



# Double Fantasy

The adorably sexy Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen are billion dollar tween queens. Now, with *Full House* a distant memory and their first film, *New York Minute*, about to hit screens, they're aiming to conquer the rest of us.

By Brooke Hauser • Photographs by Tierney Gearon

BABY-LICIOUS:  
"I have sexy moments," says Ashley (left).  
"But I don't consider myself a sex symbol."

he first thing you should know about the Olsen twins: NEVER call them the Olsen twins. When referring to the mini-moguls, who are

among the youngest (and cutest) self-made millionaires in U.S. history, it's best to address them as Mary-Kate and Ashley, or simply the Girls. Offenders of this cardinal rule will be severely punished, as it is written into their contracts. Why? "It's just, like, uncomfortable," Ashley says of the tag that's been affixed to their image ever since they started sharing the role of Michelle on TV's *Full House* when they were nine months old. "No-nuh-no," Mary-Kate says, hand splayed like a stop sign. "It's RUDE. I'll say it. If someone comes up to me and says, 'Hey, are you the Olsen twins?' I'm

like, 'No.' 'Are you Ashley?' 'No.' 'Mary-Kate?' " Forgetting to be perky, she pauses for a caustic, very un-Olsenlike effect. " 'Yeah.' "

No one has any trouble telling them apart today, at PREMIERE's photo shoot at a sun-baked location in the forgotten town of Whittier, California. Mary-Kate recently colored her hair a dusky reddish-brown and even dyed her lashes to match. "It's not like I'm trying to make a statement or anything," she says, her voice also a shade deeper than her sister's NutraSweet lilt. Nevertheless, the message is loud and clear: At 17, the Olsens don't want to be a two-headed child act. Nor do they want to be the punch line to yet another twins joke. ("We saw that *Onion* article about the third, deranged Olsen twin," Mary-Kate says, rolling her eyes.)

Still, even for Mary-Kate and Ashley—who, by the way, are fraternal, not identical—it's hard to break out of the Doublemint mold. They speak in the collective "we" and finish each other's sentences. Ask them if they think they look alike, and you'll get a simultaneous "Not at all!"

It's common knowledge among their fans (predominantly girls between the ages of 4 and 14, and guys who are, well, a bit older) that Ashley is the nice, responsible one, and Mary-Kate is somewhat of a rebel. What their insatiable tween and teen consumers may not realize is that the Olsens are worth \$150 million each. Last year their company, Dualstar Entertainment Group, grossed more than \$1 billion in global retail for products ranging from chart-topping kid vids (the most successful direct-to-video franchise of all time) to clothing and cosmetics, part of their mary-kateandashley brand featured at Wal-Mart. Recently, *The Hollywood Reporter* named them among the most powerful women in the industry. Pretty impressive considering they're not even old enough to vote.

Their marketability stems from the fact that they are as likable as they are iconic. In the nearly 50 videos that they've made—most feature a half-baked plot in which they play adversarial siblings who wind up being best friends—they're pretty, but not too pretty; good students, but not ridiculously accomplished; popular, but adorably awkward. In short, they are everygirl. Squared.

This month, they bring their sister act to the big screen with their feature film debut, *New York Minute*, which marks another monumental occasion: In the credits, Ashley's name is listed first. In the \$40 million action comedy that they coproduced with Denise Di Novi (who last teamed with *Minute* director Dennie Gordon on the teen flick *What a Girl Wants*, starring Amanda Bynes), Ashley plays—who else?—Jane, a straight-A student and captain of the cheerleading squad, and Mary-Kate proves her moxie as riot grrrl Roxey.

Despite their own bland filmography, the Olsens' knowledge of movies is surprisingly eclectic, thanks in part to a cinema class offered at their elite San Fernando Valley private school, Campbell Hall. "So far, we've watched *Network*, *On the Waterfront*, *Bamboozled*. And I LOVED *Wag the Dog*," Ashley says, in between mouthfuls of egg whites and granola, and swigs of a Starbucks venti nonfat latte that's practically taller than she is. For *New York Minute*, she continues, "we really wanted a Christopher Guest-like feel. It was hard because Warner Bros. wanted more mainstream, and we tried as much as we could to make it offbeat."

Ironic, isn't it? For more than a decade, Mary-Kate and Ashley, whose smiling sunny faces appear on Wal-Mart price tags in nearly 3,000 stores across the country, have sold middle-of-the-road: guaranteed mediocrity, or your money back. But they've made baby steps toward the edginess they idealize. In addition to casting recovering drug addict Jack Osbourne as a band manager (Mary-Kate's idea), they personally called Eugene Levy's manager to request that the cheesy folk singer from *A Mighty Wind* play an overzealous truant officer in their film. "Not only was it a really sweet thing to do, it was a really smart thing to do," says Levy, who signed on shortly afterward.

Although it's hard to tell whether Mary-Kate and Ashley are really making such decisions themselves or are merely pawns of one of the most successful marketing machines in recent history, director Gordon believes the former to be true. "People frequently make the mistake of underestimating these girls. They think, 'What do a couple of 17-year-olds know?'" she says.

"Well, you'd be a moron not to listen to them. They really know their business."

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Eighteen weeks, 12 hours, and 55 minutes: As of 11:05 A.M. on February 7, 2004, that's how much time is left until Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen turn 18. The girls know about the countdown websites, and the idea of hundreds of thousands of guys around the world anticipating their legality makes their noses crinkle in disgust. "I hope it's not serious—I mean, I don't consider myself hot or cool or anything," says Ashley, her lips so glossy you can see your reflection in them. "I'm just a dork," she declares for the 80th time today.

Of course, the milestone that matters most is the countdown to when the Olsens become copresidents of Dualstar. Though the sisters already have absolute "yes or no" power when it comes to their products, they will be officially taking the reins alongside CEO Robert Thorne, who created the company for them in 1993. Insisting that baby Michelle was the main reason why America tuned in to watch *Full House* every week, Thorne gets credit for boosting the twins' wages from scale to \$150,000 apiece per episode and launching what would eventually become their kid-video empire. A marketing svengali, he then turned a novelty act into a Hollywood commodity when he crowned the girls executive producers at age six.

By the time they were seven, the Olsens had recorded *Our First Video*, which soared to the top of *Billboard*'s music-video chart and featured songs like the reggae-inspired "Broccoli and Chocolate," about anthro-



TWIN PEEK: "We're in this transitional stage," says Mary-Kate (left). "Everyone's waiting for us to fail."

pomorphic groceries that fall in love. Says Michael Pagnotta, the girls' rep and a music publicist who has worked with Prince and the Cure, "*Our First Video* established that there was a direct-to-video market for kids—you didn't have to be a purple dinosaur."

Since then, the Olsens have filmed everything from a singing detective series (including such titles as *The Case of the Sea World Adventure*) to travel adventures like *How the West Was Fun* and *When in Rome*. Says Pagnotta, "The weirdest crossover point was when a couple of the guys from Depeche Mode who have daughters started asking me to funnel Mary-Kate and Ashley videos their way."

The Olsens now employ nearly 80 full-time staffers in nine countries around the world. "We have a development department, photo department, design department, legal and business affairs department. . . ." Thorne trails off. "Do you know how many times I've done this interview? No less than 5,000." Much like that other almighty force, the Death Star, Dualstar—with its plush Century City headquarters, where the staff eats popcorn and hot sauce around the clock while working on all things Olsen, including the *New York Minute* trailer and mary-kateandashley.com updates—has set its sights on nothing less than world domination of the tween market and beyond.

STYLISTS: CHRISTINA EHRLICH AND ESTEE STANLEY/HAIR: MARGARET/MAKEUP: LESLIE LIGHT/FOOT: THIS PAGE: MARY-KATE: JEREMY/JENNIFER/KAPRI/MAN/WOMEN: ASHLEY: TONY/KRISTINA/BEET/MISSONI/JENNIFER/KAPRI/MAN/MARY-KATE: TONY/PHOTO: SPREAD/ASHLEY: OWENS/MUJI/SHOES: JIMMY CHOO/JEWELRY: KAPRI/MAN/MARY-KATE: TONY/PAUL FOSTER/FRANKLIN/MIKE/ROKI/KAPPOSS/JENNIFER/MAN

## Olsens

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of ten-year-old girls or a confused thirtysomething male.

Undoubtedly, they'll be the main attraction when they start college this fall at New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. (Until then, Mary-Kate and Ashley will continue dividing their time between their divorced parents: Dave, a commercial real estate developer, and Jarnette, a former ballerina.) In an attempt to fashion a modicum of a normal college experience, they've opted to share a house in Greenwich Village. "I'd rather deal with the paparazzi than kids our age who are just being obnoxious," says Mary-Kate, quick to add, "Not that all kids are obnoxious—I'm a kid."

Sitting cross-legged in the grass, Mary-Kate and Ashley look like typical freshmen in an outdoor seminar, only they're fielding more-loaded questions, like about failure, an experience that's completely foreign to them at this point. "I think everything happens for a reason so there's no such thing as 'fail.' Like the word 'fail,' I just hate it," Mary-Kate says, and winces. "I *hate* 'hate.' 'Hate' is a horrible word."

In general, neither girl likes to talk about the future. They deflect questions about boyfriends (Ashley dates Columbia University football player Matt Kaplan, and Mary-Kate recently started seeing movie mogul Jeffrey Katzenberg's son David, who, interestingly enough, is also a twin) and upcoming projects. And while they are open to the idea of separate careers in both commercial films and independents like Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (hey, it could happen: "Don't tell me that anyone thought the guy from *Pumping Iron* was going to be governor," Thorne says), right now they're more excited about college.

"I want to study film and psychology, but who knows. . . ." says Ashley, who compared her life to a Jackson Pollock painting in her application essay.

"And I want to study a lot of things that I never had a chance to," Mary-Kate says, her blue-green eyes as big as fishbowls. "I want to go to culinary school, I want to take photography, I want to do art, I want to study abroad." She's less eager to talk about her college essay, perhaps wary that it could make her the butt of yet another Olsen Twins joke.

Suddenly shy, she lowers her gaze and plays with a leaf in the grass, deciding to trust what she knows she can't control. "I took a lyric out of a Ben Harper song and related it to my life," she says. Not bothering to look up, she quotes Harper's "Diamonds on the Inside," speaking so quickly it's hard to make out the words: "'When you have everything, you have everything to lose.'"