

LIFE & LOAVES OF A *Supermodel*

She's a Victoria's Secret catwalk star who has her own ballet fitness app – so far, so expected. But Mauritian model ALICIA ROUNTREE also owns a restaurant where it's all about bread. She tells *Anna Pursglove* how she keeps life in perspective >

PHOTOGRAPHS *Billie Scheepers*

The sun-kissed eight-year-old playing in the sugar cane looks like Mowgli. A pet lemur jumps at her feet and brightly coloured macaws eat from her hand. Ostriches, peacocks and donkeys roam among the palm trees and in the background you can catch a glimpse of the azure blue Indian Ocean. This exotic plantation with its strange menagerie is this carefree little girl's family home.

Fast-forward 20 years and the same girl marches through Marseilles airport, staring at her feet as a paparazzo snaps away. A couple of steps behind, her then boyfriend Jude Law tries to look anonymous in dark shades. The girl's life is not so unfettered these days. Her image is under constant scrutiny because she is now an international supermodel and it feels as though the whole world wants a piece of her. When she Instagrams a picture of herself and Mick Jagger at Rihanna's birthday party, press speculation about their relationship is rampant.

'Gosh! I mean, yes, I've hung out with him a few times but it's nothing like that. Just friends. Mick's a very fun, young-at-heart guy,' says Alicia Rountree in her distinctive accent – part French and part American, with a little bit of her native Mauritian folded in. She pauses to wrap her coat more tightly around her tiny frame (she has been living in LA and is finding London distinctly chilly) before continuing sagely: 'Getting recognised [and speculated about] just comes with the territory. You have to accept that with good grace.'

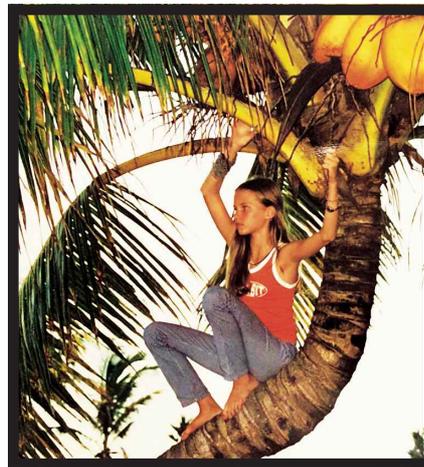
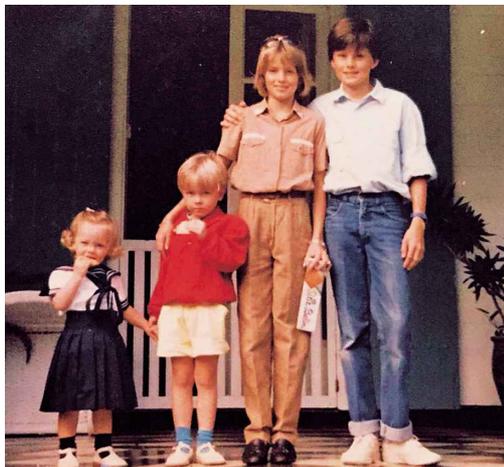
This is typical of Alicia's accepting attitude to life – you won't find this supermodel having a Naomi Campbell strop when things don't go her way. Alicia believes her sense of perspective comes from her parents Paddy and Elizabeth Rountree (from a wealthy family who have owned land and sugar plantations in Mauritius for five generations). 'They are super-chilled and relaxed,' she says. 'I love them so much. I speak to my mum at least

five times a day and my dad is probably the nicest person on this planet. They never tell me I shouldn't do things. Even if I've done something wrong they'll say: "OK, well, you'll learn from that."

Paddy and Elizabeth were apparently unfazed when their youngest daughter (Alicia has two elder brothers and two elder sisters) announced – aged 16 – that she wanted to leave her Swiss finishing school in Lugano and move to England to try to make it as a model. Everyone probably should have seen it coming, says Alicia – after all, she used to spend hours cutting out photo shoots from her mum's fashion magazines and painstakingly filing them in plastic wallets. 'I would see fashion shoots with people like Elle Macpherson and Cindy Crawford and I'd be, like, "Oh my, they are goddesses!" I still have them.' When she wasn't sifting through fashion magazines, Alicia would be ruining her mum's designer heels by wearing them and dancing through the gardens of their colonial home.

And so it was that a 17-year-old Alicia ditched her (very expensive) education and pitched up in London. She was, she says, very naive and was profoundly grateful when socialite Nicky Haslam (a friend of her parents) took it upon himself to squire her around town. Her big break came at a *Vogue* charity party in 2001, when Nicky and Alicia hit the dancefloor; Alicia wearing a punky T-shirt and a huge grey tulle skirt, which she kept stepping on. Onlookers (including the Prince of Wales, Sir Elton John and Kate Moss) couldn't help noticing the pair – and so, too, did Elena Sheridan-Young, an ex-model who, fortuitously, was setting up a modelling agency. She offered to sign the teenager on the spot and Alicia accepted the next day.

But, to begin with, it wasn't all *Vogue* covers and mega-buck contracts. In fact, Alicia remembers the first year in London being tough. She would schlep to a casting, wait in a draughty corridor and then be ➤

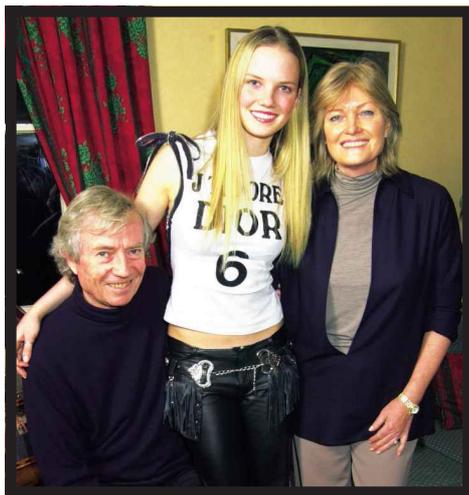


From left: Alicia practising ballet aged four; as a child (far left) with her siblings Michael, Harriet and Damian, and aged ten



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*Being
photographed
for Victoria’s
Secret was my
American dream*
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Alicia wears
JUMPSUIT,
Samuel Dougal.
CUFF, Vita Fede,
from Fenwick.
Previous page:
DRESS, Tom Ford



From left: Alicia with her parents Elizabeth and Paddy in 2002; with then boyfriend Jude Law in 2014; modelling at a Melissa Odabash swimwear show aged 17, and on the red carpet last year

◀ told ‘thanks, but no thanks’. It was when, 18 months later, Alicia moved to New York with then boyfriend (now business partner) Nicolas Dutko that things changed. Suddenly her face seemed to fit. ‘I went to New York for a weekend and stayed,’ she recalls. She signed with IMG and quickly landed a coveted Abercrombie & Fitch campaign. Then came the call from lingerie giant Victoria’s Secret and suddenly everybody wanted her: ‘It was my American dream,’ smiles Alicia. ‘Being photographed for Victoria’s Secret and appearing next to all these wonderful models is just mind-blowing.’

Alicia still models for the lingerie brand from time to time. A decade as a Victoria’s Secret model is no small achievement given that the label is famous for its ultra-demanding audition process, meaning only models with absolutely flawless physiques are booked. ‘Yup, there’s nowhere to hide if you’re in a bikini,’ agrees Alicia. ‘My rule is to eat clean before a big job, so everything as close to its natural state as possible. No salt, no sugar’ – she grimaces – ‘no grease. I’ve actually been a vegetarian for four years now and, since I’ve made that change, I can pretty much eat what I like. But that doesn’t mean I eat kale every night. I’d be miserable! I love food.’

And, unlike so many other models who claim to love eating while clearly surviving on starvation rations, Alicia genuinely does derive pleasure from food. Don’t even get her started on the native Mauritian dish dhol puri – a savoury pancake filled with vegetarian curry and tomato sauce. ‘My mouth is watering!’ says Alicia, leaning forward in her chair. ‘Seriously, every time somebody comes to Mauritius and tries it, they get addicted.’ In fact, so keen is she on food that in 2010 she and Nicolas opened a restaurant called Tartinery, in New York’s NoLIta district, specialising in

tartines (open French sandwiches). They have subsequently opened in two more New York locations and have another two in the pipeline. They also have their sights set on a branch in London and just need to find a suitable space. ‘It could be anywhere,’ says Alicia. ‘The energy of the space is the most important thing.’

Alicia considers herself a spiritual person. ‘But I’m practical with it,’ she says. ‘I think it’s important for people to see that the things they do affect other people.’ Indeed, in the time I’ve been with her she has apologised to the guy looking after the jewellery for the shoot (who had to move so that we could do our interview), thanked the wardrobe assistant for finding her something warmer to wear and worried that if we run over time I’ll be late to pick up my children from school. She practises transcendental meditation for 20 minutes twice a day (‘I get so much more done after I meditate’), as well as something she calls ‘morning

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pages’ – a technique she learned while doing an online integrative nutrition course, which is backed by luminaries such as Deepak Chopra. She keeps a notebook next to her bed and the minute she wakes up, she writes down ten things that she’s grateful for. Next she notes dreams she can remember plus any random thoughts. ‘You’re still half asleep,’ Alicia explains, ‘so you’re tapping into your unconscious mind. You let things out and you start the day fresh. What you see sometimes is that you keep writing the same thing, which makes you think, “OK, I need to focus on that.”’

But, of course, a beautiful mind and a love of food won’t make you any friends at Victoria’s Secret, so Alicia also works out like a demon – every day, unless she’s travelling. At the moment she’s into a class called Skinny Bitch. ‘It’s really crazy. You partner up and do all these mad drills ▶

TOP, Tara Jarmon.
SKIRT, A.W.A.K.E,
from Avenue 32.
NECKLACE, Vita
Fede, from
Fenwick. RINGS,
Maria Black



ALICIA'S A-LIST

What's on your bedside table?

Start With Why by Simon Sinek - it explores what makes leaders and organisations great.

What are you watching?

Orange is the New Black.

The last film you saw? *The*

Martian - I went to the premiere. Matt Damon is brilliant in it.

Favourite actress? Michelle Pfeiffer in *Scarface*.

What's in your fridge? Not much. Carrots and apples that I give to my dog Ella [a yorkshire terrier] and fruit to go with my oatmeal porridge.

Favourite restaurant I went to Chucs in Mayfair last night. It's a lovely little Italian that only has about five tables.

Favourite thing in your wardrobe? My Chanel Boy bag.

Fashion hate? Socks and sandals for men - actually sandals on men full stop.

Women can get away with murder.

Which superpower would you choose? Teleportation, so I could be with my parents in Mauritius instantly.

Surprising skill? I can lift up my leg [so it's] beside my ear - I'm very bendy.

Advice to your teenage self? Don't worry about what people think and be proud of what you do. I used to worry a lot.

Guilty pleasure? Chocolate!

Tips for de-stressing?

Meditate, have family time, have a massage.

Motto? As my mum always says, 'Drop by drop'. In other words, don't be in a hurry.

◀ using each other's body weight. I like an element of fun in my routine.' When in London, she works out with Steve Mellor, trainer-in-residence at Claridge's. 'Last time I trained with him I couldn't walk for a week, but he's so nice that you don't want to give up.' She also helped create a ballet/interval training app called The Supermodel Ballet Body. 'Growing up, I went to ballet classes almost every day. Even once I knew I wouldn't make it as a ballerina and was working as a model, I tried to do classes as often as I could.' She's also considering designing a range of ballet-inspired workout wear.

Alicia knows, however, that you can't model for ever and having just turned 30 (she wore Balmain and celebrated at the George Club and the Chiltern Firehouse before taking a break in Paris), she is busy restringing her bow. In addition to her expanding restaurant business, she has turned her attention to acting, studying in LA under the famous coach Margie Haber (who also trained Brad Pitt, Halle Berry and Vince Vaughn). 'I would love to do a Martin Scorsese movie, or the kind of roles that Scarlett Johansson picks,' she says. 'But I don't want to be just another model who dreams of being in movies.' But given that Alicia has already proved herself a canny operator in the precarious restaurant industry and speaks English, French, Italian and Mauritian Creole, it would be hard for even the most hard-nosed cynic to dismiss her as a dumb blonde.

What about romance? 'Well, I'm starting to date someone,' she says cautiously. 'But it's very new. And no - he isn't famous.' Alicia tells me she sees children in her future. 'Just two. I have to have a girl because I want to give her all my clothes. I'd love to have a girl and a boy. I'd have to have a base in Mauritius, though, because I had such a wonderful childhood there.'

For Alicia, the festive break was set to be all about going home to her beloved island in the Indian Ocean. 'Usually, all my family come home and my nephews and nieces are there, too,' she says. 'It is a bikini Christmas, then at New Year we go to our beach house and watch the fireworks from the hotel next door over the water. It is gorgeous!' So if her jet-set lifestyle went away tomorrow, what would she do? 'That's easy,' she smiles. 'I'd go back to Mauritius. That's where my real home has always been.' ❑

■ *Alicia's Supermodel Ballet Body app is free from the Apple App Store*

TOP, Maticovski at Avenue 32.
TROUSERS, Martin Grant.
RINGS, Maria Black

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