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POWER SEARCH

SHE SAID... WHY MARISKA HARGITAY HEARTS NEW YORK

LODGING

Four Seasons Hotel, very expensive, (212) 758-5700
Soho Grand, very expensive, (212) 965-3000

DINING

Babbo Ristorante e Enoteca, Italian, very expensive, (212) 777-0303

Bar Americain, American, expensive to very expensive, (212) 265-9700

Grimaldi's Pizzeria, Italian, inexpensive, (718) 858-4300

Marco & Pepe, New American/European, moderate, (201) 860-9688

Nobu, Japanese, very expensive, (212) 219-0500

Todd English's Olives, Mediterranean, very expensive, (212) 353-8345

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CELEBRATED WEEKEND

The Killer B's...

by Kevin Raub

WHAT PUTS A CALIFORNIA GIRL LIKE MARISKA HARGITAY IN A NEW YORK STATE OF MIND?

Bridges, Barneys, and Bar Americain

Mariska Hargitay is a born-and-bred Californian, but the way in which she is bullying me into saying her name correctly is so very East Coast. "It's Marishhhhhka! You know, like there's an H," she tells me with a hint of New York thuggery in her voice.



Yes, I'm afraid the Left Coast has lost this classic California girl, the daughter of quintessential 1950s bombshell Jayne Mansfield and actor Mickey Hargitay. It's not terribly surprising, given Mariska Hargitay has called the Big Apple home for 10 months of the every year since she struck acting gold in 1999 on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*.

Actually, Hargitay is anything but intimidating. That is, if the presence beautiful woman doesn't make you nervous. From her whimsical, neck-cropped 'do to her poised, street-savvy swagger, she oozes confidence much like her character, Detective Olivia Benson — but immediately you feel at ease with her carefree mannerisms and mischievous grin. (Unless you happen, after at least 10 correct pronunciations, to let slip slightly incorrect articulation of her forename between bites of grilled portobello mushroom.)

But it is the bling she is sporting that hints at the much more playful personal side of Hargitay — a contrast to her Golden Globe-winning performance on a hit show that's anything but a laugh riot. Riding a fine line between hip-hop bling and royal bling, Hargitay's gold necklace and attached charm are borderline obnoxious for anyone not named Diddy rightfully so: This is Jayne Mansfield bling.

Barneys New York, (212) 826-8900

Tory Burch, (212) 334-3000

ATTRACTIONS

Bliss Spa, (212) 219-8970

New York Public Library, the DeWitt Wallace Periodical Room, (212) 930-0579

Port Imperial Ferry, (800) 533-3779

Tompkins Square Greenmarket, Sundays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

WE SAID...

WHY WE HEART NEW YORK

LODGING

Casablanca Hotel, very expensive, (212) 869-1212. A well-appointed Times Square hotel that features free Wi-Fi and continental breakfast, and a wine, cheese, and Champagne reception from five to seven p.m. Monday through Saturday. They won't wine and dine you, so you'll have more money to wine and dine yourself.

Hotel QT, moderate to very expensive, (212) 354-2323. André Balazs' design-forward Times Square digs are little more than a glorified hostel, but the price, location, and coolness factor make it a steal for New York City.

Hotel Roger Williams, very expensive, (212) 448-7000. Don't let the Rug District location in Murray Hill deter you — a complete face-lift in late 2004 has turned the Roger Williams into one of Manhattan's hippest secrets. Seventeen of the 190 rooms feature substantial terraces — rarer than a Manhattan parking spot — many with commanding views of the Empire State Building.

DINING

Artisanal Fromagerie and Bistro, French, moderate to very expensive, (212) 725-8585.

Terrance Brennan's brasserie/fromagerie in Murray Hill nails classic French fare like hanger steak-frites, but leave room for the cheese. From the

"This is the only thing I have from my mother, she tells me. (Mansfield died in a 1967 automobile accident.) "She had a charm bracelet, but I never wore it because it was big and clunky. So I had all the charms off, and Loree Rodkin — she is one of my favorite designers — made a necklace for me. I get stopped on the street for my bling. But are you ready for this? My father gave these to my mother when I was born. It has my name on it. Mariska Magdolina."

Heavy? Not in the least. Hargitay exudes the same sort of fervent lust for life as her mother — even when speaking of her death. You just know when you stare through her piercing chocolate-browns, there is a weak experience waiting to be pounced upon.

"Do you need to know everything about me?" Hargitay asks sweetly. "Pretty much," I tell her.

You are a product of Los Angeles, but you live most of the year in New York. Talk about the best of both worlds ... I started coming to New York when I was 16, for theater, and twice a year since I decided I wanted to be an actor. It was always an electrifying week. That's not a word that I use often. But it truly was. I'd come here and just get so inspired. For an actor or an artist, there's nothing like it in the world. You walk down the street, and it's like molecules bouncing off each other. You're forced to be impacted by people. And people say stuff to you. When I'm in L.A., people will just look at you. Here, they're like, "I love your show! I love you!"

Well, it's not cool to do that in L.A. Everyone stares, but nobody says anything. Right. But it's cool to do it here. It's more honest here. You hate being stared at. If you're going to stare at me, then say something. Let's acknowledge the situation.

You seem to fit right in here. I was really intimidated by New York City at first. Leaving my family and friends was like being ripped from the womb. I was like, "What do you mean I'm going to New York?" I was thrilled to leave my friends almost killed me. I felt alone in this big giant city, and all of a sudden, I was a detective that was shooting 15 hours a day. I was freezing! I actually couldn't deal with the weather.

Well, you've been spoiled in L.A. ... I would go out without a hat and a scarf, and people were like, "What's wrong with you?" It just wasn't second nature to me. I would leave the house, and if the sun was out, I thought it was fine. But New York is so exciting, and I have to say, when I'm in L.A. now, and I say I'm going home, home is here. My husband [actor and writer Peter Hermann] pointed that out to me. He's like, "I hear you hear what you just said?" He made New York home for me and changed my experience, because he's a walker and a biker. We bicycle everywhere.

What route do you recommend? I live in Tribeca, and so we go up West Side Highway. They've completely rebuilt it, and it has such beautiful landscaping. We'll go all the way around. But for me, the best is going over the bridges. It's magnificent. You become five years old and look

extensive fondue menu to the 200 aging varieties on hand, it's a religious experience for cheese lovers.

Bombay Talkie, Indian, moderate, (212) 242-1900. This small Chelsea eatery specializes in affordable, upscale versions of classic Indian street food.

Craftbar, New American, expensive, (212) 461-4300. Simplicity rules at this cheaper alternative to Tom Colicchio's minimalist Flatiron food haven (Craft) around the corner. Foodies freak over the rabbit and sea bass dishes, but save room for the insanely satisfying chocolate gâteau with chai ice cream.

Magnolia Bakery, inexpensive, (212) 462-2572. Yes, we love Mister Softee (conveniently, there's one parked on just about every street corner in the city in the summer), but some days, that little ice-cream cone just won't cut it. For the ultimate sugar high, head to Magnolia Bakery for the best cupcake ever made. The melt-in-your-mouth, sweet-as-can-be butter-cream frosting will leave you begging for more. And take note — when filling your box in the self-service area of this shoebox-size bakery, it's everyone for himself.

SHOPPING

Olive & Bettes, various locations, www.oliveand-bettes.com. With its four locations around the city, you don't have an excuse to not stop by this fashion-forward women's boutique. It carries a wide variety of chic brands — James Perse, Paige Denim, and Chip and Pepper, among them — and along with its great assortment of accessories, it boasts one heck of a T-shirt collection.

Gracious Home, www.gracioushome.com. With four locations in Manhattan (one West Side locale and three East Side), this store is a New York staple. A combination hardware and home furnishings mecca, it offers anything and everything imaginable for the home — including luxurious bedding, chic accessories, stylish lighting options, even sleek home electronics, not to mention those everyday necessities like mops, brooms, screws, and lightbulbs. What more could you ask for?

the city and think, I don't understand it. Every time Peter and I go over the Brooklyn Bridge at sunset ... forget it! You can't compare it to any else in the world.

Is Tribeca your favorite neighborhood in the city? Well, I'm a girl makes a neighborhood wherever I live. I've loved all my neighborhood because the neighborhood to me is the people. That's what's fun: know your magazine guy and your coffee guy. As soon as you meet everybody it's your 'hood. Another reason I moved down there is the restaurants would go to Nobu every day. It's a block from my house. That's just a big thing.

When you return to New York to shoot, what's the first restaurant you hit? My favorite restaurant is Babbo. I'm very good friends with the chef, Mario Batali. It's a cute story. He's one of the people who turned New York into a neighborhood for me. I used to live on Waverly Place in the West Village, and I'd come home every night, and there's this guy on the stoop with red hair and orange high-top tennis shoes and shorts, no matter what time of year it was. I had no idea who he was.

What was he doing on your stoop? Sitting there talking with other people and having a glass of wine. It got to the point where I'd come home from work and I'd be so tired, I'd sit on the stoop and he'd bring me a glass of wine and a plate of prosciutto and figs. I'd thought I had just about gone to heaven. And you know you can't find good prosciutto at a lot of places because they just don't get it. This tasted like I was in Italy.

Did you eventually ask who the heck he was and why he was on your stoop? Yeah! I was like, "Who the heck are you? I live here ... move!" He's like, "Oh, no, this is my stoop." He's funny and sweet. The restaurant was right next door. That's why he was hanging out on my stoop.

So when you come home from a late night of filming and have the munchies, where do you go for midnight-hour comfort food? First of all, I work so late, I go home and beg my husband to make me food. That is an awesome perk. But my other favorite restaurant is a place called Americain. It's Bobby Flay's restaurant. It's low-key and really groovy and the food is insane. The skate was crazy. I don't order skate! Everything was amazing. Of course, the wines were amazing. I'm a girl who likes a red wine.

What's your favorite brunch spot? It will surprise you. My favorite for brunch is this place called Olives. It's in the W Hotel. I just hate that it's in a hotel, because other people know about it. The food is off the charts. I go there a lot on Sundays.

New Yorkers are very opinionated about their pizza joints. Your favorite? First of all, every single pizza joint is called Ray's Pizza. That's an enigma to me. Ray is the famous one, but every pizza joint is called Ray's! I don't got that. I feel that New York is like Italy. You can't really get a bad pizza of pizza in New York. People get it. It's so competitive and famous for that. But my favorite is breakfast pizza! No, actually, the best pizza is in Brooklyn at Grimaldi's Pizzeria.

what more could you ask for:

BROOKLYN, at CHIANGAI'S PIZZERIA.

I assume Ray is quite upset by that. So give me the lowdown on Mariska Hargitay city tour. I'm from L.A., so the fact that New York is an island blows my mind. I love bridges, and I love seeing the city, so I would take the Port Imperial ferry across the Hudson River to New Jersey. Get on the free blue-and-white bus up to Boulevard East, get out onto the promenade and take a picture of Manhattan. The view is unobstructed from the George Washington Bridge down to the Statue of Liberty. Incredible. There is this great restaurant in Jersey called Marco & Pepe that has the best mac and cheese I have ever had in my life.

Anything actually in Manhattan? A few years ago, Peter introduced me to the wonder that is the DeWitt Wallace Periodical Room at the New York Public Library. It's not as crowded as the main room; and it has the most amazing paintings of New York City buildings and a gorgeous view of Central Avenue. We are also fruit and vegetable freaks. We try to go to the Tompkins Square Greenmarket every Sunday morning to load up on fresh organic goodies that are locally grown. The market also has beautiful flowers and yummy baked goods. In the fall, I love buying hot cider to warm my tummy while I shop.

Speaking of shopping, which shops are intimately familiar with you, and credit card numbers? Barneys is my favorite place. I don't care where I am in the world, I shop at Barneys. Everything is so beautiful. Another favorite of mine is a store called Tory Burch. They have summer things and it always reminds me of California vacations. It makes me feel happy because when I'm in New York and get really depressed about the weather, I go in there. They have such amazing patterns and fun pink and oranges, and it reminds me of home. I buy a lot of vacation clothes there. And I do a lot of shopping on the street. That's the thing about New York. There are always little jewels everywhere here. You walk around the streets and you find such great bargains everywhere. Barneys is one side of it, but then I have my bohemian on-the-street stuff. That's all over the city.

If the pipes burst in your apartment, what's the first hotel you'd go to? The Four Seasons. I was living on Waverly Place and I had a five-minute call. I had no idea about the Halloween parade in New York. It's insane. It's like Mardi Gras. The whole city shuts down, and I was having a nervous breakdown because I had all of these early calls and I hadn't slept. I was really overwhelmed with the show. I checked myself right into the Four Seasons.

If that's sold out, where would you go? Well, now I just come here to the Soho Grand. It's so close to my house. I always have people stay at this hotel. You have every fun restaurant nearby. The best shopping in the city of New York is here. It's groovy, cool, and low-key. If you're an actor, nobody bothers you.

Where do you go in the city when you want to pretend you're not surrounded by millions of people and skyscrapers? I go to Bliss Spa because I don't feel like I'm in the middle of New York City when I'm there, and the spa is amazing. It transports me to another place. Utter relaxation. The massage therapists and aestheticians are really fine at

they do.

Tell me a New York secret. People are really, really friendly. People have a bad rap, but all you have to do is smile at them. One of the fun things about me is when I got here, everyone was like [dons hard New York accent], "Hey, howya doin?" They have this thing going on — everyone thinks you are trying to take something from them. But I've had the best time cracking people. If you don't play that game, and you treat them with love and kindness, they just melt in your hand. I think there's more heart here than in any other city in the world.

KEVIN RAUB is a Los Angeles-based travel and entertainment journalist. His work has appeared in *Travel + Leisure*, the *New York Post*, *FHM*, and *Stuff*, among others.

