



# STRIP, **STRIP,** HOORAY

*Not just the same old grind  
for Dita Von Teese*

By ANDREA KENNEDY



**DITAVO**



She's played a provocative powder puff prancing inside a gilded compact case, a raunchy rhinestone cowgirl atop a pink velvet mechanical bull and – perhaps most famously – a sizzling swizzle stick swirling around a 5-foot martini glass.

Dita Von Teese, popularly deemed the International Queen of Burlesque, performs in strategically placed rhinestones and spangled G-strings for her global fan base and elite clientele, including at events for Victoria's Secret, Christian Louboutin and Louis Vuitton. Though predominantly known for her appeal sans apparel, the pristinely poised, porcelain-faced, perfectly coiffed pinup has also gained fame as an old-fashioned glamour icon. After releasing two books on striptease, she's capitalized on her classic yet kinky image with a pocketful of product lines from apparel to beauty.

"I've always wanted to create products that pertain to my self-created image," Dita says. "I have a vast knowledge about vintage style, makeup, lingerie and perfume."

Before she mastered the art of striptease, she managed beauty counters at a Robinsons-May department store, starting at 15. Now a hottie at 40, she's publicized her refusal to hire a stylist ever, deeming herself a stand-alone style guru for a timeless throwback look appealing to a less commercial feminine culture.

# DITA VON TEESE

"Dita is an alternative to American society's stereotypical blond, blue-eyed, tan ideal of beauty," says manager Melissa Dishell. "...Women really respond to that, and we see it every time she does an in-store appearance or a live show."

Ladies who lined up for blocks to catch a glimpse of the marketable maven at product launches in London, Sydney and Los Angeles are poised to pounce on products telling them they, too, can share her seemingly unattainable airbrushed look. Since 2010, Dita has released two perfume scents; a 40-piece makeup line featuring everything from foundation to fake lashes, lip liner to nail lacquer; a six-item fine clothing line and, naturally, lingerie. She'll tie the lines together in a new beauty book set for release later this year.

The assortment of style accoutrement seems to provide all the trappings of Von Teese's airbrushed look – minus her ballerina's grace, flawless face and 20-inch waist, of course.

But the latter attributes are likely beside the point for Dita consumers, considering the brand she sells preaches power to women via the power of products.

Says Dishell: "Even if (women) feel like they don't measure up to society's messages of beauty, they can make themselves feel glamorous and empowered with certain tools, like hair, makeup, clothing."

Tapping Dita fans and wannabes aching for seven degrees of Von Teese – some of whom even buy her used (yes, used) stockings – she ensures her personal mark on each item, saying, "I am very hands-on with the creation of each product."

First glance indicates an obvious brand strategy concentrating, like Dita herself, on packaging. Her eponymous perfume wows with a slim black bottle featuring an air-pump atomizer from the days of glamorous vanities – complete with playful tassel akin to those twirled on Dita's performance pasties. (Makeup creator ARTDECO, however, misses the mark with a caricature logo of Dita's profile that somehow cheapens the aura.)

But though Dita's image and brand is vastly cosmetic – in interviews, she's said that makeup boosted her girlhood confidence, and her beauty mark is really a tattoo – she's keenly aware that her product quality must go further than skin deep.

Her fragrances, for example, feature innovative blends that imply craftsmanship and breed award-winners. Dita is said to entice with peonies, Bourbon pepper, Bulgarian rose and Tahitian tiare. She won a Duft Stars Award for the Best Female Lifestyle Fragrance from Germany's Fragrance Foundation. Rouge is set to seduce with Lapsang-Souchong tea, magnolia and tonka bean, an aromatic legume gaining traction in haute cuisine.

While her fragrances show potential in brand image and integrity, Dita maximized her fashion-fused production prowess with her line of six couture clothing designs dripping in classic chic. The frocks and coats, she says, are "based on vintage pieces from my own collection" and chosen for their "timelessness and wearability."

Designs start at \$350 for a mesh trench to \$995 for a silk crepe de chine maxi dress. High-class, price-hiking details include fine fabrics, full lining and signature prints.

"When I created the line, I had to make a choice regarding the quality and I really didn't want to make dresses that are disposable," Dita tells WAG. "If there's one thing I have learned, it's that investing in well-made pieces is smarter than snapping up a pile of clothes that don't have the same nice details as vintage."

Though a Dita-inspired dress collection may be the envy of many a consumer, ownership is plausible for few – and not just because the line is available stateside from just one boutique on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles. When asked about the collection's retail success, Dita simply replies that her designs can be seen on many of her "stylish friends" like Debi Mazar, Amanda de Cadenet, Liz Goldwyn and British shoe designer Charlotte Dellal of Charlotte Olympia. (Then again, at press time Aussie web retailer David Jones shows her Muse VIP Trench with a 60 percent markdown to a cool \$299.)

Where Dita hit the brand jackpot, though, is with her tantalizing vixen- and vintage-inspired lingerie line, Von Follies. Hovering around the \$30 to \$60 range, it features corsets, bustiers, balconette bras, fitted chemises, high-waisted briefs and garter belts laced with ruffles and ribbons, print and mesh to adorn women craving Dita's vintage glamour. Plus, pieces accommodate women up to size 20 and E-cups that, as manager Dishell claims, "make women of all shapes and sizes feel feminine and confident."

Mistress Von Teese also teases a new, likely more affordable, clothing collection still in the "beginning stages" set to hit the market in 2013, perhaps with New York seeing a launch this turn. And if locals are already pining for her in the flesh, perhaps they clinched tickets to her sold-out show. Her risqué revue hits the Gramercy Theatre in Manhattan for a four-day run starting March 6.

It's called, appropriately enough, "Burlesque: Strip Strip Hooray!" ■



Photograph by Albert Sanchez