

Sophia Loren's Advice:

SOPHIA LOREN was a picture of breath-taking beauty as she appeared in a Roman bath scene on the set of Samuel Bronston's \$16,000,000 epic, "The Fall of the Roman Empire."

She was dressed in yards of white silk, her coiffure had taken a hairdresser two hours to perfect, and \$150,000 worth of jewelry graced her ears and neck.

Yet when Sophia finished the scene and walked over to greet me, I couldn't help noticing what I had observed whenever we have been together: her appearance is anything but perfect. She's a bit on the heavy side. Her nose isn't exactly Roman—or Grecian. Her chin is small, her neck too thick, her lips too voluptuous.

And she's the first to admit it! "Even as a little girl I never felt pretty," she told me as we left the film set for lunch at a Roman restaurant. "I was too skinny then. People used to call me *stuzzicadenti*, which means 'toothpick' in Italian. I didn't look like the other girls my age. And today, Carlo (her husband, film producer Carlo Ponti) tells me not to wear brilliant colors. He says there's already too much of my body and that I should underemphasize it. That's why he prefers me in black dresses. I know that sometimes women look at me and think to themselves, 'What has she got?'"

Sophia insists that what is inside a person is more appealing than what the eye can see—and her love for Carlo Ponti illustrates her point. He is a head shorter than Sophia, bald, overweight, and almost twice her age. He can hardly be classified as a romantic-looking individual, yet Sophia's love for him is real—or she would have left him long ago.

NOT ONLY DOES SOPHIA know her faults, but she knows how to make virtues of them. Capitalizing on her appearance is but one example of her inbred shrewdness.

"I never thought I was pretty, unless someone told me I was. But I felt I could be interesting," she explained.

At first she went about it all wrong. "When I was in my early teens, I made myself up too much. Too much powder. The lipstick was too heavy, too dark. I know now that I was trying to hide behind a mask. It took me years to realize that a woman who is overly made up does it because she's basically unhappy. One day I looked at myself carefully and decided my eyes were my best feature, with emphasis away from my mouth, my nose, my forehead."

Over the years, Sophia has perfected her eye make-up to such a point that a rumor circulated through Rome that she had undergone an opera-

tion to slant her eyes in the catlike fashion that is her trademark!

While Sophia readily admits she is a bit overweight, it doesn't worry her. Another well-endowed Italian actress once remarked that Sophia had a neck like a giraffe. When told about it, Sophia smiled, "I like animals, don't you?"

Another time, when cautioned about her love for spaghetti (which she likes to wash down with red wine), Sophia came back with, "Don't you know that everything you see I owe to spaghetti?"

Curiously enough, since she doesn't feel restricted by her weight, no one else minds it, either. But it made her more aware of how to walk, sit, and move. She has learned to carry herself gracefully and, if necessary, majestically. A thinner Sophia would have been no match for Charlton Heston in "El Cid"—and she all but physically eclipsed bony, lanky Tony Perkins in "Five Miles to Midnight."

That Sophia knows her good angles and how to get the most out of them is apparent to anyone who has ever worked with her. A still photographer told me how Sophia once insisted she be photographed near a window so she could constantly check her appearance through her reflection in the glass. "Once I saw her running around the set adjusting light filters," the same photographer recalled. "She knows lighting just as well as any professional cameraman."

Make Your Faults

But Sophia is too smart in her relationship with photographers to offend them. She knows there are two things they can't stand: to have an actress "pose" for them and to be blamed for bad pictures that appear in print. A story once circulated in Hollywood about how Marlene Dietrich supposedly told a photographer that his pictures didn't turn out as well as they used to. He answered, "I'm sorry, ma'am, but the last time I took your picture I was 20 years younger." Sophia would never be caught in such a situation.

She issued an edict that accredited photographers could shoot all the pictures they wanted of her—provided she okayed the proofs. For instance, while Sophia and I lunched together, a photographer kept snapping pictures. Sophia was gulping down spaghetti as if it were her last meal—hardly a complimentary pose! But who knows? Out of the 20-some pictures taken, one might show the earthiness for which Sophia has become famous without revealing unflattering angles. No wonder she has become the darling of photographers! And no wonder her pictures are more relaxed, more natural than those of most stars—and that they get the widest possible circulation!

Another shortcoming which Sophia has turned to good advantage is her lack of a formal education. She had only nine years of schooling, and

during the early days of her career she felt embarrassed about it. "I used to laugh too loud and talk too much because I was ashamed to expose what I didn't know. But gradually I realized that, when I admitted what I didn't know or simply kept quiet, people went out of their way to explain things." Rather than think of her as ignorant, they were flattered by her eagerness to listen to them—particularly men!

"I became a sponge," she recalled. "I tried to soak up information from everyone and every place." Today she can hold her own in conversations with almost anyone.

Carlo Ponti probably has received more than his share of credit for Sophia's success. True, he discovered her for the movies after she won a Naples beauty contest and worked as a movie extra and photographers' model. But Sophia herself not only knows what is good for her but whom to listen to.

During her early days of stardom, Sophia was known only as a sex goddess who invariably emerged from oceans, rivers, or lakes with her clothes clinging tightly to her body, breathing heavily, her mouth open seductively. The result was good box office—and terrible reviews.

She knew that her career would go downhill once she reached the end of her twenties (she is 29 now). To survive, she had to concentrate on becoming a professional actress.

In the mid-1950s she decided to take acting lessons. "Don't you dare!" cried Vittorio de Sica, the actor-director who is a good friend of Ponti's. "What you need is a good script and direction. Just be yourself, be natural, and everything will be all right."

A few months later he proved his point when he directed her in "Gold of Naples," which became her first real hit as an actress. And of course it was de Sica's direction that helped her win an Academy Award for her performance in "Two Women." In that film, she wore no make-up, her hair was tousled as though it had been stirred with a stick, and her long legs (her best feature other than her eyes) were covered by long, droopy socks.

Your Virtues!

Another actress said she looks like a giraffe—but Sophia doesn't let a few shortcomings keep her from being one of the world's most exciting, exotic women

By PEER J. OPPENHEIMER