

**Joan Baez
twits Dylan**

**Teaching kids
to accept death
in the family**

**Carter's lady
at Commerce**

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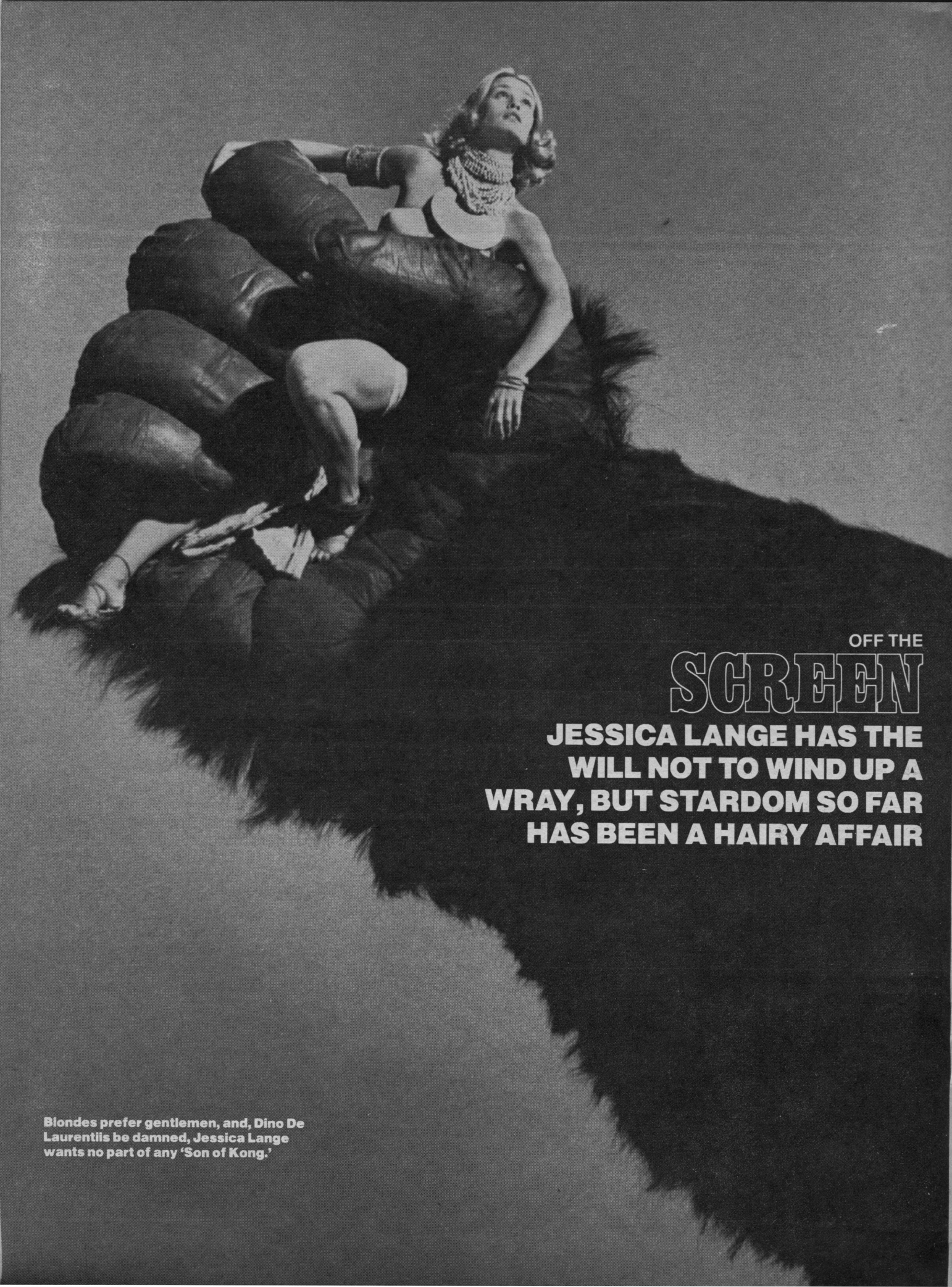
People

weekly

King Kong's Jessica Lange

**A new
star now
wants
that
monkey off
her back**





OFF THE
SCREEN

**JESSICA LANGE HAS THE
WILL NOT TO WIND UP A
WRAY, BUT STARDOM SO FAR
HAS BEEN A HAIRY AFFAIR**

Blondes prefer gentlemen, and, Dino De
Laurentiis be damned, Jessica Lange
wants no part of any 'Son of Kong.'



JULIAN WASSER

Jake is Lange's main man in L.A. She and N.Y. filmmaker husband Paco Grande have antipodean goals.

We start in February," decrees *King Kong* producer Dino De Laurentiis. "We do a horror *Konk*, like-a da Frankenstein. *Konk I* end with da monkey dead. But we gonna vivasect," he malaprops. "In *Konk I*, Jessica Lange da only one able to pacify Konk when he get mad. In da first scene of *Konk II*, we bring her back. She climb into monkey's hand like always and tell him to calm down. Konk look her over, smile, then pop her in his mouth and eat her . . ." Dino's only kidding, but that's the sort of gross whimsy in which he indulges himself these days, and, of course, De Laurentiis' whims seem to outgross just about everything else in Hollywood. Already *King Kong* has collected nearly \$80 million, and in its first six weeks has crashed into the Top Ten in all movie history.

Yet moguls are mortals, and even Dino is simultaneously facing up to the hairy finger of fickledom. His *Konk* may ride as high as No. 2 among all-time

grossers, but for all his \$15 million ballyhoo budget, it seems unlikely to achieve his proclaimed goal of overtaking *Jaws*. Further, Jessica Lange, the starlet who was born in *Kong*, declares that she will have nothing to do with any sequel. "Artistically," she proclaims, "it would be redundant."

That's high-flown talk for a 27-year-old who barely a year ago helped support herself as a Greenwich Village barmaid. But she did matriculate in fine arts back home at the University of Minnesota, and making her film debut in *King Kong* was a head-turning experience. Even reviewers who were queasy about Dino's bloated remake of the 1933 classic were knocked over by the naive sensuousness of Jessica's updating of the Fay Wray role. She was likened variously to a smaller Margaux Hemingway, a taller Tuesday Weld, an Eva Marie Saint "under the influence of Spanish fly" or the next Carole Lombard. "Dino said I'm going to be

the next Marilyn Monroe, and that really upsets me," Jessica flushes. "She was a tragic figure who led a tragic life and who wasn't taken as the serious artist she was. I don't want to compete with her memory or with anyone."

This past year has made Jessica feel a little tragic about herself. She nearly broke down during the pulverizing, three-continent, 31-city, six-week promotion tour on which De Laurentiis deployed her. Her five-year marriage to Paco Grande, a Spanish-born cameraman, may be breaking up. She is an ethereal creature, serious but ambivalent about ambition and success. "I'd always been poor," she notes, until Dino called one morning and said she had to "sign right now" the deal that put her into six figures (and tied her up for seven years).

But De Laurentiis doesn't own Jessica Lange. With her first proceeds she bought a house on Wisconsin's icy Lake Nebagamon, just 40 miles from her

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Jessica's merciless filming schedule was almost relaxing compared to her discombobulating promo tour—from Japan where she was minis-



tered to by a *maiko* (an apprentice geisha) to Massachusetts where she presented Gov. Michael Dukakis a Kong in solid polyresin.

Screen CONTINUED

Cloquet, Minn. birthplace. In Hollywood, she still rents and clearly dances to her own music—which is Schubert and Brahms. Similarly, when her manager (she finally has one now) would prefer her to read scripts, she's into Stendhal or Graham Greene. It's perhaps the sedentary, contemplative existence she's sought all along.

"We always lived pretty much like gypsies," Jessica recalls. Her dad—successively a teacher, gas station operator and Ford dealer—took the family south during the Korean war but has now returned and is working in the rail yards for Burlington Northern. A couple of forays to college did not net her a diploma, and she finally took off to experience the world with Paco, whom she had met on campus. Even in the early days they were often apart, including the two years she studied mime in Paris with Marcel Marceau's master, Etienne Decroux.

Eventually Lange fetched up as a model in New York—"it's called eating," she says. If barely. "It was mostly catalogues and runway, nobody knew my face, but I was doing well for me, making \$500 a month." At that point, *King Kong* was casting. Implausible as it now seems that she would play second banana to anyone, Barbra Streisand toyed with taking the part, as did Cher, but she was carrying Elijah Blue Allman by then. At that point, De Laurentiis sent a distress signal to model agencies to round up unknowns. Manhattan's Wilhelmina dispatched Jessica on one day's notice without giving her time to have unwired the braces that were correcting her

teeth. "They didn't know who to send," she says modestly. "It was really the dregs." She also had a New York pal-lor and at 5'8", 105 lbs. was 25 pounds under her eventual playing weight. Dino's snap appraisal was "Terrible! Here is a girl with nothing at all. But I getting desperate now, so I say, okay, give her a screen test. A few hours later," he recounts, "director John Guillermin calls me and says, 'Dino, get to the screening room. One of these girls is sensational on camera.' He right."

The 12-hour-a-day, eight-month shooting would have been a crusher even for a pro, since most of the scenes were filmed, Jessica notes, "without a Kong to react to. I had to play to the ceiling or to the wall or to the floor." "Many fine actors might not have brought it off," says co-star Charles Grodin. "It was harder, for example, than playing in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where an actor has human emotions to identify with." There was also the physical danger of working with a 40-ft. hydraulic monster, operated by 20 technicians. A caress from one of Kong's 1,650-lb. arms nearly broke her neck one day and left her with a still painfully pinched nerve.

What she's been through the past year was "quite extraordinary," Lange sighs. "I don't know if it's all sunk in yet." Currently she's still decompressing in an airy three-bedroom cottage a block from the Pacific shared with a veritable rain forest of houseplants and her pet Scottie, Jake. She was in the North Woods for Christmas with her folks and for a rare reunion with Paco, who works out of their Manhattan loft



JOHN BRYSON

and is currently on assignment in Jamaica. She concedes that it's become "a difficult situation. He has no intention of giving up what he has built up, and I have to be where I can do what I'm interested in."

Which, of course, is movies, preferably a comedy and not *Son of Kong*, one possible title for the sequel inevitably shooting this spring. As Jessica,



While watering her plants, Lange exposes the "little boxer's nose" De Laurentiis wanted fixed. She sniffed, nix.

who knows her Dino, shrewdly observes: "They have an awful lot of money [\$3 million] tied up in that mechanical ape, and I don't think any other big job offers are coming in for him. What else could they do with it except give it to the Smithsonian?" Lange's bigger next question is what's next for her. "I don't put to my mind yet what can be done," says De Laurentiis, ad-

mitting, though, that "the problem is very serious." He and Jessica can't forget the worrisome history of Fay Wray, Kong's original honey, who played six dozen other roles, none of which anyone remembers. "We need the right part," says Dino. "Jessica is already a great big star. But if the second movie doesn't work, we are in trouble."

BARBARA WILKINS