansas to settle the estate of their recently departed paterfamilias. There are grudges, and wounds, and a terrible racist secret in the attic, as there is in much of American life. The choice to acknowledge that rot—or not—forces the remaining family members to decide what kind of family, and what kind of people, they are. There are moments of levity, but the play is not a light lift—Paulson’s role, the eldest sister, Toni, furious and bitter in measures, perhaps especially. (Corey Stoll plays her brother Bo, and Elle Fanning is River, the fiancée of the youngest of the Lafayette siblings, Franz.) For Neugebauer, it made Paulson a dream casting. “She has an electrifying kind of command—a combination of technical virtuosity and an appetite for excavating the furthest reaches of the human capacity,” the director writes in an email. “She is one of the few actors that can push their limits and completely surprise us,” says Fanning. “I look up to how daring and adventurous she is in her choices. They are for herself and no one else.”

For Paulson, who is clad in a dove gray overcoat by The Row, a pale blue button-down shirt, wide-legged B Sides jeans, and loops of Irene Neuwirth and Jessica McCormack jewelry when we meet, relocating to New York will be something of a homecoming. She grew up there, attending Berkeley Carroll School in Brooklyn’s Park Slope before LaGuardia High School, and made her Broadway debut right after graduation in the 1994 play *The Sisters Rosensweig*. She has returned to the city about once every decade, she says, but still, everything about this time feels new. Her last stage run was Lanford Wilson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning comedy *Talley’s Folly*, a two-hander opposite Danny Burstein at the Roundabout theater in 2013, and during that time she says she lived “monastically,” on continuous vocal rest and with little social life to speak of. This time, her three rescue dogs will be with her; her partner, the actor Holland Taylor (herself making waves as a difficult woman on the ropes in this season of

The Morning Show), will go back and forth between New York and Los Angeles. The pair are famously low-key, preferring long walks through the hills and small dinners with friends to the scene-ier aspects of L.A. (They’re also good at living apart: Paulson has partly credited the health of their eight-year relationship to keeping separate houses.) It may be that this production requires a glass of wine and a bath to decompress after the curtain falls or a Taylor Swift soundtrack for the way home. “I didn’t take my Eras Tour bracelet off for, like, a month and a half,” Paulson says. “I’ve never been 48. I’ve never been in New York doing a play



LEAN ON ME

Elle Fanning plays a supporting role in *Appropriate*. Photographed by Annie Leibovitz, *Vogue*, June 2017.

with three dogs. You know how they say your cells all turn over every 10 years? I’m a whole new person since I last did a play. I’m interested to meet who I’ll be.”

When it came to who Toni Lafayette will be, the actor worked with Julia Crockett, the movement coach who helped her transform into Linda Tripp for *Impeachment: American Crime Story*. With a character based in history, there is footage to scour, diaries to read, material to build off of. For a fictional creation like Toni, Paulson’s been zeroing in on the character’s calcified, volatile nature and how that might register in her carriage and cadence. “I’ve been watching *Chimp Empire* and *Real Housewives of Salt Lake City*, and to me, somewhere in there lies a path to a creative process,” she says. “I know that sounds insane.” (It actually doesn’t: Both programs follow highly reactive, insular communities deeply concerned with social hierarchy and prone to sudden interclan bouts of violence. And *RHOSLC* has become must-see TV, we agree. She says she’s even got her good friend *The Last of Us* star >84

Pedro Pascal tuning in: “He’s like, ‘I understand everything about you’ now that he’s seen it,” she says, “and I was like, ‘I don’t know how to take that. I *really* don’t.’”)

For Paulson, the return to Broadway means more than a change of scenery. It’s a head-spinning change of pace, living a heart-wrenching series of events on loop eight times a week, and without the screen actor’s option to stop and try it again. She came up in the theater working with small casts and is looking forward to a larger corps to share notes with when the curtain comes down. The collegial spirit extends to her castmates: “I have never done a play before, so knowing I would have Branden, Lila, and Sarah to lean on during my first production was a huge gift,” says Fanning.

“The beauty of doing a play is that you kind of strap in. You have a starting point and an arc, and every night you land at the end of the piece, and then you get to try it again the next day,” Paulson says. “I love the idea of buckling my seat belt and letting the play take me somewhere.” For Jacobs-Jenkins, Paulson is less the passenger than the vehicle itself. “Having her in the cast is like being able to drive some very expensive foreign car.”

“That moment that the curtain goes up or the lights dim...it’s the closest thing to church to me”

Paulson is not a religious person, she says, but “I think the truth is, at that moment that the curtain goes up or the lights dim, where those hundreds in the audience are together for that one night, it’s the closest thing to church to me.” People sometimes think that repetition must deaden something about a performance, she says. It doesn’t. Every production is different: a very beautiful, communal experience that only happens one time. And in an age when nearly everything is being disseminated on social media, theater requires the viewer to truly be present.

“It’s one of the few places I can think of in the world where you have a performing element and it’s not documented, and people aren’t just sitting there half-watching, half-scrolling. It’s a commitment you’re making. I think it’s really beautiful in a world where so much is happening behind screens,” she says, citing recent studies showing loneliness’s abbreviating effect on life span. “So here’s an opportunity for people to all gather into a room and put their collective attention on something. How beautiful,” she says, smiling, “and how *rare*.” She knows a thing or two about that. □

Sneak Peak

An under-the-radar new wellness destination.

If you were forced to dream up a list of the world’s most legendary spa destinations, it’s unlikely that Transylvania would be on it. But for those able to look beyond the regional stereotypes of vampires and werewolves, this blissfully bucolic corner of central Romania has served as a low profile destination for intrepid wellness pilgrims. And as of this November, those trekking through its picturesque mountains or soaking in its mineral-rich springs might spot a new—and thoughtfully designed—haven nestled in the peaks of the Carpathian Mountains: Matca, an independent spa hotel with a twist. The tasteful taupes and creams of its artfully rustic suites and villas are where the similarities to other wellness sanctuaries end. Here, you can immerse yourself in the local landscapes with more than just a brisk hike, whether by joining local Romanian Orthodox monks for a traditional musical ceremony or—for the more thrill-seeking visitor—venturing out with a



THE HILLS ARE ALIVE

ABOVE: The Bucegi and Piatra Craiului mountains near Matca. LEFT: A room at Matca, set in a traditional Transylvanian farmhouse.

local ranger for a bear safari. Along with the usual array of saunas and plunge pools in the spa complex, there is also “hay bathing”—essentially, immersing yourself in bundles of warmed grasses to soothe your aches and strains—or simply lay yourself out on the massage tables draped in locally embroidered linens. And before you ask: No, they don’t offer vampire facials.—LIAM HESS