

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

# 'I PUT ON MOISTURIZER AND HOPE FOR THE BEST' HELEN MIRREN

THE OSCAR WINNER TALKS AGING GRACEFULLY, MISSING QUEEN ELIZABETH AND HER ADVENTURES IN CANADA

From her powerful roles to her exquisite fashions, Dame Helen Mirren never fails to make a dazzling impression. But catch her one-on-one and the legendary actress will be the first to admit that she came into her own relatively late in life.

"I was a dumpy little thing – absolutely hopeless!" the *Gosford Park* star, 78, says of her younger years. "I was a big francophile because the French were just so cool compared to the British at the time. They still are, aren't they? They're just so chic and elegant, and we're so chaotic by comparison."

Of course, chic and elegant are words that describe Helen herself. The actress, who's renowned for playing three British monarchs – including the late Queen, whom she knew personally – is a longtime L'Oréal Paris spokesperson and bona fide style icon. And yet, she still exudes an endearing down-to-earth vibe.

It helps that Helen and her husband of 25 years, director Taylor Hackford, 78, have swapped the bustle of London and the spotlight of Hollywood for a peaceful property in Lake Tahoe, Nev., which has been therapeutic

for her body and soul – and marriage, too. "You're constantly discovering, learning about the person you love, who suddenly, completely surprises you," she says of their secluded life. "You find depths of courage or patience or generosity that you just didn't know were there."

Recently, the *Golda* star made her way to Toronto to accept the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center's 2023 Humanitarian Award for her commitment to human rights and chatted with *Hello! Canada* about royals, Barbie dolls and her Oscar statuette.

**Welcome back to Canada! What's one of your fondest memories of being here?** I remember being in Quebec and going out on the frozen lake and how unbelievably cold it was. I had my first poutine in Quebec!

**What does this prestigious humanitarian award mean to you?** I feel incredibly honoured and undeserving and, as they say, humbled. I hate that word, but I do generally feel that, especially at this moment in time, when humanity seems to be so missing in action.

**You have a long-standing relationship with the Royal Family, both on and off the screen. How did the late Queen's passing affect you?** I had the great honour and pleasure of appearing before her shortly before she died. It was at the Royal Windsor Horse Show, and I was given a speech to say directly to her, basically thanking her for her service to the country. It was a very moving moment for me. She died not long after that and by then, I was back in America. I did really want to be in my home country at that time. It was the end of my history, in a way. I'm coming toward the latter days of my life, and I was an Elizabethan. She was there for the whole of my life, so it was a very, very important cultural moment.

**Back when he was Prince Charles, the King presented you with your damehood. What would Her Majesty think about how he's taken to his new role?** She wasn't rigid. She allowed people to do what they wanted to do within the context of a constitutional monarchy. She knew the rules attached to that.

But apart from that, she was very laissez-faire, and I think she would be like that about her son's reign so far. It's very early days.

**How does it feel to be a Dame?** I don't think about it, quite frankly! There was a moment where I wasn't sure whether to accept it or not. Both of my parents, unfortunately, had passed away by the time I was offered the honour [in 2003], but they were quite fierce Republicans. It's presented to you by a member of the Royal Family, but they're doing it as a representative of the country. You're being recognized by your country, so it was a very great honour. I asked around and everyone said, "Of course you must accept it!" So I did. It was very gratifying because my father was an immigrant to England, so as a daughter of an immigrant, I felt very proud.

**Speaking of royalty, we consider you a red-carpet queen. Do you have a favourite ensemble?** Sometimes I look back and see all these beautiful dresses that I was loaned and I can't even remember. I go, "Oh God, how beautiful that dress is!" I'm so very lucky because it's the artisanal quality of fashion that I love. And these beautiful pieces, they're museum pieces. To have the honour of wearing them for a brief period of time is great. I think of them as costumes more than fashion.

**What's your go-to outfit at home?** I wear jogging pants. I'm a big T-shirt person.

**That's fun! What are your other secrets for staying youthful?** I don't stay youthful at all! [Laughs] I always put moisturizer on and hope for the best. I do a little bit of yoga with YouTube – 10 or 15 minutes more or less every day. A famous British actor called John Gielgud [her co-star in 1979's *Caligula*] always said, "It's all in the spine, my dear – it's all in the spine," and he was absolutely right. It makes a huge difference, so I consciously try to sit up and stand up straight. I yo-yo between

'I am an Elizabethan. She was there for the whole of my life'

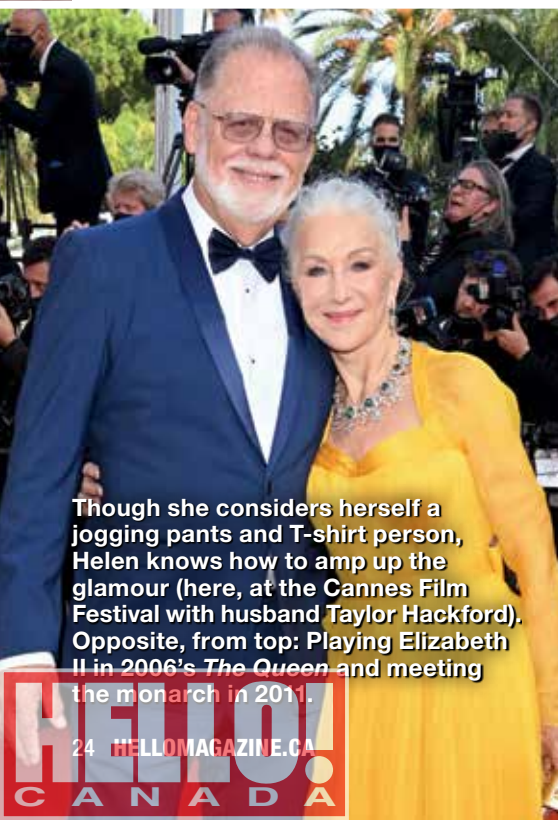


the same 10 pounds that go on and come off.

**It was a fun surprise to hear you narrate Barbie earlier this year. Did you own one of the dolls as a child?** Barbies didn't exist when I was young, but I had a doll that was Barbie-like. She was quite big, and she had very, very small breasts. And she wasn't a baby – I never wanted baby dolls. She was a young teenager-y doll. I called her Elizabeth. Not very inventive! [Laughs] One day, I cut all her hair off and then I tried to curl her hair. I put her too close to the fire and half her head melted away! But I still loved her.

**Your incredible performances have earned you the "triple crown" – Oscar, Emmy and Tony – plus countless other awards. Where do you keep your trophies?** My Tony and my Oscar are in London. My Oscar sits halfway up the stairs. It moves around. I think it's having a passionate affair with my SAG award! I keep finding them together and I don't remember putting them together. [Laughs] I'm sure they snuggle up to each other in the night. They're two rather good-looking boys.

INTERVIEW: SUZANNE WINTROB



Though she considers herself a jogging pants and T-shirt person, Helen knows how to amp up the glamour (here, at the Cannes Film Festival with husband Taylor Hackford). Opposite, from top: Playing Elizabeth II in 2006's *The Queen* and meeting the monarch in 2011.