

CLAUDIA CARDINALE:



Stardom, Italian Style

By PEER J.
OPPENHEIMER

FOR THE FIRST TIME in almost a decade, Italy has produced a smoldering beauty who is likely to become a world-renowned personality like Sophia Loren. She's brown-eyed and brown-haired, 23-year-old Claudia Cardinale.

Recently I visited Claudia in Italy, and naturally I was struck by her sultry Mediterranean loveliness. But oddly enough, she also reminded me of an early-day Debbie Reynolds. Claudia's straightforwardness, sim-

plicity, and innocence would be surprising in Hollywood—but in Rome it came as an absolute shock!

This may not be accidental. Claudia is the careful product of a resourceful Italian producer, Franco Cristaldi,

who tutored and guided her with the utmost care and attention.

Claudia first came to public attention four years ago when she won the title, "Most Beautiful Italian Girl," in her native Tunis in North Africa. (Ac-

tually, she is of French and Italian origin.) First prize was a trip to Venice, and there she was spotted by Cristaldi, who put her under contract six months later.

When she returned to Italy, she

brought along her entire family—her father (a technical engineer), her mother, her younger sister, and her two brothers. Cristaldi installed them in one of his own villas, staffed with servants, a secretary, a publicist, and

a chauffeur, and promptly enrolled Claudia in an acting school in Rome. The latter brought fierce resistance from his protégée. "I stayed for a month," Claudia told me, "and then I quit. I simply could not become a tree.

That's what they asked me to do—grow and then fall and die like a tree. You call this 'the Method' in your country? I thought it was crazy."

Reassured by the tremendous success of her first picture, "Big Deal on Madonna Street," Cristaldi agreed that she could do without a formal acting education. Subsequent events have proved him right; she has won critical acclaim in 21 films—including "Bell' Antonio" opposite Marcello Mastroianni and "The Leopard" opposite Burt Lancaster. She currently is starring in "The Pink Panther" with David Niven, Peter Sellers, and Robert Wagner.

Claudia always had a mind of her own. As a teen-ager in Tunis, she was never allowed to go out by herself. "It just wasn't safe for young European girls," she recalls. "My parents were so concerned that when we were at our beach house, they had a servant girl sleep at the foot of my bed."

But Claudia's stubbornness was obvious to her parents at an early age. "When I was 15, it was fashionable to dress like a beatnik—you know, with black pull-over, black skirt, pony tail, and all that. But Mother refused to buy me black things, so I solved the problem by secretly dyeing a plaid skirt black and wearing it with a pull-over, which I also dyed."

Slanted eyes were in fashion, so Claudia pulled her eyes back every day. Since make-up was prohibited in the convent school she attended, she made up her eyes and eyebrows with a lead pencil the moment she left school.

CLAUDIA's provincial upbringing hardly prepared her for international stardom. So as his first step, Cristaldi hired a young woman from Greensboro, N.C., to be her tutor. Caroline Pfeiffer taught Claudia to speak almost flawless English, supervised her manners, and accompanied her on shopping trips. Even now, whenever Claudia leaves the house, she is accompanied either by a member of her family or by Caroline.

It seems hard to believe that a breath-takingly beautiful girl like Claudia could lead such a restricted life. I asked her about it when I visited her at the handsomely furnished farmhouse outside Rome where she makes her home. "It's easy," she said with a smile. "When I'm not working, I spend one week a month in Paris. It's not hard to get lost in the crowd there."

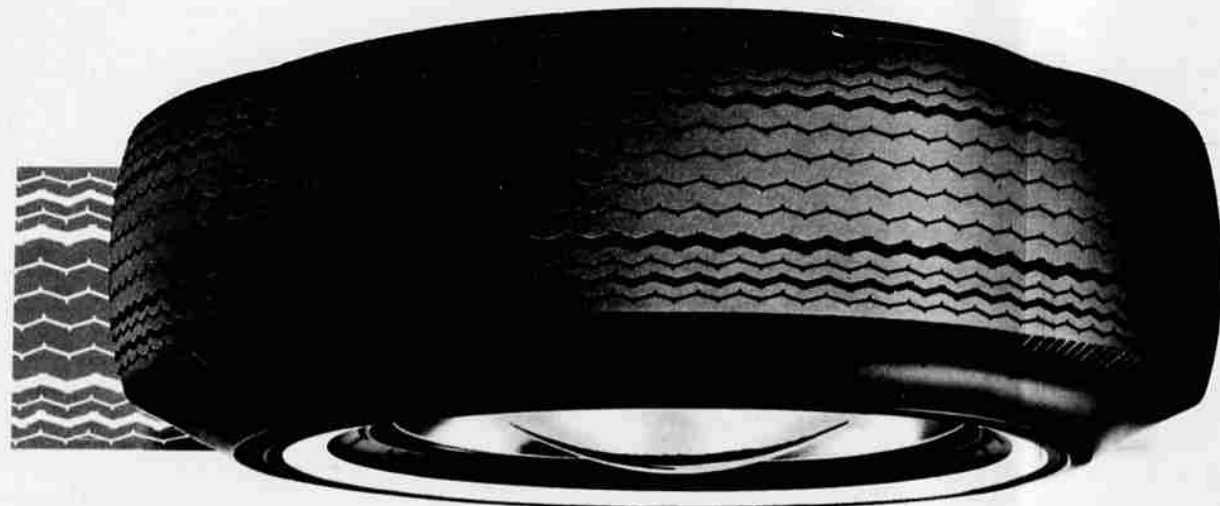
There was one question left in my mind before I said good-by. "Don't you want to get married?"

"Someday, but not soon," she said without hesitation.

"Does that mean you're too ambitious now?"

"If I weren't ambitious, I wouldn't be in pictures," she said frankly.

So smart, so frank, and so beautiful. Move over, Sophia, Gina, and Brigitte.



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