

Dress by **Carolina Herrera** (\$4,390).
Carolina Herrera, 954 Madison Avenue,
212-249-6552. Earrings by **Alex Woo** (\$988).
Visit alexwoo.com. Ring by **Christopher Designs**
(\$2,691). Available at christopherdesigns.com.
Shoes by **Stuart Weitzman** (\$250). Stuart Weitzman,
625 Madison Avenue, 212-750-2555.



WALKING on sunshine

Coming off a year filled with incredible highs (and one terrible low), *Law & Order: SVU* star **Mariska Hargitay** is now embracing the long-awaited love of her life, her blossoming star status, and the power to use her celebrity to make a difference.

by Lizzie Simon • photographs by Jack Guy

styling by Mia Morgan
hair by Luca Blandi for Oscar Blandi Salon & Hair Care
makeup by Kristofer Buckle for Artistsbytimothypriano.com



Top (\$275) and jeans (\$228), both by **Tory Burch**. *Tory Burch, 257 Elizabeth Street, 212-334-3000.* Watch by **Cartier** (price on request). *Cartier, 653 Fifth Avenue, 212-753-0111.* Bangles by **Roberto Coin** (\$3,800 each). *Visit robertocoin.com.* Long necklace by **Me&Ro** (\$4,955). *Me&Ro, 917-237-9215.* Short necklace by **Links of London** (\$760). *Links of London, 402 West Broadway, 212-343-8024.*

OPPOSITE PAGE: Coat by **Dolce & Gabbana** (\$3,500). *Dolce & Gabbana, 825 Madison Avenue, 212-249-4100.* Earrings by **Links of London** (\$2,200). *Links of London, 402 West Broadway, 212-343-8024.* Ring by **Christopher Designs** (\$3,411). *Visit christopherdesigns.com.*



Mariska Hargitay enters the room, and it's as though someone has brought in a bouquet of daffodils—she's so pretty, bright, and hopeful that any spectator suddenly feels a heightened sense of optimism. She's trying on a yellow dress (and wearing it stupendously) while a team of stylists and photographers look on approvingly. Her cheeks are glowing and her slender figure shows curves aplenty. Hargitay doesn't just look fabulous; she looks like she *feels* fabulous.

She certainly has plenty to be upbeat about: In 2006, the 43-year-old actress won an Emmy for her role as Detective Olivia Benson on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, signed a blockbuster two-year deal to remain on the show, and, on June 28, gave birth to son August Miklos Friedrich Hermann, her first child with her husband of two years, actor Peter Hermann (whom she met on the *Law & Order: SVU* set when he first appeared as a recurring character, lawyer Trevor Langan).

"I think I was just so scared of being a mom that I waited until I was ready. Now I think, *Thank God*. The day I met Peter, I was like, *That's my husband*. I've always been a late bloomer, but it's always worked out for me."

Yet not every event in the past year has been cause for celebration. In September the actress lost her father, former Mr. Universe Mickey Hargitay, to cancer. (Her mother, Hollywood bombshell Jayne Mansfield, was killed in a car accident in 1967 while three-year-old Mariska was in the back seat.) And as glamorous as her "Queen of Primetime Television" moniker may sound, stars on Hargitay's level work grueling 90-hour weeks—so the two-year commitment she's just made may prove to be brutal on the things she values most, her marriage and family.

But surprisingly enough, even while acknowledging the new personal and career heights she's achieved (Hargitay is reportedly the highest-paid actress on primetime television), she still refers to herself as a "late bloomer." Well, even a daffodil needs time to blossom.

GOTHAM: You just signed on to do two more years of *Law & Order: SVU*. Your fans were elated at the news. How did you feel about it?

MARISKA HARGITAY: Well, you know, I went back and forth. It was really nerve-wracking. I had my son at the beginning of our hiatus, but after three months I was ready to go back. I realized I wasn't done, and that I loved the character so much.

G: You grew up in California, but does New York now feel like home?

MH: It does! We shoot at all of these fantastic locations, so I've gotten to know the city. Now every street I go on, I'm like, "We shot here." And my husband is a walker, so when we dated, we walked everywhere—and I mean, 50 blocks. That was a big deal for me, coming from California, where we don't walk anywhere. It was our courtship. For me, it was so romantic.

G: You were 42 when you got married. Why didn't you marry in your 20s or 30s?

MH: I just wanted to be married once, and I wanted to be *really* ready. I had a shrink who told me, "You have to find out where you're going, and then find somebody to go with you." In my 20s I was changing so much. And maybe because I lost my mother at such a young age and have always suffered so much emotionally from that, being a mother was huge to me and I didn't want to mess it up. I think I was just so scared of being a mom that I waited until I was ready. Now I think, *Thank God*. The day I met Peter, I was like, *That's my husband*. I've always been a late bloomer, but it's always worked out for me.

G: Are you anxious about balancing motherhood and a career?

MH: August comes to work with me every day. And I feel like I'm married to the greatest guy in the world—he's just so supportive, he's made it work. Peter comes to me on set on Friday night at six o'clock and we start our weekend, even if I'm at work until 3 A.M.

G: You had two celebrity parents—what insight did that give you regarding raising healthy kids in a star environment?

MH: I think the most important thing is to understand that everyone is the same. Everyone deserves to be treated respectfully. Sometimes celebrities are treated as though they're special, but I think it's important for kids to understand that it's temporary, that you should never, ever, ever, ever take it for granted, and that you should give back as much as you get.

When I was growing up we traveled a lot, and one of the greatest things my parents did for me was take me to live with my Hungarian family. My parents showed us that the rest of the world doesn't live like we do in America. That really stamped me as a kid. I was like, *Why are we so lucky? Why do people let the water run when other people don't have water?* Children who see that at an early age have a different understanding of humanity. I'm going to do everything I can to show August that the way some of us live in this country is not the way the rest of the world lives.

G: We were sorry to learn that your father died in September. Has grieving been different than you anticipated?

MH: A little bit. My father was sick, he had cancer, so I did a lot of my grieving before he passed away. Without a doubt, it's the most devastating thing that's ever happened to me, but I will say [she pauses and begins to cry, then starts speaking again in a soft, high voice]... the one thing that's different is that I know my dad is with me all the time, and that he did everything he set out to do, so I'm OK. If I can do half the job with August that he did with me, I'll feel like such a good parent.

G: On your website, *Mariska.com*, you get your fans involved with nonprofit organizations supporting women, the environment, and the world's poor. How did you manage to use your celebrity so constructively?

MH: People like cutters, bulimics, and motherless kids started writing to me, and I just thought, *Thank God the kids who are the most difficult to reach trust me, that they think I'm cool enough to talk to*. And so I wondered how I could help them have their own safe place, because that's what I want for everyone—to feel safe. I see my celebrity as an opportunity to educate and bring people together... and I'm not done with that yet. [G]

Law & Order: SVU airs Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on NBC.