



Magical MIKAELA

Mikaela Shiffrin spins hard work into gold.

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styled by JOHN MARTINEZ
hair & makeup by JUSTIN ST. CLAIR

Dress **Silvia Tcherassi**
Necklace **Buccellati**
Bracelet **Buccellati**
Ring (index finger) **Buccellati**
Ring **Lulu Fiedler**

*The ski racer is as curious as
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makes a champion.*

Mikaela Shiffrin has blown in off the street. It's mid-April in the mining town of Minturn, Colorado. Flakes from a freak snowstorm are floating from the sky like feathers from a goose and the wind is spiraling mini-twisters along Main Street, past the saloon and the Sticky Fingers Cafe and the still-frozen banks of the Eagle River. Gusts of wind catch the World Cup champion and carry her through the door of The Minturn Inn, a rustically chic bed and breakfast owned by ex-World Cup skier Marco Tonazzi and his wife Amy. Shiffrin, on a four-day break from spring ski training, is here for a cover shoot and fashion spread for *SNOW*. Soon she'll be transformed by an inventive beauty team into a glam queen with banana curls, glittering gowns, and handmade Fendi boots. But for now her long blonde mane is blowing every which way, her cheeks are pink from the chill, and she looks more the part of a young ski racer intent on maintaining a streak so fast she's just been titled 2017's World Cup overall champion.

Mikaela Shiffrin first flashed across our screens at the 2011 U.S. National Championships where, at sweet 16, instead of studying for science tests and buying Cover Girl makeup, she became the youngest American ski racer to claim a national alpine crown. At age 17 she was crowned slalom's World Cup winner. And at age 18 in Sochi, Russia, as most eyes were on Lindsey Vonn and the bodaciousness of Bode Miller, Shiffrin stole the show as the youngest ever Olympic slalom gold medalist. Thirty-one breathtaking World Cup wins later, the now 22-year-old Shiffrin is approaching the peak of her game. In February she became the first woman to match Christl Cranz's 1939 success by winning three slalom World Championship golds. And in March, Shiffrin won her first Crystal Globe – World Cup skiing's overall title.

How does she do it? As she's readied for the shoot on this snowy day in Minturn, calmly withstanding mascara wands, curling irons, and the primping and prodding of stylists, Shiffrin asks herself the same question. Smart, articulate, candid, and analytical, the ski racer is as curious as the rest of us as to what makes a champion. She bristles at being called a phenom. Instead, she's convinced hard work, perseverance, and dogged focus supersede staggering talent.

"It's *not* natural," Shiffrin insists. "It's been a lot of work. It comes naturally only as far as I've probably watched more video than anyone else, and I've probably skied and practiced more. That's why it looks like it comes naturally, because it is a lot of repetition."

Shiffrin admits she's fascinated by the process of being a ski racer: Rising early to train gates. Afternoons in the gym with her trainer. Endless hours viewing and analyzing video footage of every conceivable portion of her ski turn. She is obsessed

with where to apply edge. When to release pressure. How to ride a turn with more flow and less stiffness. As she says: "I've always liked training."

This has been her routine since at least age 11. While enrolled at Vermont's Burke Mountain Academy, the preteen became a student of the sport. "Like another student would study for a math test," she says, "I would study skiing. I studied my competitors. I studied World Cup racers. Even though they were light-years ahead of me, I watched them as if I was going to compete against them tomorrow."

Anja Pärson. Janica Kostelić. Lindsey Vonn. Manuela Mölgg. Heroes all. Shiffrin cultivated the fine art of breaking down their skiing and analyzing footage of their arcs in minute detail in slow motion. She scrutinized the tops of their turns, the bottoms of their turns, their transitions, and determined which muscles were employed to make it all happen.

It's a methodology Shiffrin credits to Burke coach Kirk Dwyer. "He taught me how to look at video methodically and analytically," she says. "My mom also learned that from him, and since then we've taken it to new extremes."

On this day in snowy Colorado as Shiffrin is shuttled deep into a forest for the first photo of the day, her mom rides in a car ahead. With bobbed hair and the body of an athlete, Eileen Shiffrin, a former masters ski racer, is always *somewhere* in her daughter's daily routine — handing her a towel, shooting a video, timing a training run. The older Shiffrin tours the World Cup circuit at her daughter's side throughout each season. Mikaela calls Eileen a coach. But, she insists, her mother is so much more. "She does a *lot*. She's my mom. She's a ski coach. In some ways she's my mental coach. She's my manager and my handler. She makes sure I stay on track with my skiing."

It's a relationship that's scrutinized by the ski racing world and one with which not everyone is comfortable. While fathers have followed their sons in ski racing before — most notoriously Helmut and Marc Girardelli — somehow moms on the slopes have a not-so-stellar reputation.

"It has made people uncomfortable," Mikaela says. "When they see a mom around they're like, 'Omigosh! What are *you* doing here. You're in our space.'" Mikaela frowns. "Maybe they feel as though they're under a microscope — as if she's judging."

And while the younger Shiffrin bristles again, this time having to defend her mother, she has no plans to fix what isn't broken. "People ask what my secret is, why I've had success. I ask them, 'What do you see that's absolutely different about my team?' And then I explain, 'it's my mom... Having her around has given me a *huge* advantage.'"

It's true, Eileen Shiffrin is her daughter's keeper. During the photo shoot in this tumbling, wooded terrain — not far from the Shiffrin family home in Vail, Colorado — Eileen is the first to sling a blanket around Mikaela's shivering, Silvia Tcherassi-clad shoulders. She frets about Shiffrin catching cold, worries about her tripping on a four-inch Fendi heel, and most of all, as the shoot drags on and the light grows darker, is concerned about Mikaela missing her daily dryland training. "It may not seem much to miss a single day," Eileen whispers as Mikaela poses serenely for another shot, thistle-down flakes falling softly on her curls. "But it's a set of blocks that need to be built on; each one is as important as the other."

Who's to argue? It's a formula that has worked, particularly in early 2017 as Mikaela was faced with the first real stress of her career. Hard to believe that this dynamo was nearing 31 World Cup wins when she first encountered gut-twisting fear, but she did, and it was Shiffrin's mother who snapped her out of it.

"This year there was so much hype about my results, what I could accomplish, if I could accomplish winning the overall globe," Mikaela explains. "I never really let that get to me before. This year it did and it stressed me out in ways I'd never felt. I'd get these terrible stomach aches and show up to race and just be frozen. My mom would see me and ask 'Why are you nervous? You're skiing great. Just do what you always do.' She's always two steps ahead of me." Later Shiffrin adds: "She has the best eye for my skiing."

The ski racer also attributes breakthroughs to primary coach Mike Day — Ted Ligety's former ringmaster — and strength and conditioning guru Jeff Lackie. Team Shiffrin is in force to ready young Mikaela for the 2018 Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea. All eyes — at least those enamored of ski racing — will be on this graceful, fearsome skier as she strives to break more records.

The day is advancing swiftly amid the snowy aspens. Dressed in a beguiling Dennis Basso gown, Mikaela Shiffrin fixes her gaze on Christian Alexander's lens, a silver sky fading behind the superstar like lights dimming slowly on a Broadway stage. Shiffrin's expression is difficult to read — it could be intensity, focus, curiosity... hard to say. It's never easy to read Mikaela Shiffrin.

It's an observation the racer has struggled with since catapulting onto the world stage at the 2014 Sochi Olympics. Time and again observers have complained young Shiffrin is emotionless at the finish of her races, despite monstrous wins, and even when she's beaten her competition by huge, unheard-of margins. "It's true," she admits, her grin now as giant as a Cheshire's. "I show no emotion at the finish!"

Shiffrin is as baffled by her inability to emote as everyone else. "I don't know what to feel," she says honestly. "I don't think you can understand that feeling [of winning] and express it to the world *immediately*."

Sliding through the finish of a World Cup race, with cameras crawling toward her and sounds of the crowds thundering through her helmet, she reveals her first instinct is to "go the other direction."

Most often, Shiffrin says, if she's done well, that frozen expression captured by the cameras is Mikaela astounded by her own speed, baffled by how she pulled it off. "A lot of what you see is

disbelief — that I could win a race, sometimes by up to two seconds. That has happened several times and I was thinking "Wow... I don't even know what to think right now."

Mikaela's eyes gleam as it occurs to her some winning athletes plan their reactions to gratify crowds and cameras. Stephen Curry's shimmy. Tiger Woods' fist pump. José Bautista's bat flip. Shiffrin leans in as if she's telling a secret. "I want to ask them, *What were you thinking?*" She wrinkles her nose. "*How did you know to do that?*"

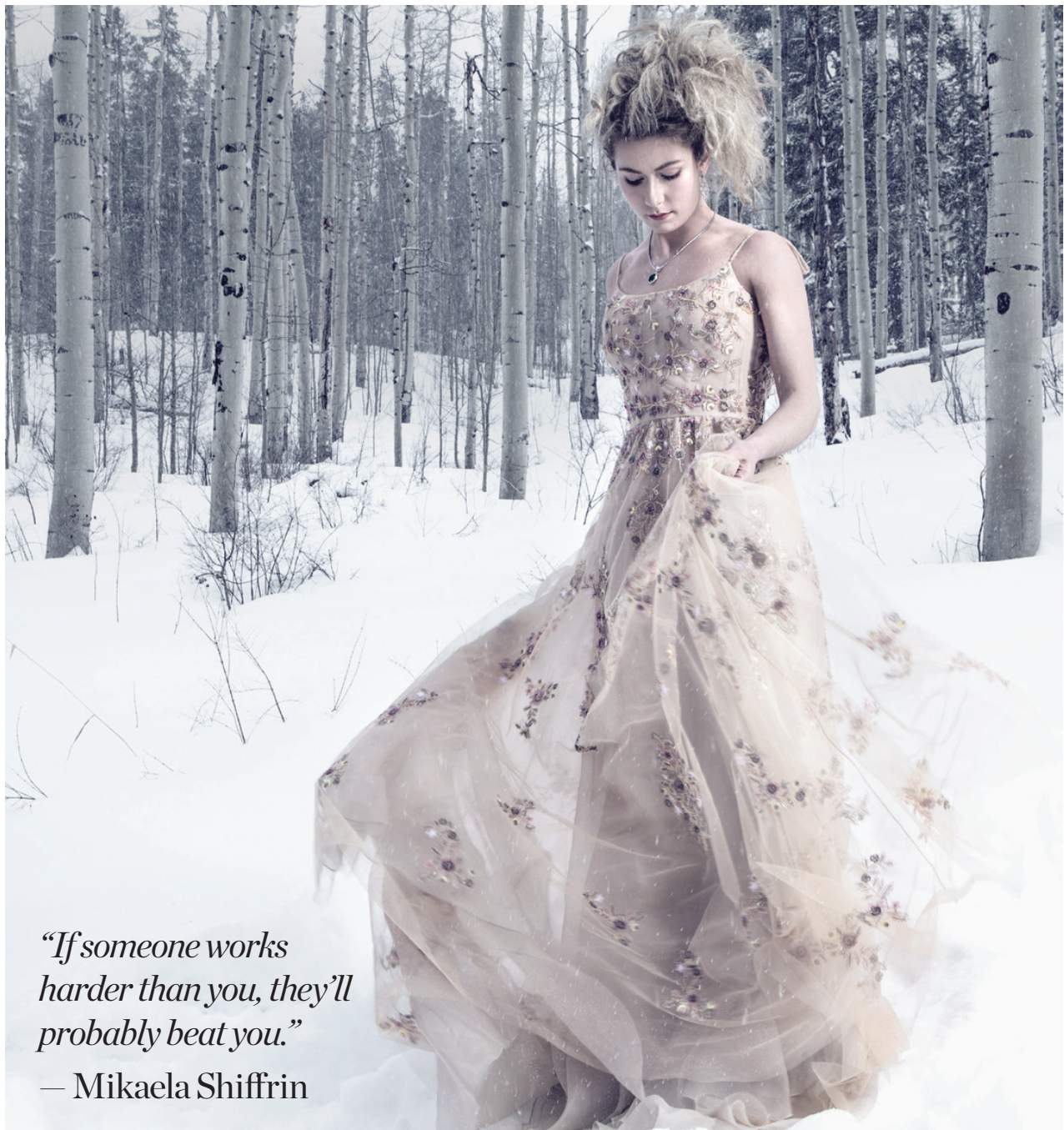
The day is dying and so is Mikaela's energy. As the last vestiges of daylight disappear behind surrounding peaks, the ski racer rests against a ragged barn and stares beyond the camera for her final shot, her feet tucked into gold lamé boots, her body sheathed in a mini dress from Manrico Cashmere.

With the whirl of the camera finally silent, she graciously accepts thanks for a job superbly done, then picks her way through the snow to a waiting SUV. There, as any 22 year old would, Shiffrin digs for her phone, brings its screen to life, and loses herself into the world of social media.

Tucked into the SUV's rear seat beside the ski racer is Isabella, Marco Tonazzi's teenage daughter, who has lent her horse for the shoot, and who's been watching Mikaela's moves with eyes as wide and as wondrous as snowflakes. Mikaela glances sideways at her new friend and the athlete's exhaustion dissipates instantly. The two pass the long, bumpy drive back to Isabella's dad's bed and breakfast immersed in staccato chit-chat.



Dress **Manrico Cashmere**
Shoes **Silvia Tcherassi**
Earrings **Estate Jewelry — Betteridge**
Watch **Longines**
Ring **Robert Procop — Betteridge**



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— Mikaela Shiffrin

“I hope they consider me more of a friend,” Shiffrin says of her legions of young fans — at last count, 79.4K followers on Twitter. “It’s great that they consider me an idol but I want those kids to think of me as relatable as well. I’m young. I was in their position not very long ago. I want them to know that this level of skiing is not some crazy dream.”

Back inside The Minturn Inn, Mikaela considers her life for a moment. “You have to be willing to work *really* hard and sacrifice a lot,” she adds. “You miss your friends pretty much 99 percent of the time. You can’t party. You can’t have sleepovers. There are a lot of things you have to give up. But if you really want it and you’re willing to work, it’s achievable.”

Achievable? Thirty-one World Cup wins by age 22, an Olympic

gold, and the most World Championship slalom victories since 1939’s Christl Cranz? “There are moments of triumph when you feel on top of the world, I understand that,” she admits. “But a lot of athletes portray themselves as *‘I’m the king and you’ll never beat me.’* I’m like, get a life! If someone works harder than you, they’ll probably beat you.”

Shiffrin leaves *SNOW*’s photo session the same way she entered, exiting the The Minturn Inn with her mom by her side. They slide into a snow-covered car, start it up, and disappear past the saloon and the Sticky Fingers Cafe, now lit in alpenglow.

Last word, they were headed for dryland training. **S**