

THE SORORITY OF

Saldana

SUPERNOVA
ZOË SALDANA
KNOWS WHAT BOYS
IN HOLLYWOOD LIKE,
BUT SHE'S FUELED
BY GIRL POWER.

By Andrew Myers
Photography by John Russo
Styling by Ricky Berrick
Shot on location at the
Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Turquoise floral jacquard top,
\$1,770, and floral jacquard mini
skirt, \$1,330, both at Louis Vuitton;
Calamozzo woven slide sandals,
\$95, at Christian Louboutin.

Sisterhood isn't an attribute commonly ascribed to actresses in competitive Hollywood, let alone to lithe and beautiful boldfaces enjoying a precipitous rise to stand-alone stardom. But for Zoë Saldana, who stars in this month's much-anticipated independent drama *Out of the Furnace*, sisterhood—in both a familial and social sense—is a defining characteristic, and often an ass-kicking, motivating virtue.

"It's very hard being a woman in a man's world, and I recognized it was a man's world even when I was a kid. It's an inequality and injustice that drove me crazy, and which I always spoke out against—and I've always been outspoken," says Saldana, noting that even now, casually breaking gender barriers is something in which she delights. "I love learning new skills, especially those you're told girls aren't good at—like parallel parking. Hey, I'm going to learn to ride a Ducati!"

Sisterhood is also a compass by which Saldana navigates her career. "I'm known for being selective in parts I either pick or pursue, and what matters most is that they be good female roles where the character isn't cardboard or objectified, and where there's real substance," shares Saldana, adding, "No generic girlfriend or wife, and no sexy bombshell. Enough of that already!"

It's precisely this cliché-busting, passionately held point of view that has steered Saldana toward roles as diverse as those in the ballet-based *Center Stage*, her debut film back in 2000, and the Britney Spears vehicle *Crossroads*. Then came her defining cameo in *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl*, followed by breakout turns in 2009, including the blue-hued alien princess Neytiri in James Cameron's *Avatar*—the highest-grossing movie of all time, with three announced sequels in Dec. 2016, '17 and '18—and the iconic Uhura in J.J. Abrams' supersized reboot of *Star Trek*, a marquee part she reprised in last summer's blockbuster sequel, *Star Trek Into Darkness*.

Most recently, in terms of

Made crapa-backed lace dress, \$5,900, and ladder collar necktie, \$1,125, both at Preonza Schouler.



Navy, black, cherry and white graphic jacquard marine wool sweater dress, \$1,225, and cutout waist belt with braided strap, \$650, both by Prabal Gurung at Bergdorf Goodman; Jaci Bilgore bag, \$98, by Isharya at Isharya.com. Opposite page: Multicolor silk fringe knitted embroidered dress, \$4,550, at Bottega Veneta; Yvanka snakeskin sandals, \$1,195, at Christian Louboutin; L'Illestre silver and crystal cuff bracelet, \$770, at Baccarat; ring by Demarco. Artwork: "Urban Light," 2008, by Chris Burden.



release dates, that compass guided Saldana to *Out of the Furnace*, a pulls-no-punches drama set in the nation's Rust Belt, which addresses themes such as war and recession. Starring opposite Christian Bale, Saldana describes both the movie's subject matter and its shoot on location in Pittsburgh as "beautiful, intense and very real. My takeaway thought in all respects was: Be grateful," says the 35-year-old actress, emphasizing each word.

Out of the Furnace, due out Dec. 6, also serves as Saldana's springboard into 2014, a year that heralds an awe-inspiring number of releases starring the actress—a catalog of work running the gamut of genres as well. Among these forthcoming films are the drama *Blood Ties*, co-starring Clive Owen; the dark comedy *Infinitely Polar Bear*, with Mark Ruffalo; the Nina Simone biopic *Ninot*; and next summer's Disney tent-pole, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, in which Saldana stars as comic-book heroine Gamora—aka the most lethal assassin in the galaxy, naturally.

So how did a first-generation American, the second of three daughters born to immigrants from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, grow up to be an action star, a pathos-filled character actress, a damn sexy blue alien and a woman afraid neither to speak her mind nor fly the feminist flag?

Born in Passaic, N.J., Saldana reports an idyllic childhood in Queens, involving a tight family; frequent trips to the Caribbean to visit doting grandparents, aunts and uncles; and sisters with whom

wasn't interested in," relays the actress, whose mother seemed to know intuitively the discipline of dance would provide her daughter a necessary structure and comforting framework upon which to learn about herself and navigate a wider world. "The barre, the piano, the breathing—they calmed and centered me, and allowed me to learn lessons physically, which is how I learn best."

Saldana's second boon was having the good fortune to be raised by a strong woman who, in turn, became a strong matriarch. "Latin culture is *machista*; its focus is totally male," says Saldana, illustrating the degree of the culture's penchant for patriarchy with an anecdote. "As a girl and bride, my mother had wanted only sons. It wasn't that she didn't want daughters, it's that she knew how much harder it was for women. Why not have boys and not have to see your children struggle and suffer so much?"

By the time the family returned to the United States when Saldana was 17, she'd learned not only the importance of a room of one's own, but the primacy of being able to pay for it independently. "My sisters and I weren't raised to be princesses; we were taught to want love and to recognize love, but not to be tempted to sacrifice things you can provide for yourself for love. We were taught to work," she says.

Back in New York, Saldana finished high school, gradually "weaned" herself off of ballet and started to explore the arts, acting in youth theater organizations such as Brooklyn's Faces,

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she not only got along but also with whom she actually liked to play, talk and be with. "It was truly carefree, that kind of fantasy kids who are lucky get," she says. But the fantasy ended abruptly when Saldana was 9, and her father, Aridio, was killed in a car crash. Faced with raising her three girls alone in New York City, Saldana's mother, Asalia, decided to move her family to the Dominican Republic, where she could count on the support network of immediate and extended family, as well as the predictable and familiar rhythms of a more agrarian and rural environment.

Not that it was idyllic or easy. "Believe me, it was very different to visit than to live," says Saldana, who was enrolled in a boarding school and had to deal with separation from her mother. "In the Dominican Republic, we weren't rich, we weren't poor," she says, explaining that her mom frequently returned to the United States to work.

Out of the crises and heartache, however, came two life-changing boons. The first was ballet. "My mum took me to ballet when I was a little girl and it didn't [set in]," Saldana remembers. Fortunately, a reintroduction to the art form proved to be not only a charm, but also a *jeté* that taught the budding adolescent how to focus, be still and breathe. "Before ballet, I had trouble concentrating, and I wouldn't even try to concentrate on things I

an award-winning group that focuses on positive messages for teens while addressing heavy-duty topics such as substance abuse and sexuality. "Both my sisters and I were very much into the arts and that world," Saldana says. What, then, could have seemed more predestined than *Center Stage*, a teen drama about a group of young dancers at the fictitious American Ballet Academy in New York City? "I heard about it, auditioned, and... wow, Nicholas Hytner [the director] cast me," she remembers. "Of course it helped I had a background in ballet." Thus began Saldana's ever-quickening pas de deux with Tinseltown.

In terms of romance—the one arena that she will not speak of, unguardedly or otherwise—Saldana recently married comely and talented Italian artist Marco Perego in London.

Not that married life has much altered Saldana's sense of sorority. Last September, she and sisters Mariel and Cisely signed a first-look deal with Lionsgate to develop content for Hispanic audiences, and most Friday nights, the three Saldana daughters, all based in Los Angeles, get together. The convening is particularly special when their mother is in town. Like old times, the women congregate, commune, cook and share the week's adventures.

They also prepare for what lies ahead. ☑

Black and chalk Kapow embroidered silk bomber jacket, \$7,950, zigzag embroidered tulle skirt, price upon request, and silver-plate penny sandals, with brooch detail, ankle wrap and optional heel, \$1,250, all at Tom Ford. Artwork: "Penetrable," 1990, by Boris Mikhailov, Collection Fondation Philippe de Ciraesio. Hair by Gaiathon Bowman for Exclusive Artists using Rona Fortner Makeup by Vera Steinberg. Manicure by Lily Zambrana of lilyzambra.com using Stalder by John Russo Nails.

PRODUCTION: ESTHER MONTENEGRO; PROPSTION: ASHER/STYLING: VANESSA ALAZAVARA; STYLING ASSISTANT: PRISTINA CHAVEZ; HAIR: GAIATHON BOWMAN

