

# LIKE A BOSS

FEARLESS, FRANK AND FLUORO-FABULOUS  
— NICKI MINAJ IS DOING IT HER OWN WAY

**E**ver since she raced into the charts all doe-eyed and brightly attired with her super-speed lyrical assaults, rapper Nicki Minaj has had the hip-hop world cowering in her wake.

Tiny and formidable, with a personality as punchy and garish as the fluoro pink she adores, the 31-year-old is already well on her way to being Queen of Everything. Last year, *Forbes* declared Minaj the Cash Queen when she blazed in at No. 4 on its Hip-Hop Cash Kings list — earning more than Snoop Lion, Eminem and Kendrick Lamar combined, with a cool \$US29 million. Notably, she was the only woman on the list.

It's clear from her feisty lyrics (not to mention her now notorious clashes with Mariah Carey on *American Idol*) that Minaj takes no prisoners and just the thought of speaking to her on the phone is enough to make the most steely of reporters nervous.

When her voice trickles down the line — soft and bubblegum-sweet — it has an unmistakable edginess. “I never felt it was important to be highly regarded in the fashion world,” she states firmly as we





begin by talking about the motivation behind her eclectic style. “I never did it for anyone in the fashion world’s attention or approval. Absolutely not.”

Instead Minaj, who was born Onika Tanya Maraj in Trinidad and Tobago, before moving to Queens, New York, at the age of five, says her fearless fashion came from a more organic place. “From a very young age, I was obsessed with the colour pink, and as I got older I realised just seeing it would make me happy and light up like a kid,” she reveals.

“I wanted to have that feeling over and over again, so I started dressing outside the box. I realised there was no level I couldn’t go beyond. I believe your image and your look is always a blank canvas and you can create whatever you want on it. Then, when you’re done, you can start back over again. Wearing colour just made me feel very exhilarated and free and alive.”

However, that didn’t stop Minaj from unveiling a more demure look for the cover of *Elle* last year, and a softer style as a judge on *Idol*. “It was a conscious decision to tone it down last year,” she says. “When I was about to shoot the *Elle* cover, I decided I’d attempt to do very little make-up. I decided to do a make-under rather than a makeover. People weren’t used to seeing me like that, but when that cover came out and I had my new look on *Idol*, people reacted so well to it. I was absolutely in love with it, so we just got it going.

I never intended on wearing the bright colours forever.

“There’s a season for [everything] in fashion. People change and grow up, and as they meet new people, their look changes as well. I think what happened with my look was an organic change; I just started doing more calm and looking more calm.”

When it comes to Minaj’s go-to designers, she breathlessly reels off a long list: “Chanel, Versace, Giuseppe [Zanotti], Louis Vuitton, [Roberto] Cavalli, Jeremy Scott, Alexander Wang... I have a lot of favourites. I’ve been leaning heavily on Chanel and Versace for accessories, and when it comes to

clothes, it can be a small designer, it could be a no-name creation. I love whatever makes me feel the most confident and comfortable on that particular day.”

Whatever she wears, she pulls it off with panache, yet Minaj was as surprised as the next person to discover her style had caught the eye of none other than fashion royalty Anna Wintour, who invited her to several runway shows. “I love and respect Anna Wintour. She’s the mecca of everything fashion,” Minaj says. “When she asked me to be her guest, I was so floored and humbled with shock and

disbelief. It was one of the greatest moments of my career. I thought, ‘Wow, this is a humungous step and accomplishment, and it shows that everyone in fashion magazines doesn’t have to look the exact same and they shouldn’t have to be a size 0 to be on the cover.’”

Is that what they discussed? “We didn’t talk about any of that,” Minaj quickly clarifies. “I went with her to about three shows and we talked about the models and what they were wearing.”

While the rapper is eloquent and polite, it’s clear she doesn’t care about awkwardness and certainly doesn’t feel obligated to explain herself when she doesn’t like a question. One such topic is whether she’s conflicted about the adult content and swearing in her lyrics when so many of her fans are tweens and younger. “I’m not conflicted at all,” she says tersely. “I don’t feel conflicted, I don’t feel anything.”

And then there’s her curt manager, who, while listening in on our conversation, interrupts abruptly to stop questions about certain topics – such as what Minaj *really* thinks of Mariah Carey. The two singers famously clashed last year as they co-judged on *American Idol*, with Carey even saying, “It was like going to work every day in hell with Satan.”

Their bickering led to a lukewarm viewer reaction to Minaj, but she says she learnt from the experience. “One of the things I took away was to cherish my accomplishments and achievements. I saw how much these people really wanted success and fame, and I realised that



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sometimes I personally take these things for granted.

"I saw a passion in these people. I saw a drive. I saw them coming back two or three times to audition. That made me feel like I have absolutely nothing to complain about. It's just a matter of getting out there and claiming your dream and working at it."

Not that you could accuse Minaj of complacency. She's worked tirelessly since being signed by rapper Lil Wayne in 2009, producing two US *Billboard* chart-topping albums, a perfume range, a Kmart clothing line and scooping endorsements with MAC, OPI and Pepsi.

"I have to say, even prior to my first album coming out, I was very mature in terms of my thinking and in terms of business," she explains. "I know I dress a little colourful and flamboyant, but I've always had the mindset of a businesswoman. In a lot of ways, I've just kind of evolved."

Minaj's most recent venture is a sweet wine drink called Myx Fusions Moscato, which she part-owns and was involved in taste-testing. The alcoholic beverage has been a phenomenal success, selling one million bottles in the US in six months last year, and will be launched exclusively in Australia through the Woolworths-owned BWS stores in the coming months.

"It's actually a surprise to me that we're launching in Australia so soon – I thought it would take at least a year for us to go global," she says. "But I've never met a human being who didn't like the taste of Myx, and that's the truth."

As 2014 unfolds, Minaj reveals that her resolutions this year are to be fit and healthy. "I want to be a healthier person in 2014 than I was in 2013," she admits. "I want to eat right."

Could this keenness for wellness be down to the rumour she's pregnant? Minaj is quick to react. "Oh, f\*ck that, I'm not pregnant! I can't believe people are still saying I'm pregnant by Lil Wayne. Lil Wayne is like my brother – that would be so disgusting."

However, she is taking baby steps towards a movie career with her acting debut in *The Other Woman* alongside Cameron Diaz and *Sunday Style* cover star Kate Upton. "The

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character was originally written for a brunette Jewish girl, but the director happened to see me on *American Idol* and thought, 'Hmm, this might be interesting,'" Minaj reveals. "So I came in and auditioned, and the more they spoke to me about the character, [the more] I thought, 'Hey!' She's not exactly like me but, in the physical sense, she loves to change her hair and be really dainty and ladylike. She's a know-it-all so, in a lot of ways, she's like me, but not in every way."




And this time her female co-star, Diaz, made a lasting impression for all the right reasons. "I'll never forget her for the rest of my life," Minaj enthuses. "She's one of the most bubbly, fun-loving, intelligent, creative, talented women I've ever met. She was so sweet to me. She was so understanding and helpful, and I learnt so much from just watching her as this huge, worldwide actress. She'd walk on the set and she was just so humble and endearing. I had a blast. I can't believe my first movie role was this much fun."

Minaj, who's famously outspoken about women being able to represent themselves any way they want, also has another album in the pipeline showcasing her feisty and unapologetic lyrics. "It's very important to me that women take control of their destiny and be bosses, and find a way not to have to depend on a man," she explains. "It's definitely one of the driving factors in my brand – to empower women to be the boss of their destiny."

Her latest song, *Boss Ass Bitch*, includes the lyrical advice that if a man is screwing you around, you should sleep with his best friend and send him an explicit photo "with a red heart and a kissy face".

Could this be based on Minaj's own experiences? "You know what? I'd rather not say I've done this to someone," she says, with just a hint of amusement in her voice. "But I do think this advice truly works." **• CHARLOTTE WARD**

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