

KILLER



INSTINCTS

As designers channel film-noir-inspired looks for fall, Lea Michele embraces an equally risky—and slightly sinister—mood in Fox's *Scream Queens*. Watch the actress go full-on femme fatale in the season's darkest, sexiest styles, then listen up as she reflects on her most dramatic role yet: herself.

BY EMILY ZEMLER PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC RAY DAVIDSON

LEA MICHELE: SINGER, ACTRESS, HOTTIE...WITCH?

Perhaps, if you look at her family tree. The 29-year-old recently discovered that her great-great-great-grandmother had been an apothecary witch. "She'd come up with oils and scents and tea bags for people who were sick. Meanwhile"—cue the eerie music—"I douse myself with oils every single day, to the point where people at *Glee* would be like, 'You smell like a green tea bag. What's wrong with you?'"

Ready for the even creepier Shyamalanian twist? The photographer at Lea's *Women's Health* cover shoot divulges—before Lea arrives, before we know about the witch thing—that the ornate Los Angeles manse we're in is a rumored site of the legendary, still-unsolved Black Dahlia murder from 1947. What?! Is *The Shining*'s Danny gonna roll through on his trike too?

Danny never shows (phew), but when Lea does, she embraces the dramatic clothes and vibe with a giant metaphorical hug that speaks to her readiness to try new things. Take *Scream Queens*, the college-based slasher satire from *American Horror Story* creators Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuck (who also happen to be her bosses from *Glee*). "This show is definitely a lot darker, and I'm excited to play that," Lea says, completely convinced that her character might just be a certifiable psycho. "I was reading scripts the other day and thought, *So, gonna go turn some lights on...*"

The role is a massive departure from the bubbly, wide-eyed girl she played for six years on *Glee*, but Lea isn't afraid of what's potentially lurking around the corner. Rather, she's energized by it—for the same reason her ancestral discovery thrills her. "It's the coolest thing ever," Lea beams, curled up in an armchair sipping a freshly brewed cup of (what else?) green tea. "You ask all these questions, and you could be a princess...or a witch. It's an opportunity to look deeper and find something you didn't know was there."

FROM GLEE TO GORE

When her time as choir-diva-turned-Broadway-ingenue Rachel Berry was winding down, Murphy came to Lea with an intriguing proposition: "All he said to me was 'neck brace,' and I was like, 'Done!'" Enter Hester, a frizzy-haired, scoliosis-afflicted sorority pledge with more than a few screws loose. "She's literally a nut job," Lea enthuses. "I just got new scripts in the mail, and they're so f-cking hilarious. There's a crazy side to Hester that's very conniving and strategic."

Juxtapose IRL Lea—today, seductively posing in slinky dress after slinky dress—with the '90s-tracksuit-wearing hot mess she's playing on TV... and it's difficult to reconcile. Of getting into her alter ego's ultra-dorky persona, she says, "It's really been about finding gestures that don't look too overdone. I've drawn so much from Kristin Wiig and Gilda Radner—women who are comfortable in their bodies, who can be awkward and funny but not cheesy."

Body language aside, a fair amount of making-under has also helped Lea tap into her inner fug. Rather than spending hours in a folding chair getting perfectly coiffed, the New York-born, New Jersey-raised actress—admittedly "not a makeup person" to begin with—now shows up to set mere minutes before she's due, hair unwashed and abundant natural curls in full effect. "We fill my eyebrows in to make them bushier—that's it," she says. "Our crew includes a lot of the same people from *Glee*, and no one recognized me at first."

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

Once you get past the physical changes, there's another striking distinction between Lea's past and present gigs: It's the first time she'll be in a starring role without singing. She realizes that might disappoint her fans, but to her, the separation is a relief; it's given her the needed clarity to develop her second album, due out next year.

SULTRY SURPRISE

Now here's a plot twist: Even a high-neck, long-sleeve dress registers as sexy when it's made of lace. Heighten the suspense some more with a pair of peep-toe platforms.

Misha Collection dress, \$273, mishacollection.com.au; Diane von Furstenberg shoes, \$375, dvf.com; John Hardy necklace, \$795, johnhardy.com; Anil Arjandas ring, anilarjandas.us





“LOOKING BACK, I WAS TRYING TO FIT A CERTAIN MOLD.”

“When I started working on [my first album] *Louder*, I knew what I wanted to do, but because I was singing different artists every week [on *Glee*], they were ingrained in my head,” she says, adding that she also felt pressure to “sound a certain way” and mimic other pop artists. “I find myself to be such an advocate for being yourself, but looking back, I was trying to fit a certain mold.” (As one harsh critic put it, *Louder* “straddles the line between Katy Perry and Celine Dion.”)

This time around, Lea is making sure her own voice and sound come through. “If it’s theatrical and coming back to my Broadway and Barbra [Streisand] roots, maybe that’s what it’ll be. And if it’s more pop, it’ll be my version,” she states emphatically. For her, it’s all about the experience and opportunity to try things one way, and then do them again totally differently.

WRITER, UNBLOCKED

A sophomore album isn’t Lea’s only side hustle. She’s now expanding the “author” section of her already robust résumé, with her just-released second book, *You First*, a journaling workbook. “I’m not the greatest writer,” Lea insists. “I always wanted to do it, but there was definitely a little self-doubt.” Key phrase: a little. Even if she won’t cop to being a natural wordsmith, Lea acknowledges that she knows a thing or two about setting and achieving goals. Case in point? The list she wrote seven years ago while in the Broadway musical *Spring Awakening*: “It was like, ‘Get a TV show. Move to L.A. Record an album. Get a publicist.’ Check, check, double check. “Yes, I’ve had a lot of blessings come my way, but a lot of it was me

making it happen,” she says. Now she wants to give other women the tools to turn their own aspirations into reality.

Though she’s been a firm believer in manifesting things through writing, actual journaling was still a stretch for the petite brunette. In fact, it was a practice she gave her *Spring Awakening* costar and BFF Jonathan Groff a ton of crap for even doing: “Every night, he’d sit in his dressing room for an extra 45 minutes and write, and I’d say, ‘What the f-ck are you writing about? We do the same show every time!’ He’d tell me, ‘I wanna look back and know what I’ve learned and where I’ve come from.’ And I would say, ‘Whatever dude—I wanna go watch *So You Think You Can Dance* and eat cheese.’” (Hi, so do we.)

But the more she thought about it, the more she realized that she would regret not chronicling all the crazy-amazing experiences she’s had. “I was thinking about that as I drove here today, like, *Dude—you met the President! What the hell?*” (Lea performed at the 2010 White House Easter Egg Roll.) Now she spends plane rides jotting down song lyrics, memories, and, of course, all the tidbits she’s gleaned from quizzing her parents about the family tree.

These moments of introspection have also been a way to help process some of the tougher experiences she’s had, like losing boyfriend Cory Monteith to an overdose in 2013. Between writing and taking time for herself (away from the paparazzi lenses snapping her every move), Lea was able to reconnect with what she wanted and needed. “Everyone is going to experience some sort of hill in their life, but when you get to the other side, you feel better and stronger,” she says. “It takes a lot of work and time with yourself to find that voice.”

That said, Lea is careful to point out that this habit of self-reflection doesn’t mean she endlessly ruminates on the past; in fact, she doesn’t even keep every journal she finishes. “Sometimes, when I’m done with one, I throw it away—if the energy is like...” she says, making a snapping noise, as if she’s shutting her own director’s clapboard. Next challenge, that’s your cue.

FLAIR FOR DRAMA

Punch up an all-black look by playing with textures. Here, our damsel pits a peekaboo knit top with voluminous sleeves against flirty laser-cut silk shorts.

REDValentino top, \$750, redvalentino.com; DKNY Intimates bra, \$42, macys.com; Clover Canyon shorts, \$187, shopbop.com; Astley Clarke necklace, astleyclarke.com; Walters Faith bracelet, waltersfaith.com



So...About That Bod

Grueling days spent at the mercy of a personal trainer, you wonder? Eating a single lettuce leaf for lunch? Nope and nope! Lea's approach is totally DIY—and reasonable—so feel free to crib her tips on staying lithe and toned.

• HIKING

"I'm really close with Becca [Tobin], who was on *Glee* with me, and we go hiking all the time," she says. "I hike on trails about four times a week; I love being outside." Her costar isn't the only one she turns to for an alfresco workout partner. Lea recently recruited boyfriend Matthew Paetz, a friend, and her pal's fiancé for a wellness retreat in Malibu that involved scaling advanced trails for four days straight. "The feeling on day one was like, 'I did iiiit! I am the strongest person on the planeeeeet!'" she says. "Day three or four was more like, 'I'm in pain. This is horrible. Dear god, just get to that bush. Get to the bush, then get to the rock...'"

• HOT YOGA

"[Becca and I] also do hot yoga; I like exercises that have a little spirituality to them," says Lea. "It's the greatest combination of meditation, detox, and a fantastic workout."

• PILATES

"Emma Roberts introduced me to Pilates in New Orleans," she says. While in the Big Easy filming *Scream Queens*, the costars have been hitting up Romney Pilates Center (romneypilates.com) multiple times a week, switching up sessions on the Cadillac or reformer machines with floor-based workouts using BOSU balls or TRX straps.

• GOOD FOOD

Lea has always had a healthy perspective on food and never relied on it as a stress soother—but she doesn't follow a strict diet, either. Whether she's keeping vegan (at home), vegetarian (often on the road), or neither (if she can get hold of responsibly raised meat), Lea focuses on quality ingredients, especially when she's dabbling in her two biggest vices: wine and cheese. "I love eating, but I eat what fuels me," she says. "And if it's not gonna fuel me, then it'll fuel my soul—like pizza." ■

BUILDING A MYSTERY

Left: A good heroine has depth and complexity, as does this mini, which tricks out a stretch-crepe fabric with real ostrich feathers. Throw on a graphic hematite pendant for balance.

Elizabeth and James dress, \$595, saks.com; Pushmataaha necklace, \$220, pushmataaha.com

CAT CLASS

Right: Even Hitchcock couldn't handle the tension happening here: plunging top, masculine-inspired dress, and a choker that's as dark as it is dazzy. Me-ow.

Karolyn Pho dress, \$320, karolynpho.com for information; Vitamin A halter maillot, \$176, mollybrownswimwear.com; Alexis Bittar choker, \$275, alexisbittar.com

For complete shopping information, see Where to Buy on page 163.



Fashion editor: Jacqueline Azria. Hair: John D for Tresemmé/Forward Artists. Makeup: Melanie Inglessis for Make Up For Ever/Forward Artists. Manicure: Jenna Hipp for Beauty's Most Wanted/Nailing Hollywood. Prop styling: Ward Robinson/Wooden Ladder.