

SENSUAL SECRETS: HOW TO GET YOURS EVERY SINGLE TIME

ESSENCE[®]

EXCLUSIVE
LATIFAH,
ANGELA &
GABRIELLE

On Looking Good,
Expecting Twins
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“I’ve been lucky, too,
to be supported by
people who like me
for me and don’t try
to make me look like
somebody else.”

Queen Latifah

The Asian symbol tattooed on her back means "accomplish everything without fear" and Queen Latifah—or Dana, as she refers to herself—has done just that. With her size-16 frame, the Oscar nominee and star of the upcoming movie *Last Holiday* ranks good health over size obsession any day. "For me, having a breast reduction in 2003 was about comfort, not self-esteem," Latifah, 35, explains. "I want to have kids someday, but I didn't want to wait to have the surgery until after pregnancy, because then I would be carrying three babies—two up top and one in the belly," she adds, laughing. "Now I wear a DD and don't have backaches or indents from bra straps in my shoulders." Latifah says she was a little depressed after the breast reduction because a part of her body she'd had her entire life had suddenly changed. But that feeling soon faded, and these days she's feeling pretty good about the way she looks. "I think I have an attractive body. I like my eyes, my smile and my complexion and skin texture," she says. "I'm starting to get a booty now, which I like. I've been lucky, too, to be supported by people who like me for me and don't try to make me look like somebody else." >

lovin' the skin they're in

look
and
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at
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age

Queen Latifah, Gabrielle Union and Angela Bassett challenge Hollywood's definition of what's considered beautiful, both on and off the big screen. And on these pages, each woman shares how she's come to accept her unique beauty

BY REGINA R. ROBERTSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM WRIGHT

Gabrielle Union

Whether scoring all the fine brothers or taking down drug lords, Gabrielle Union's on-screen characters—including the one she plays in the upcoming film *Running With Scissors*—have paved the way for milk-chocolate-hued honeys to get some recognition, and rightly so. "I'm the darkest girl in my family," Union, 33, says. "When I was younger, I thought I would get more compliments if my skin was as light as possible, so I stayed out of the sun. There have even been times when I've caught myself slathering on sunblock with SPF 45 for babies and thought, *Okay, why are you concerned about getting darker?*" Now, she adds, each day she's learning to be comfortable in her own skin. And for her that also means learning to accept her imperfections. "I have scars from playing basketball and soccer, but I'm proud of the scar tissue under my right eye [the result of a sexual attack she endured at 19]. For the longest time I would stare at it, feeling disfigured, but now it shows me what I'm capable of surviving."

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PHOTOGRAPH BY FLORENCE FLORENCE; HAIR: FLORENCE FLORENCE; MAKEUP: RANDY STODOLSKA; STYLING: SUSAN WOODS; DRESS: G. R. QUEEN COLLECTION; STYLIST: SAM FINE; ART DIRECTION: DARIA HINES; HAIR: KIMBERLY WIMBLE; MAKEUP: RANDY STODOLSKA; STYLING: SUSAN WOODS; DRESS: G. R. QUEEN COLLECTION; STYLIST: SAM FINE; ART DIRECTION: DARIA HINES



Angela Bassett

Angela Bassett's physique has had us transfixed ever since she whipped herself into shape in 30 days to bring Tina Turner's life to the big screen. Thirteen years later the 47-year-old Oscar nominee still works at maintaining her chiseled frame. "God gives us each something to be proud about," Bassett says. "He gave me good arms and a good upper torso. I also like the strength and power of my back." This year Bassett reteams with Laurence Fishburne for *Akeelah and the Bee* (in theaters April 28). But first she's gearing up for her most important role yet, as the mother of twins—a boy and a girl—due next month via a surrogate. "I'm looking forward to it," she says. "I thought I would have the option to bear children in my forties as long as I was healthy and took care of myself, but I don't. My body decided what it was going to do. I was unable to carry, but there are other ways you can have children." Bassett's also keeping an open mind when it comes to her looks. "Plastic surgery is hard to resist," she admits, laughing. "I couldn't see myself adding anything, but I might take a few things away. I love seeing people who are mature in age and are healthy and vibrant. You just have to live and laugh—joy looks great on everybody." □

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