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LIFESTYLES

25

MOST
BEAUTIFUL
PEOPLE

Taylor!

ON HER NEW ATTITUDE,
1989, AND MUSIC CITY

PLUS Fabulous
FALL GETAWAYS



15th
*Anniversary
Edition*

THE 25 MOST BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Our 15th annual
list of Music City's
most captivating,
compassionate, and
intriguing residents.

PHOTOS BY CAMERON POWELL

TAYLOR'S PHOTO
BY SARAH BARLOW

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TAYLOR SWIFT

This month's cover beauty—and the world's most recognizable musician—dishes about her latest album, her newfound outlook on life, and how she'll always be proud of Nashville, no matter what.

BY KRISTIN LUNA. PHOTO BY SARAH BARLOW.

There's no one better at poking fun at Taylor Swift than Taylor Swift. The global superstar's wildly popular "Shake It Off" video—which amassed more than 50 million online views in its first 10 days and reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 in the same time frame—is a blatant nod to the haters, who seem to want to critique Swift's every jazz hand and shimmy. But rather than jump to the defensive, she plays along. *You want to laugh at me? Fine, I can mock myself, too,* she assents by awkwardly twirling, rapping, cheering, and bunny-hopping alongside dozens of professional dancers. Or perhaps the country-turned-pop singer is really saying "talk to the hand," in keeping with the retro theme of her latest album, *1989* (out Oct. 27), a throwback to her own birth year and the musical genre that's most recently inspired her. And that's the beauty of the new, grown-up Swift, both the artist and the person: She no longer lets the little stuff bother her. >>>





It feels weird to call 2014 a banner year for the Pennsylvania-born performer. After all, *every* year for the past several has seemed to be her biggest yet. Her four-continent, 15-month *Red* tour, which kicked off in early 2013 and wrapped this past summer, was the highest-grossing tour of all time for a country artist, racking up more than \$150 million and selling upward of 1.7 million tickets. She's collected four Grammy awards, garnered countless accolades from MTV, CMT, CMA, and other institutions, and last year was honored with the Country Music Association's Pinnacle Award, a distinction only previously bestowed upon Garth Brooks. This fall, not only does she release her most buzzed-about album to date, Swift also approaches a milestone birthday—her 25th, on Dec. 13—along with celebrating a decade in both Nashville and the music industry.

"I've used music to help me deal with life and love and all the important lessons you learn growing up," Swift reflects. "A song I wrote a couple years ago that I was very proud of, 'Mean,' was about not understanding why people say what they say and why people make you feel small and weird or like you're not special or deserve what you have. I was very confused about that social dynamic back when I wrote that song, and since then the lesson I've very gradually learned is that there's nothing I can do, there's no amount of questioning that to make people change their behavior—I have to change *my* behavior, and I have to change it from being protective of myself to kind of rocking it."

For those who have grown up with Swift—or at least have listened to her hooky tunes since "Tim McGraw" hit the country airwaves in 2006—it may be hard to believe it's been only 10 years since she was that self-conscious teen in a sundress and cowboy boots being made fun of in the halls of Hendersonville High School, prompting her to write her the emotionally charged "Fifteen." (At the time, she was the youngest songwriter ever to be signed by Sony/ATV Music Publishing, thanks to her brutally honest lyrics set to catchy riffs.) These days, the stylish star with her designer crop tops and chic new bob makes the news almost daily for her personal endeavors: In recent months, Swift attended a 20something fan's bridal shower in Ohio, made the hospital rounds singing to young cancer patients, doled out teen wisdom on a social media commenting spree, and even paused to take pictures in Central Park with a passerby celebrating her 17th birthday, to whom she then gave \$90 to buy herself lunch.

And, of course, she still makes the news for her

music. The media and "Swifties"—the artist's legion of diehard fans—have long picked apart her cryptic lyrics and attributed them to past love interests, and don't expect *1989* to be any different; there's already talk about which former flames Swift will call out on the new album (Harry Styles, for one). With that in mind, there couldn't have been a more fitting way to announce *1989* to the world than "Shake It Off," an I-don't-care-what-you-think anthem that's demonstrative of her newfound confidence (and the official debut of her pop career, although she's long been known to cross genres).



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"I think you really have to tap into your sense of humor in order to survive," Swift shares. "Going through the amount of scrutiny that your life is looked at when you're performing for millions of people, when you're on TV, when you're putting out records and everybody has an opinion about it, you have to think certain things are funny. And you have to be able to make fun of yourself. That's one of the things that I think is a new development for me: not taking things too seriously and when people make fun of me, just laugh at it. And, thankfully, in doing that, I feel like lately less people are making fun of me."

It seems Swift leads by example, too. Her new life approach, fittingly, ties into her own interpretation of what beauty means.

"My personal definition of 'beautiful' is exhibiting an identity," she says. "I am so intrigued and drawn to people who know exactly who they are, who know what they want, who live life on their own terms. And that can be anything—it's not

defined by 'wear less makeup' or 'try a nice red lip' or 'walk with your shoulders back.' It's about embracing your identity."

Some might say Swift's evolution—both personal and professional—has run a close parallel to Nashville's own transformation: She's a homegrown country girl who has blossomed into an international sensation now known for so much more than what launched her on the scene in the first place. She seems flattered by the comparison and says she's proud of her adopted home for growing leaps and bounds since she moved here in 2004.

"Nashville is a much different city now than it was 10 years ago, and I'm one of the people who *loves* to see a city become more popular," she gushes. "When I hear statistics about our real estate booming and everyone wanting to move here, that doesn't make me feel this strange jealousy and possessiveness. It makes me feel so excited that everyone else is discovering what I've known was awesome for 10 years."

Although Swift now has homes scattered across the United States, including in Rhode Island, New York, and California—she can't stay anywhere for more than a few days before the paparazzi catch wind—she has become a Music City concierge of sorts, a walking guidebook for her big-city friends coming to Nashville for the first time.

"It makes me happy, it makes me stoked when my friends tell me they're going on vacation to Nashville," she says. "They're not on a road trip on their way to somewhere else, they're just going to Nashville for vacation. *I love* that, and I think that's also a parallel to how people see music. A lot of people discover a new artist and then they get super angry when everybody else discovers that music, and they're like, 'I don't like them anymore. They sold out.' I don't feel like Nashville has in any way sold out. I just think that the rest of the world is becoming hip to the fact that it's one of the greatest places [on Earth]."

Still, no matter what Taylor Swift does—wears a (designer) onesie to an awards show, hops on stage at pal Ingrid Michaelson's concert and bounces around without a care in the world, pens a song called "Bad Blood" about an ongoing feud with a fellow female artist—or how many good deeds she commits with purely selfless intentions, it seems that haters gonna hate. But you don't have to worry about Swift, not for a moment. She'll be over in her metaphorical corner shaking it off as she dances to the "sick beat" of her own drum, no doubt celebrating yet another banner year and yet another smash album.