



If you are sheltering under an umbrella of misinformation, you may assume that brains and beauty go together like chalk and cheese. Seen as an anomaly by the easily intimidated, it is this very marriage of intellect and aesthetic allure that has been simmering beneath the surface for years.

# *The Dark Star*

By Kasha Van Sant

**I**man might be known primarily for her beauty and secondarily as being wife of David Bowie, but she has feathers to her bow that set her apart as a dynamic businesswoman in her own right. As the Founder and CEO of IMAN Cosmetics, Fragrances and Skincare, she has found a niche in the market that tailors specifically for darker skins. Inspired to write a book dedicated to the needs of the darker skinned woman, 'The Beauty of Color' is unlikely to put a foot wrong.

"I wrote 'The Beauty of Color' as a visual tribute, celebration, and insider information for women from diverse backgrounds. It includes photos of celebrities – black, Asian, Latinas and multi ethnic – as well as everyday women representing so many countries and nationalities."

Iman began her modelling career in 1975 after being discovered by legendary photographer Peter Beard, whilst studying Political Science at Nairobi University. Vogue soon beckoned and Iman became an instant hit within the fashion world. As muse to designers such as Yves St Laurent, Versace, Calvin Klein and Donna Karan, her modelling career has spanned close to 16 years.

Iman was soon to discover that the most basic yet problematic aspect of her new career was to give birth to a germ of an idea: "When I started working professionally for high-end magazines in the 70s, I was subjected to this perplexing question from make-up artists: "Did you bring your foundation?" Even though I was one of the top models in my day, I never had an artist to do

my make-up at fashion shows – I always did my own.”

The cosmetics brand IMAN was launched in 1994, to great acclaim. With skincare and cosmetics including over 16 shades of foundation catering for the entire spectrum of women of colour, it is inevitable that this brand would be a runaway success. “All those years mixing and matching foundation led me to launch IMAN Cosmetics. Today I am the CEO of a global beauty brand and I consider it my life mission to create a new dialogue on beauty and self acceptance.”

It seems that all the hard work has paid off as Iman has been recognised as the creator of the best foundation range for black, Asian and mixed race skins (Instyle Best Beauty Buys). I was curious to know if this has been a tough task to achieve. “No, I think it was about time as IMAN Cosmetics is considered the best for all women of colour in the USA... We are just delighted with this acknowledgement.”

So how difficult has it been to be taken seriously on her own merit as opposed to being a renowned beauty?

“Not as difficult as people think. I was the first black to sign a cosmetics contract and it was with Revlon in the late 70s... I have been a model for almost 16 years and having been a woman of colour all my life and not getting good products, I knew what I was creating and it became an instant hit with beauty editors, celebrities as well as real women all over.”

Real women play a key role in Iman’s philosophy, but her message transcends beyond the external confines.

“I want to change the perception of beauty and challenge the narrow definitions of beauty. I see this as a life’s mission. In a way, it’s similar to a public servant because the objective is to enrich the lives of others and make the world a better place. When I came to the US, the beauty message was ‘America celebrates the girl next door’, and I said, ‘Not only has the girl next door changed, but the whole neighbourhood has changed.’”

It is very apparent that Iman strives for perfection and her drive comes from her mission. What keeps her going? Which part of her multi-dimensional

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career does she want to be remembered for?

“I hope my legacy will be my company and at the heart of it, the philosophy is to empower women to feel comfortable in their own skin. I’m focused on expanding the concept of beauty and empowering women to have the confidence that comes from feeling beautiful on the inside. That’s the legacy I want to leave behind. Also, I love what I do and I am passionate about the self-esteem and confidence it gives women.”

Salma Hayek, Vanessa Williams, Rosario Dawson, Naomi Campbell and Tyra Banks are just some of the names that have endorsed “The Beauty of Color”. They give their vote of confidence to the book which teaches readers how to work with skin care regimens and palettes targeted to their exact skin

tone and type. Iman adds,

“I hope readers will find ideas for using make-up as self expression.”

Iman has created a strong identity both in her personal and business life. Despite being a mother of two, wife to one of the most famous musicians on the planet and running a cosmetics empire, Iman is remarkably grounded. So, in life what matters to her the most?

“Family and friends, health and happiness.”

For those that know Iman, this is a very typical answer, and for those that do not, an insight into her background can shed light upon this attitude. Somali born Iman sought exile from revolutionary Somalia in Kenya.

“We were left with only the clothes on our backs,” she recalls.

One of five siblings, her first US modelling payouts were used to educate each of them, thus being a breadwinner of a sorts, and thereby cementing the familial bond. This pride translates to her relationship with her two daughters to whom ‘The Beauty of Color’ is dedicated.

For Iman, life seems to be full of a series of proudest moments, in her career, “opening the door for lots of amazing black beauties including Naomi



Campbell, Alek Wek, Tyra Banks and Kiara”, in her business it is her foundations that she is most proud of.

“My husband David gets the biggest kick out of women who flash me their IMAN Cosmetics compacts when we’re out. Foundation is the Holy Grail for women with skin of colour because it’s so hard to find the perfect match that gives us flawless coverage. Foundation is the one product that women will remain fiercely loyal to once they’ve found their perfect match.”

Speaking of perfect, has belonging to such a stylish duo helped?

“Not at all! We keep our professional life and personal life separate.”

So what about influencing David’s fashion sense?

“You’ve got to be kidding, right? The man invented style and cool!”

Indeed! I would have thought that being one of the most beautiful women in the world would bear a certain amount of pressure; coupled with her history and ethnicity, role model status is guaranteed. Is it a surprise?



“At times yes... it is a big responsibility.”

The woman who counts standing by her word as her best quality, and dislikes honesty in others, has definitely captured the heart of women. Children are not too far off her radar either if her outside interests are anything to go by.

“I am very involved with an organisation that is called KEEP A CHILD ALIVE and I am in the process of organising an event for them at the end of the year to help raise funds for getting cheaper drugs to AIDS victims, especially children in Africa. Have a look at the website [www.keepachildalive.org](http://www.keepachildalive.org)”

The Beauty of Color: The Ultimate Guide for Skin of Color (Putnam Penguin) is available from all good bookstores.

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