

WILD AT HEART

A visit to the Kalahari desert gives in-demand actress Isabel Lucas a moment to reflect. And while she may have the world at her feet, she tells Alexandra Spring she is determined to stay grounded. Photographed by Max Doyle.

Louis Vuitton terry cloth dress, \$2,000. Lucas's own hat. Tom Binns earrings, \$245, from Husk. Erickson Beamon necklace, \$995, and bangles, \$895 each, from Husk. All prices approximate; fashion details last pages.

Fashion editor
Naomi Smith

Lucy Plessabel and I are squeezing into rather small seats on an Air Botswana flight. It's our second flight of the day; the first was on a tiny six-seater Cessna, flying high over the dusty plains of Botswana, where we've spent the past week.

This has been Lucas's fourth visit to Africa, a place that resonates deeply with her. "There is something about the energy of Africa," she says, reflecting on the week. "I feel like there is so much beauty here, it's in the nature, the natural beauty and it opens people's hearts and it brings a peace." Being back in the ancient land has inspired her creatively. "For me, anywhere in nature I am creatively inspired, that's where I plug in and that's probably my main source of inspiration, where I can fill up and revive and feel enriched."

Strangers stared as we bumped our way to our seats. Golden-haired and tanned, Lucas seems blissfully unaware of her effect, and, after a week, I've almost grown accustomed to her wide-eyed, fine-featured beauty. Instead it's the quiet strength and intelligence that she exudes that is infinitely more intriguing.

It is these qualities that helped her to connect with Athena, the goddess of war and wisdom she plays in the upcoming Greek mythology epic *Immortals*. As we settle into our seats, Lucas tells me about how her mother would often read the myths to her and her sister. It was the archetypal goddesses Persephone, Artemis and Aphrodite she identified with, yet in revisiting the stories in preparation for the film, she felt most in tune with Athena. "She's so connected to her vision and her ideals and what she wants for the world, in an altruistic way, but she's a realist and she goes after what she wants. It was encouraging to find that archetype and that energy and to feel okay with being able to be like that myself."

It was this underlying strength that director Tarsem Singh sensed when he initially offered her the role. "Even though she comes across as childlike and naive, which is what I wanted in her relationship with her father, there is a certain hardness underneath her that is rarely visible," Singh says.

It's a quality that seems to have evolved since Lucas and I met last. In 2009, she was about to be catapulted onto the international

stage in her short but memorable role in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. She describes working on the blockbuster as "a coloured experience". "There were really a lot of different things to learn from doing that kind of film, and it was really full-on and intense and great. It affected just being able to be in that world and to do a really classic blockbuster and work with a director like Michael Bay." It was significant for her career. "In a little way, it did put me on the map and that's what I'm mostly grateful for, because now I get to do films that are in tune with my heart. I'd like to do films that match what I need to learn to grow, [and] I think that's what that film was in a way."

Now she gets to do films like the upcoming thriller *Loft*, filmed in Brussels and New Orleans, a remake of the highly successful Belgian thriller of the same name. Lucas says she is drawn to European films and was keen to work with Belgian director Erik Van Looy. Hers was a demanding role. "Emotionally, what we were doing was quite confronting, but I felt prepared and comfortable and in the zone in those moments."

She stops for a minute when I ask if this increasing experience has changed her. "As long as it's not in the term of: 'You've changed.' It would make me sad if someone said that," she says. "But change, of course, is growth, and anything that is not growing is either paralysed or it's not alive, because that's life; we always change and we grow." She agrees, however, that she is becoming more comfortable with the position she finds herself in. "Often, when I was younger, I wasn't quite sure if I was in the right role, so to speak, being an actress because I always felt like: 'How am I really helping the world? Can I do any good if I am doing this for my profession?' I feel like I didn't quite own the role. And I think things have moved around and the puzzle pieces have fallen into place and it does make sense."

It was a conversation with an Ayurvedic doctor at an ashram in India that helped her to see it differently. "I was telling him about how I am very interested in healing and working in healing therapies and about my sometimes questioning what I am doing with my ►

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Jeepers creepers

Prada cotton blend coat, \$2,730, silk dress, \$1,900, beret, \$590, silk scarf, \$390, and shoes, \$820. Marni sunglasses, \$495. Louis Vuitton hatbox, made to order.

Roam if you want to

Louis Vuitton leather jacket, \$5,000, skirt, \$2,700, and wool scarf, \$390. Lucas's own hat. Hermès silk scarf, \$520. Burberry Prorsum bag, \$1,925. Cotton kikoy, from Jack's Camp.

Beauty note: hide from the harsh African sun under a hat and a generous layer of a SPF30 sunscreen. A safely burnished complexion like Lucas's comes care of a natural-hued bronzing powder, such as Revlon New Complexion Oil-Free Bronzing Powder in Sun – the tawny golden shade simulates sun-kissed skin minus the orange effect that some bronzers can impart.



Hello, ranger

Prada cotton blend knit cardigan, \$980, knit skirt, \$1,280, and silk scarf, \$390. Marni sunglasses, \$495. Hermès hat, \$1,540. Carven shoes, \$695, from Christine Accessories.

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*Nights in
white satin*

Chanel silk gown embellished
with crystals, \$16,920,
from the Chanel boutiques.
Fairfax & Roberts white
gold earrings set with
diamonds and pearls,
\$29,700.



Gamekeeper

Miu Miu silk dress, \$1,780.
Fairfax & Roberts gold earrings
set with diamonds, \$12,700.
Paloma Picasso for Tiffany
& Co. gold bangle set with
diamonds, \$13,000. Tiffany
& Co. gold bangles set with
peridots and citrines, \$1,800
each. Louis Vuitton playing
cards, \$125. **Beauty note:** to
stay shine-free on scorching
days, switch to a mattifying
base such as Revlon New
Complexion Oil-Control
Makeup in Nude. For double
shine insurance, keep a powder
compact (we like Revlon New
Complexion Oil-Free Powder
in Medium Beige) at hand to
touch up between games.

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Deepest, darkest

Miu Miu silk blend sequined dress, \$5,990. Fairfax & Roberts gold earrings set with diamonds, \$13,400, and necklace, \$16,400. Emilio Pucci shoes.



Traveller's tale

Tommy Hilfiger velvet blazer, \$1,200. Hat, from Jack's Camp. Giorgio Armani earrings, \$880. Etro silk scarf, \$195, from Christine Accessories.



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Village voice

Opposite: Bottega Veneta cardigan, worn around waist, \$1,850, swimsuit, \$750, and belt, \$1,070. Hermès hat, \$1,540. **This page:** Marni silk dress, \$1,895, and belt, \$275. Balenciaga bag, \$1,550, from Cosmopolitan Shoes. Sonia Rykiel wedges, \$650, from Christine Accessories. **Beauty note:** when the mercury rises, keeping make-up to a fuss-free minimum helps avoid smudging. A waterproof mascara such as Revlon Grow Luscious Plumping Waterproof Mascara in Blackest Black will see you safely through the day. No touch-ups required.



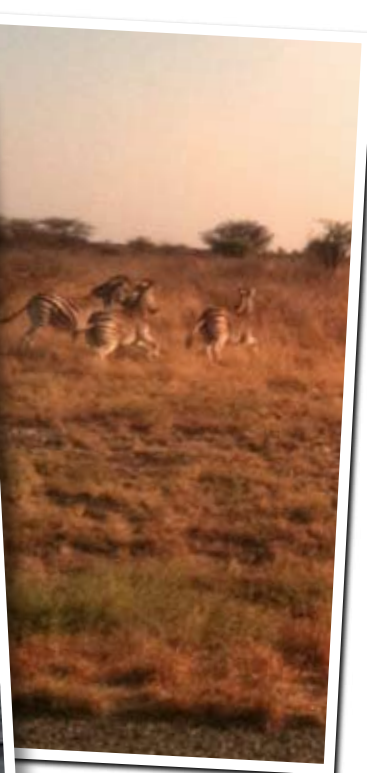
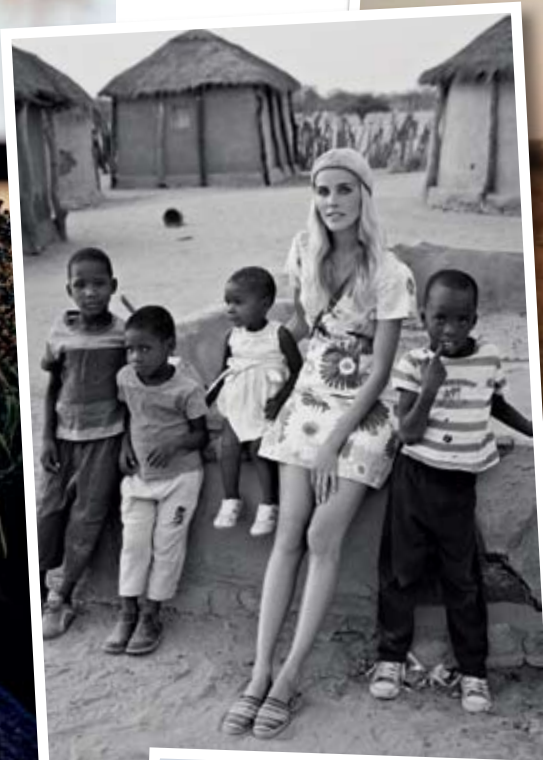
Going the distance

Louis Vuitton silk dress, \$4,000. Hairstylist's own headband. Erickson Beamon necklace, \$995, from Husk. Cotton kikoy, from Jack's Camp. Sassari bracelet, \$60, from Husk. Easton Pearson sandals, \$145.

Stand-up crew

Roberto Cavalli cotton and silk vest and top, and silk pants. Nerida Winter hat, \$695. Lucas's own boots. **Beauty note:** the ultimate no-maintenance make-up look is a nude mouth. Line and colour in lips with Revlon ColorStay Lipliner in Nude - a deep flesh-toned shade - then follow with a coat of Revlon ColorBurst Lipstick in Pink Sugar for a touch of moisture and shine (it contains sweet almond oil to hydrate and plump).





On safari with Ralph Bousfield, from Uncharted Africa.

“Change is growth and anything not growing is either paralysed or it’s not alive, because that’s life; we always change and we grow”



Sun, sand, see
Opposite, top left, and this page: Burberry Prorsum wool sweater, \$895. Louis Vuitton shorts, \$700. Nerida Winter hat, \$695. Espadrilles, \$30, from Ici et Là. **Opposite, centre:** Marc Jacobs cotton dress, Espadrilles, \$30, from Ici et Là.



Tree's a crowd

Collette Dinnigan cotton dress, \$420.
Hermès hat, \$1,540. Fan, \$5, from My Island Home. Bottega Veneta wedges, \$940.

Hair: Kevin Murphy
Make-up: Sarah Tammer

Shot on location at San Camp and Jack's Camp, Botswana (www.unchartedafrica.com). With thanks to Classic Safari Company (www.classicsafari.com.au) and Qantas (www.qantas.com.au).

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profession, and he said something that felt significant at the time.” She paraphrases the doctor: “[He said:] ‘There are many people who never get an opportunity ... when you are given an opportunity, ride the wave, just be grateful and surrender to it.’” It helped her see her career as a blessing and an opportunity. “I thought: ‘I’m not going to wonder so much any more and just accept it.’”

Her growing profile also affords her the opportunity to support the causes close to her heart, and she remains deeply committed to increasing awareness of environmental issues. “I’m very passionate about living in more sustainable ways and respecting Mother Earth,” she says simply. Recently she was approached by Protect Our Coral Sea to put together a public service announcement video calling for a dedicated marine park for the Coral Sea, near the Great Barrier Reef. “[I said] I’ll do it but maybe if we could put a video together and just do something that’s a little lighter, because it can sometimes be a bit

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heavy.” She and boyfriend musician Angus Stone collaborated on a sweetly poignant video, with his sister Julia providing the soundtrack, which received plenty of attention. “It’s really very simple and it’s not a big epic; it’s something very small that we could do.”

Stone’s name comes up frequently in conversation and Lucas is clearly very much in love. “He’s very inspiring, the way he lives with so much humility and such an open heart, and he inspires me creatively as well. The word that I could use, if I had to use a word to describe him, is true. Just true, down to the ground.”

Like our fellow passengers, designers and fashion pundits have been quick to notice Lucas’s striking beauty, and invitations to fashion shows and parties fill her inbox. Even among the world’s most beautiful, she stood out when she attended this year’s Met Ball in New York. She delights in dressing up in designer gowns, but remains resolutely true to her own unique sense of boho vintage style, slipping into sweet little sundresses topped with a headband, or bundling up in jeans, quirky T-shirts and oversized jumpers between scenes on our shoot. She shrugs when asked about her style. “I just like wearing what I like,” she says. “I don’t think it’s something I give that much thought to. I just like to wear what suits my mood that day.” She rarely sets out to shop, often stumbling on purchases she falls in love with. She crinkles her nose when I point out that those in the know are name-checking her. “It’s really lovely,” she says, laughing. “I will give more thought to it.”

Indeed, she seems to be happiest and most comfortable on our trip when the cameras are packed away and she’s free to skip off on her own. The visit to the baobab tree, for example, clearly moved her, and she couldn’t wait to step out of the Bottega Veneta wedges to climb and explore the tree’s massive branches. Later she tells me it was one of the highlights of her trip and a memory she will treasure. “The life force in that tree, walking around it, its beauty, it was really special.” And with that, we touch down at Johannesburg airport, hug our goodbyes and split up, me to return to Sydney and her to fly back to Los Angeles and the exciting future that awaits her. ■