

# VOLUME

SEP

JUST  
**B**

BEYONCÉ  
AND THE ART  
OF GLOBAL  
DOMINATION

FALL  
ROMANCE  
**832**

PAGES OF  
WILDLY  
WONDERFUL  
LOOKS

# Forces of Fashion

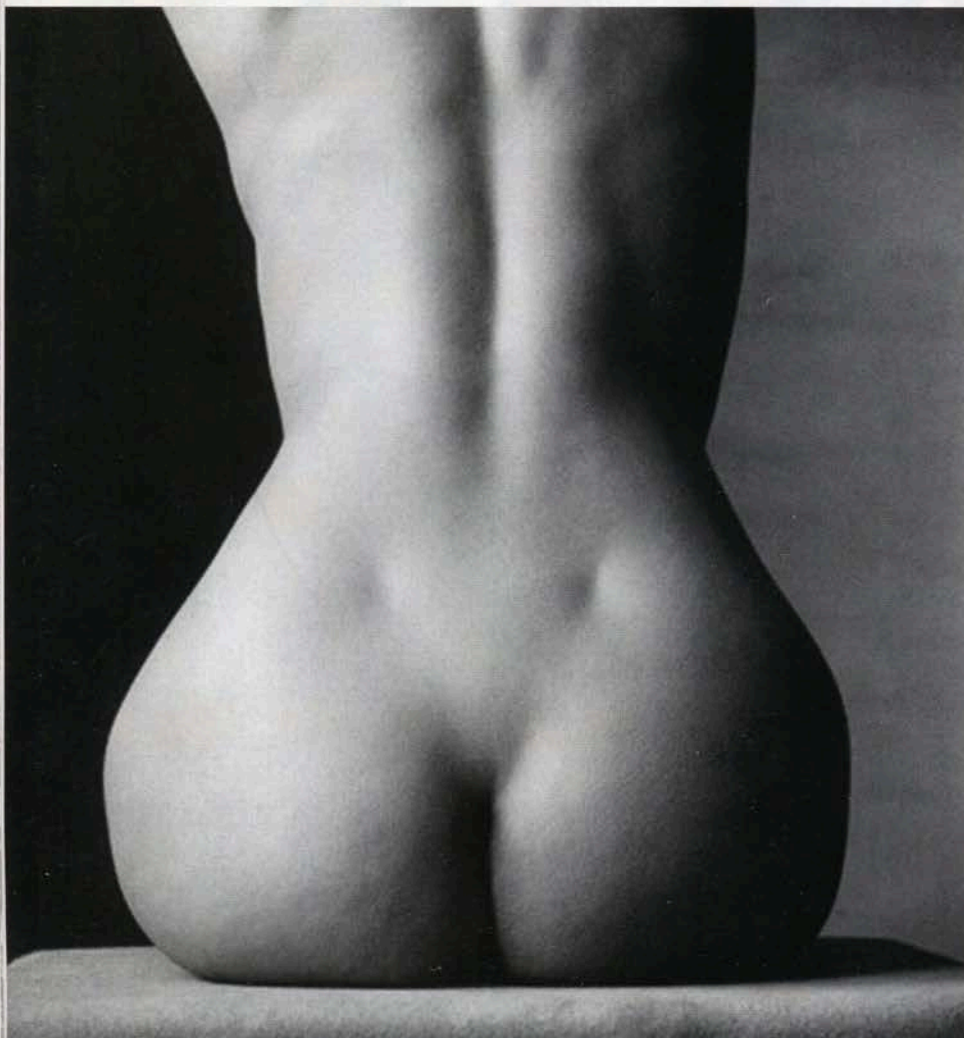
THE RULE-BREAKERS  
DEFINING THE WAY WE  
DRESS NOW

\$5.99US \$6.99FOR  
09>



0844

0 753384 2



## The **Bottom** Line

Weary of looking back in anger, Marcia DeSanctis embarks on a dedicated regimen in pursuit of hindquarterly perfection.

**RUMPUS RAISED**  
CYCLING AND YOGA CAN HELP, BUT MUSCLE BUILDING REQUIRES RESISTANCE TRAINING. PHOTOGRAPHED BY IRVING PENN FOR VOGUE, 1994.

**I** am lying facedown on my bedroom carpet, legs bent with toes wedged against the wall, and Stuart McGill, Ph.D., is coaching me over the phone from Ontario, Canada.

“Pretend you have a \$100 bill in your gluteal crease,” he says. His voice is clinical but reassuring.

“My what?” I ask.

He translates into the vernacular. (Yes, you’ve guessed correctly.) I have enlisted McGill, whose life’s work includes the study of the muscles of the derrière, to elucidate the less obvious advantages of a shapely, fit behind. In addition to guiding me through rear-improving floor moves like hip bridges and the clamshell, he gives me some astounding news: I thought my brain was forgetting things? It turns out I may also have a case of gluteal amnesia. This condition, coined by McGill, describes a loop where pain in the hips and back causes the butt muscles to shut off, which in turn results in more back, hip, and even knee pain. In other words, the price of a flabby, squashed, and atrophying bottom—mine

and anyone else’s who sits most of her waking life—can herald disaster in the lower body.

A few weeks earlier, I’d hired a trainer to help me focus on lifting and rounding my behind. It’s grown slack in midlife, often affixed to the driver’s seat heading to my children’s track meets and crew regattas, and rarely to my own workouts. My motivation was pure vanity: The rear of my vintage Agnès B. leather trousers, which once filled out with curves, now called to mind a deflating balloon. I sought the shape that Spanx gives me, with lean, firm dents in just the right places. Given that I don’t have the stomach for implants or injections, I needed to sweat my way there. And now, thanks to McGill, I understand my discipline includes a mental component I’d not yet considered. To become iron-hard, he says, we must first train the brain to focus on this most esteemed—but jilted—body part. Hence, the imaginary C-note concealed under my Odile de Changy briefs. “You have to remember, whenever possible, to squeeze robustly,” McGill says. So lately, whether I’m going upstairs, counting sheep, rising from chairs, or watching *Veep*, “Contract **BEAUTY**>662

the glutes!” is my rallying cry, to amplify the results of my dedicated rump regimen.

A curvy bum is sexy, but it’s advantageous to have a strong one, too. The glutes are the largest muscle group and the primary stabilizer for the body. They control the hips, the pelvis, the knee, and by extension the back. And so my trainer and I have agreed to meet a few times a week at my gym in Litchfield, Connecticut, while I simultaneously sample several other programs known to boost the backside. At the start of my all-natural rump lift, I am advised by Bret Contreras, an author and expert in all that is gluteal, to take a “before” picture because inches don’t tell the whole story. “You can gain muscle and lose fat and your measurement doesn’t change, but you look way better,” says the Phoenix-based trainer. So, feet planted on the cold kitchen tiles, I enlist my husband to snap away at my bottom. All but one image goes straight to the electronic trash bin.

Artists from ancient Greek sculptors to Edouard Manet and Helmut Newton have long shown the female behind to be a most enduring muse. As anyone who has not been marooned on a life raft knows, the backside claims the center of the galaxy these days: fashion, fitness—heaven knows, Instagram. This preeminence reached its apotheosis at the 2015 Met gala, when

Brenda Vongova, who works in the Secretary General’s office at the United Nations, teaches her Bumbum Lift at private homes. Many of her moves—with names like “flamingo,” “rainbow,” and “sailboat”—are based on her past as a synchronized swimmer. Where Carvalho incorporates free weights and Cybex machines, Vongova’s program is designed for efficiency on the floor of your bedroom. When I finish my session, Vongova congratulates me on completing 500 lifts in 20 minutes.

Still, there are no shortcuts for a determined lazybones like me to reverse a flattened seat into something more three-dimensional. Pure resistance training is required to build up the three gluteal muscles: the maximus; the medius, which frames the hips; and the minimus, which attaches to the leg. My local gym has all the intimidating hardware, and Peter Bergamo, my trainer, guides me through exercises and repetitions. I warm up doing squats on the TRX, careful to activate glutes on the way up, rather than my quads, which I have been told to use on the way down. More squats with a heavy rope on both shoulders, Volga boatman-style. Bent-leg Jane Fonda kicks behind me, and yes, I feel the burn. The “fire hydrant” is effective, if unlabeled. My favorites are bridges for the opportu-

## I swing the kettlebell and bring my weight forward. “THE GLUTES ALWAYS WANT TO CHEAT,” says my trainer

Beyoncé, Kim Kardashian West, and Jennifer Lopez in their respective Givenchy, Cavalli, and Versace semi-sheer dresses exhibited their *jolie rondeur* to the gasps (and envy) of the rest of humanity. This trifecta of hindquarter perfection further fueled womankind’s ongoing rush to gyms the planet over.

“I’ve definitely noticed a huge increase lately in the demand for a firmer, rounder, perkier butt,” says Lisa Hirsch, owner of the Studio (MDR), three Los Angeles fitness studios that are affiliates of the very popular Sebastien Lagree method, whose Megaformer workouts are renowned for sculpting a superathletic *derrière*. A contingent of New York City women who yearn for glorious backsides flock to The Class by Taryn Toomey. If seeing is truth, the strong, gorgeous bottoms I envied at the downtown space prove that her exhaustive (and exhausting) all-over regimen also helps. “I don’t want to bulk the butt; I want to lift it,” says Toomey, a 36-year-old mother of two whose seat could pass for a work of marble. “Almost carve it out.”

**A**nd then there are the site-specific classes. The high priest of target practice is New York’s Leandro Carvalho, a former Merce Cunningham dancer whose Brazil Butt Lift method is designed to round and reshape to dazzling effect, most prominently on the fleet of Victoria’s Secret models he has trained. My lackluster, five-decades-old specimen causes him no concern. “There are no hopeless butts, only hopeless people who don’t want to do the hard work,” Carvalho says as I gasp for breath warming up on a steeply inclined treadmill at the start of my hour-long session. “I’ve never seen a behind that couldn’t be fixed.”

nity to take five on the floor. I swing the kettlebell up and down while flexing the butt muscles and too often, put my weight forward rather than on the back of my heels. “The glutes always want to cheat,” says Peter. No, Pete, I do. But I resolve to improve: three times a week, for 30 minutes, plus two more weekly at home, remembering McGill’s advice to contract the muscle group even, for example, while sitting in traffic.

All this bottom-centricity becomes a tad monotonous after several weeks. So I wonder if I might switch it up for, say, a cycling class. “Does spin work for your glutes? Does Pilates? Does yoga? Yes, it all works. But nothing works like resistance training,” says Contreras. “To get that 3-D, perky, round look, that’s straight-up muscle building. You need to be doing exercises that target the area.” His comment makes me curious to know if one could ever overattend to one’s assets. “In 28 years of training, I’ve never heard a woman say, ‘My butt is too round and muscular,’” he says with a laugh.

I’m a long way from that, but this new deliberate focus, both physical and mental, has forced an absolute shift in my approach. It’s astounding how lazily I used to walk, stand in line at the market, or climb the stairs—on my toes rather than my heels—and how simple it is to shift my weight back so I can feel the glutes flex. More remarkable, though, is my backside. I can’t overstate this: The butt is incredibly, eminently transformable. The experts told me, and I am proof: If you work it, it will grow. Two months into my experiment, the photos are beginning to show definition where there used to be flesh. My husband/photographer has noticed, my trainer is proud, and I’m a little stunned. More than that, my glutes are doing the job they were built to do—hold me up and fill out the back of my favorite leather trousers. □ BEAUTY>664