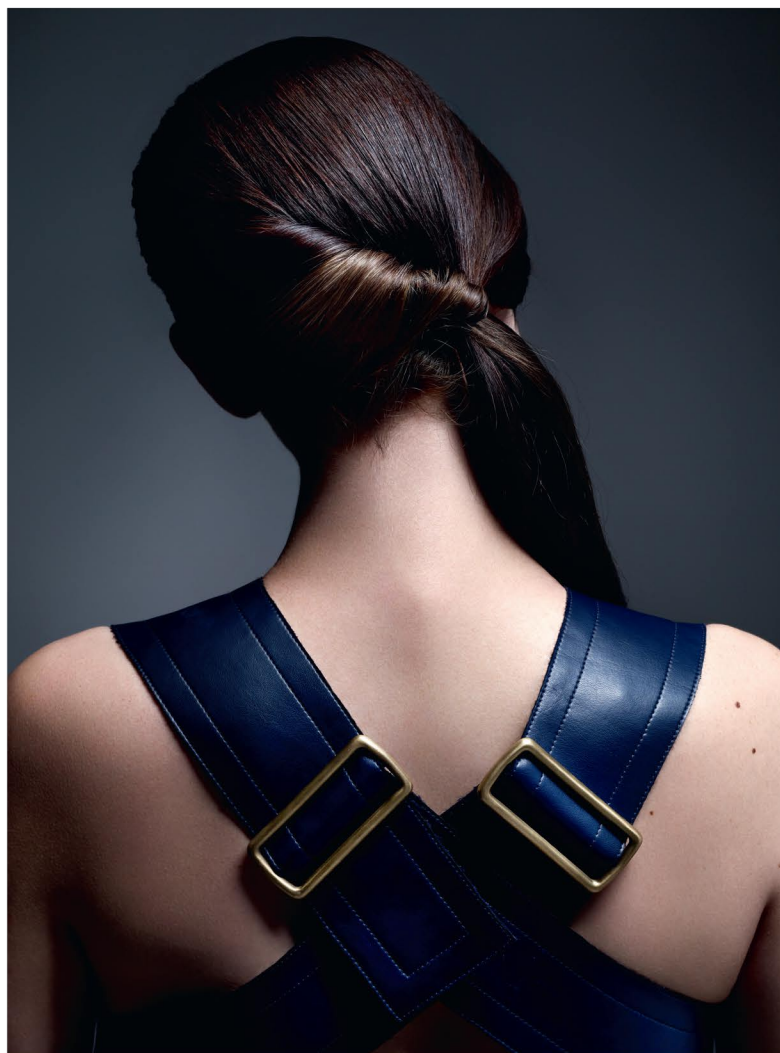


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atie McGrath has broken the cardinal rule of being a celebrity – she’s 15 minutes early. Walking into a north London studio with her ebony hair hidden under a knitted beanie, in a plain black tee, jeans and Ray-Bans, she looks so inconspicuous it takes me a while to realise who she is. But the second the shades are lowered, and you’re confronted with those huge jade-green eyes and heart-shaped Victorian heroine face, you can see in an instant why directors have been falling over themselves to cast her in fantasy fairy-tale roles. Best known for playing Morgana in BBC’s *Merlin* (“I owe everything to that role,” she says), Katie is just about to grace our TV screens in a new production of *Dracula*. Based on Bram Stoker’s original gothic horror novel and set in Victorian London, it’s bound to appeal to the vampire-obsessed *Twilight* generation. “It’s a spectacle like only a British period backed by American money can be,” she says – “lush, fantastical, wonderful, dark and gritty all rolled into one.”

Does she channel the gothic vibe off screen too? “How would I describe my style? Lazy!” she says. “I love clothes, but when you dress up for a living and you’re so perfectly put together on set, you feel like you’re never going to live up to that in real life. So it’s big sunglasses, all in black, easy – I’m the least girlie girl ever.” That’s surprising, given her enthusiasm at our shoot today. “I’m not actually the world’s biggest fan of photo shoots, but I fake confidence until I feel it, and having a top stylist like James [Rowe] do my hair was great – he’s so chilled and relaxed. My favourite look was the braids – so perfect for a party – and it makes a nice change to my everyday hair. It’s permanently tied up away from my face!” Does she enjoy getting made up? “I was a make-up artist for over a year, and I still do all my mates’ make-up when we go out. If I’m a bit low, then



having a play with make-up always makes me feel better. But it never felt like a permanent career – nothing did until I got into acting,” she says.

An accidental career move, she was working as a wardrobe assistant on *The Tudors* when she was encouraged by the show’s producers to approach agents about acting. “I realised I’d found my calling,” she says. “It’s crazy, because I was crew on *The Tudors*, where Jonathan Rhys Meyers was the lead and, six years later, I’m acting opposite him in *Dracula!*” Is he as dark and brooding as he looks? “He’s become a good friend,” she says. “We were lucky on *Dracula*; there were lots of Irish actors – me, Jonny and Vic [Smurfit] – so there’s a nice sense of being home when you’re far away.”

“Home” is County Wicklow in Ireland, “the most beautiful place on the planet” according to Katie. Does she miss it? “I’ve learned that wherever I am in the world, I have to make it my home,” she says. “I take stacks of photos with me. Photos and Barry’s Tea – the best tea ever; you can only get it in Ireland – and I can feel at home anywhere.”

So what does Ireland’s hottest new export have planned for the future? “The character I’d most love to play is Catherine the Great of Russia. She started life as a minor German princess and ended up ruling the largest nation on earth. It just goes to show you should never underestimate anybody.” No chance of that, Katie.

PHOTOGRAPHER ASSISTED BY FRASER TYRIE. DIGITAL OPERATOR: ELLIOTT WILCOX. HAIR BY JAMES ROWE AT D+V MANAGEMENT USING L'ORÉAL PARIS. MAKE-UP BY MAKI TANAKA. MAKE-UP BY LIZ MARTINS AT FRANK AGENCY USING L'ORÉAL PARIS. NUDE MAGIQUE AND COLOR RICHE. NAILS BY SABRINA GAYLE AT LMC WORLDWIDE USING ESSE. FASHION ASSISTANT ANNA ELIOTT. SHOT AT AND WITH THANKS TO LOFT STUDIOS. OPENING SPREAD, FROM LEFT: SATIN TOP, £520, PORTS 1961 (PORTS1961.COM); CRYSTAL EMBELLISHED CHROME NECKLACE, £420, CHRISTOPHER KANE FOR ATELIER SWAROVSKI (GETLAB.COM). WOOL CRÉPE DRESS, £1,165, MOSCINO (MOSCINO.COM). SECOND SPREAD, FROM LEFT: WOOL AND SILK CRÉPE COAT, £1,850, ROLAND MOURRET (ROLANDMOURRET.COM); WOOL AND SILK CRÉPE JACKET, £2,100, VICTORIA BECKHAM (NET-A-PORTER.COM); GOLD-PLATED METAL NECKLACE, £675, LANVIN (LANVIN.COM). LATEX TOP, £252, ALEXIS BARRELL (AVENUE32.COM); 9CT GOLD AND DIAMOND RINGS, ALL FROM A SELECTION, ALL ANNINA VOGEL (ANNINAVOGEL.CO.UK); PVC TOP, £881, CALVIN KLEIN COLLECTION (CALVINKLEIN.COM).