

# FREDERIQUE VAN DER WAL

# SCYLER VAN DER WAL KLEIN

*Genuine*

In spring 2021, I received the elevating news that Frederique van der Wal was flying into Los Angeles. My interest was piqued for several reasons: this internationally famous Dutch-born model had jet-tisoned into the super model sphere a few decades ago - commanding the covers of *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Cosmopolitan* and every other top-flight magazine. Frederique was so sought after that she had the power of choice, and the lucrative modeling contracts she landed - including *Victoria's Secret*, were turned into smart financial choices that set her up for life.

Our planned cover shoot had another important dimension to it. Frederique's daughter, Scyler (who is studying Media and Culture at the University of Amsterdam), was in L.A. with both her parents - celebrating her 21st birthday. Scyler describes it as the best 21st any girl could possibly have had: "My mom and dad took me to Chateau Marmont where two close friends and my god mother joined us for an intimate dinner. It was incredibly special and I will always treasure the memories of that night," she recounts.

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**W**e were greatly looking forward to this mother/daughter photographic art piece with brilliant Los Angeles photographer, Colette de Barros, particularly because Frederique and Scyler share a genuinely special relationship, and the pictures were sure to be a testament to that beautiful bond. Their love and respect for each other was viscerally evident – and we were happy to bask in their relationship sunlight on a Malibu June-gloom day. So much was positive about the day. Scyler had just received news that she had been appointed to a board position on her student body at the University of Amsterdam. She was to lead the Media Educational Activities Committee – a position that she intended to breathe life into with fresh, creative ideas.

I ask Scyler why she made the decision to study in Europe. “I grew up in New York,” she explains, “and attended a great school there. But I have European roots. Dad is Hungarian - although he was raised in Montreal. Mom is Dutch, so I wanted to have the European education experience. It differs from American universities in that there’s a more diverse age range of students, and the classes are less intensely focused. They give you a broader education, I feel.”

So Scyler began her first year at the American University in Paris, and found that to be an exciting and interesting experience. Ultimately, though, Amsterdam is where she felt happiest and this is her home city for the next few years as she completes her studies.

Frederique’s life story is steeped in rich and colorful memories. I ask her how her modeling career began.

“In Holland in the 1980s, modeling was relatively unknown,” she explains. A friend in high school suggested that I should try it. He offered to introduce me to a good agency in Amsterdam. I was 16 at the time and before I knew it, I was put onto Elite Modeling agency’s books. They had the “Look of the Year” competition worldwide and there was a Dutch version. I won the competition and took home a car as the prize. From there I went on to the international ‘Look of the Year’ competition – held in Mauritius – and to my big surprise, I won, and that came with a contract of two years. Things happened very fast after that. Before I knew it, I was shooting a Vogue cover, and I was off

to Paris. My experience with American Vogue was particularly special. In between that time, I finished my schooling.”

But things weren’t all smooth sailing for Frederique. From age 16 to 18, she would go on to lose both biological parents: her mother to ovarian cancer, and her father to a heart attack. A third significant death also occurred: her stepfather passed from cancer. Within a time span of just two years she lost the three pivotal adult figures in her life. The shock of the losses built resilience in her that was her survival mechanism.

“I knew that I had to be solidly grounded in order to navigate this new chapter of my life,” Frederique vocalizes. “I was an instant orphan, and decided to move to New York. I knew I had to be highly responsible, so I bought my first apartment shortly after that. While working very hard at modeling, I also studied on the side.”

“I loved New York!” continues, Frederique. “The array of people was fascinating, and I found America to be the land of great opportunities. When Bear Stearns Investment Company asked me to be a guest speaker on the topic of branding, I recognized that an opportunity like that would never have transpired in Holland.”

“Americans and New Yorkers – particularly - are very open to new ideas, and they are progressive in fields such as mental health. America gave me a lot of support and help in that respect.” Frederique muses as she comments, “It took me a while to

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be proud of modeling. I eventually gestured to myself that I was 'doing ok'. Life's hard knocks sometimes have silver linings. I grew up quickly and I invested the money I made – wisely. Those things helped me to move forward, and it was a great learning experience.”

Frederique and I share an in-depth chat about Scyler.

“When I first fell pregnant with Scyler,” she describes, “I was scared, and Nicholas, Scyler’s dad, knew that I was afraid. I questioned whether I would be a good mother and whether I was capable of the demands. Shortly after that I had a beautiful sign. I visited a doctor’s office, and in it was a statue of a mother and child. Most significantly, it was also the exact statue that had belonged to my mother, and which I had in my home (clearly there were a few of the same statues). It was at that moment that I knew that my child was meant to be. I am a spiritual person, and I have becoming increasingly more spiritual. We didn’t know if the baby was a girl or a boy, and when Scyler was born, we were ecstatic.”

Frederique continues,

“Scyler and I share such a special relationship. We are best friends, and she is such a gift to me. I have learned so much from my precious daughter. She has taught me in my journey to let go of things. More than that, we are great listeners. We hear what the other person is saying; we ask each other for advice. It’s a very caring, nurturing relationship.”

We discuss the modeling industry and its evolution. Frederique offers this analysis:

“I am strong-willed, and that was a characteristic that protected me. If I felt that someone in the industry was disrespecting me, and if boundaries were crossed that made me feel uncomfortable, I drew a line in the sand. Interestingly, during a Guess photo shoot, after I told a photographer ‘enough’, and walked off the set, he apologized to me. Maybe it’s my Dutch upbringing that gives me the confidence to have a voice. I think that Dutch women, in general, are raised to value their self worth, and my mother was very good when it came to empowering me. But ultimately I think it was the loss of my parents that created an even greater strength in me because I was determined to survive, and I wanted to establish respectful and safe work environments. I’m not suggesting that my environ-

ment was ever unsafe. On the contrary, I have very good memories of my modeling years, but I used to offer ‘equality’ humor on set. During a Victoria’s Secret assignment, I suggested that maybe it would be more equitable if everybody – including the behind-the-scenes crew – wore just their underwear that day!”

“America kept opening new doors to me,” enthuses Frederique, “and I was deeply grateful for the opportunities. I went into business; licensing; TV. I met so many interesting people. I was very fortunate. I think where Americans might fall down sometimes is that they live to work, and in Europe, people work to live. Family is very important – and I think the last year of Covid-19 has maybe helped us to assess our life balance in the USA.”

Frederique’s modeling career opened up several other doors in the last 20 years. She went on to act in a Broadway stage production of ‘The Vagina Monologues’, and she performed in several films including Woody Allen’s ‘Celebrity’. She was even offered the role of a Bond girl but she turned it down. Her fame was so entrenched that Scyler recalls walking down 5th Avenue with her mom:

“Everybody that walked past us,” she recalls, “said ‘hello’ to mom, and I was amazed at the thousands of friends she had! But then I would ask mom who the lady was, and she admitted that she didn’t know her name. That’s when I figured that I had a famous mother.” Scyler immediately disposes of any notion that Frederique was ego-driven by saying, “mom was polite and friendly to everyone. She was always so grounded, and I really admired that quality in her.”

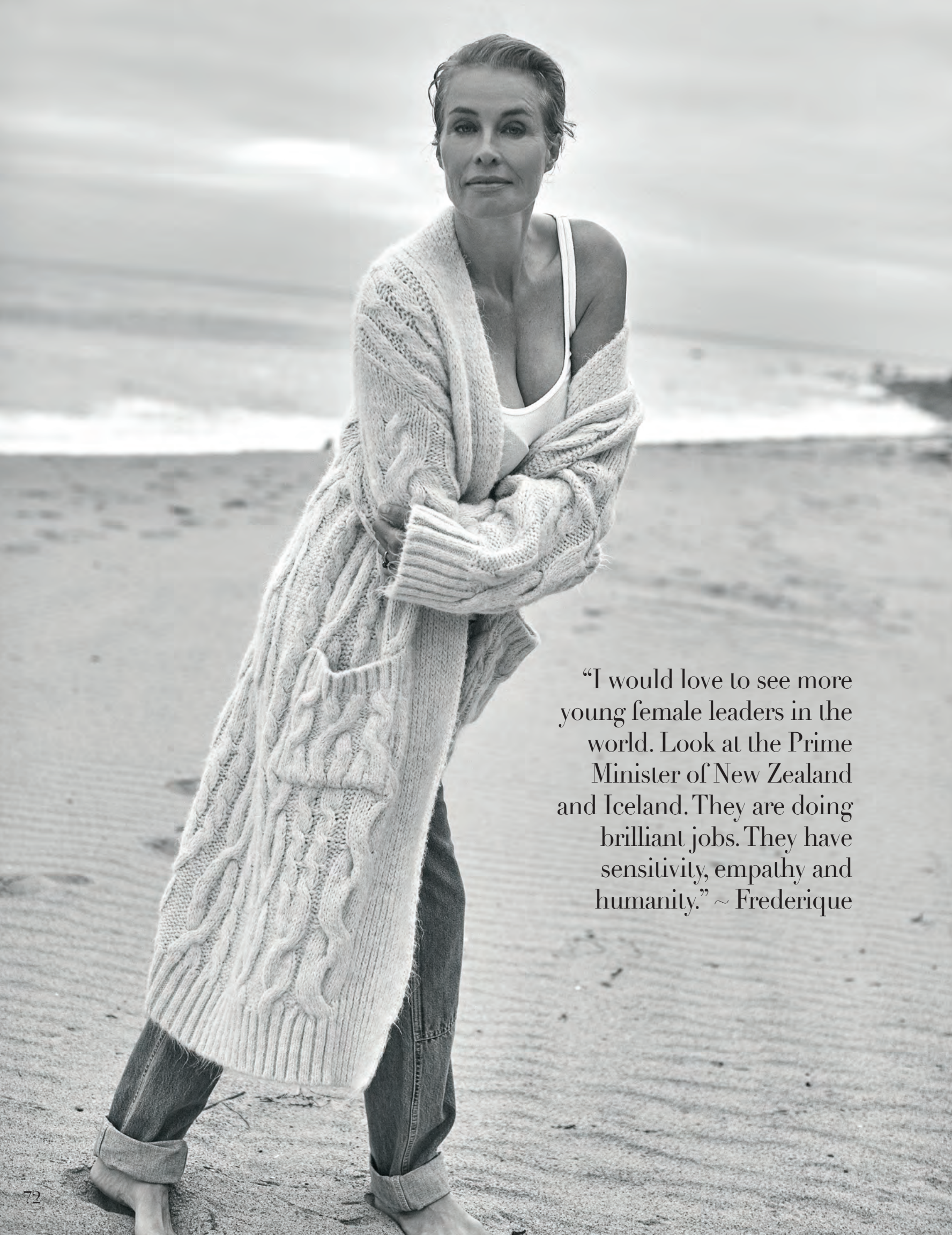
Frederique did a speaking engagement at Harvard University in 2011. She supplies the details:

“There were two occasions where I spoke at Harvard. One was under Professor Coles, and they invited an interesting mix of people with interesting lives to come and join a class. They also invited Isabella Rossellini with us on the panel; on another occasion I was on a panel in which beauty was analyzed. It included racial issues and people expressed very passionate views. I thought it was great.”

Frederique’s humility makes her a shy conversationalist when it comes to covering her extensive accomplishments. She was the recipient of the Marie Claire Entrepreneur Award

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based on her company, Frederique's Choice. I draw the information out of her:

"At one point, Holland named a flower after me," she smiles, "and I was asked to come and meet my flower! It was perfect because I'm an enormous lover of plants and nature in general. As I went through the process, I was fascinated. At that point I pitched to the Discovery Network the idea of a show called 'The Invisible Journey' where you follow the flower from its seedling base to where it eventually travels across the world to get into someone's vase. At that time there was no online brand around flowers. It was an enlightening voyage. I launched my company in 2008 – brought it to the USA along with a TV program with A & E networks. 'Home Grown Makeover' was ahead of its time and it is being sold still. It's all about how flowers and plants eventually get to their living space – to create more balance in people's lives – especially when they live in apartments. The Dutch always have flowers – no matter where they are."

On the topic of her acting career, Frederique provides a tempered summary and some humorous descriptions:

"I did a huge blockbuster movie, 'Wild Wild West' in L.A. on the Warner Bros. lot. We'd play basketball with George Clooney and it was so much fun. Selma Hayek was in it, and I enjoyed living in L.A. In truth, the movie really wasn't my thing. I'm much better at being myself - but I'm glad that I dabbled in it because it was such a fun experience."

We talk about mental health – and the advances that have been made in the USA on this subject. Being emotionally raw from the loss of loved ones has tremendous side effects. Frederique wholeheartedly agrees:

"When I was young, I certainly had my guard up in some relationships because I didn't want to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is something I had to learn about and I sought professional help for that because I started to see patterns of behavior that prevented me from fully investing in relationships. Intimacy was something I had to learn to be comfortable with, and I had to let my guard down in order to experience that."

"Eventually I learned that it was ok to be vulnerable, and I owned it," she says. "The birth of Scyler was an enormous step forward for me. When she was very little, she said something about my mother that I thought was significant – and it was at that moment that I realized I was carrying a suitcase of emotional baggage that needed to be addressed. I certainly didn't

want my issues to be projected onto Scyler."

Scyler remembers that incident clearly. She describes it like this: "Mom and I were watching a sunset, and I turned to her and said, 'this reminds me of your mom'. What I always knew about my mother is that losing her parents at such a vulnerable age was very defining. Her open communication was a process of working through it - and I certainly never felt she was projecting anything onto me. Quite the contrary. I only ever experienced mom pouring positivity and light into my life."

Scyler continues, "A close friend of ours passed away this year and I learned how to deal with loss by helping mom. The experience added to my character. I'm empathetic and I like that quality. I learned how to deal with loss by allowing myself to feel the pain – and I recognized that the wave of deep sadness eventually passes."

Frederique supplies more detail on their recent loss:

"My friend was just 39 years old when he passed unexpectedly. Dealing with that loss was painful, but that's life. We experience joy and sadness, and I've learned to embrace all of those experiences."

"I committed to attending several workshops and I found them to be incredibly helpful. ESALEN in Big Sur is a wonderfully healing place. OMEGA in upstate New York was another key growth area for me. I also went to EMDR Trauma counseling."

We talk about risk:

"I took the huge risk of leaving my home country and moving to New York," Frederique says. "The risk paid off, but not all risks do. Some fail. I learned to understand that failure is as much a part of life as success is. Life has seasons."

We discuss whether Frederique's fame affected Scyler in a negative way while she was growing up. Frederique responds: "Certainly there were kids at school who said to Scyler, 'Look at your mom' – and they would show her a Victoria's Secret picture with me in it. We would discuss it in a very sensible manner, and I think that Scyler really understood that being in the spotlight was not important to me. My brother, with whom I'm very close, uses humor all the time to keep me in my place."

Scyler responds,

"Mom is the most grounded person I know. She's never displayed an ego – ever! In fact, I'm much more fashion conscious than she is. I love clothes, particularly vintage clothes, whereas mom is just happiest in her comfy jeans."

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Frederique's career continues to fire brightly. She's currently filming a show called 'Life Cycles'.

"Life Cycles' is a show that we did just before Covid-19," she explains. "In it, I ride my bike and interview people who are fascinating New York characters. We are now in the editing process, and it will be released on the digital network, CORE – soon."

Just after we did the cover shoot, Vogue Living conducted an interview with Frederique, and then she jetted off to Europe.

We end our interview on several invigorating notes:

"There are so many wonderful benefits to living in the USA," confirms Frederique. "Change here is possible – unlike in Europe – where change takes such a long time to take effect. America is a country of movers and shakers. People move mountains here to bring about change – efficiently and rapidly."

On the topic of the highlights of her life, she says with deep thoughtfulness:

"I am most proud of the fact that I live a beautiful life here in America – and that I survived a lot of losses in my teen years. I am also proud of the fact that I held my head high in an industry (modeling) that encompasses an enormous amount of rejection. I learned that the highs and lows of my career did not reflect on me – and the harshness of the industry never affected me negatively."

"I am most proud of how Scyler has turned out. It is a joy to watch her flourishing and developing as a young adult. I'm also proud and grateful that I was in something like the 'Vagina Monologues.' It was out of my comfort zone but I dared to do it. Likewise in business, I have taken risks. I had a fragrance line; then a bathing suit line. Some of those businesses took off, and some failed, but that's all part of the journey and you learn so much."

Frederique sees her life as a metaphor. She explains, "I'm like a flower. Sometimes I flower, and other times I go back into a bulb...ultimately I always need to come out of that bulbous state and grow."

I ask Frederique what her favorite relaxation activities are:

"I love gardening. I also love visiting art exhibitions; that's how I infuse my soul with the beauty that art provides. I also love yoga – particularly when I'm in the city. I also love to surround myself with nature – so hiking in it is wonderful. As we get older, I think that nature calls us more."

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Scyler's relaxation routine is mostly related to healing and wellness. She loves to pamper herself with nourishing skincare routines, yoga and reading. But she also enjoys the vibrant stimulation of socializing, clubbing and dancing. "I love music and dancing," she says with great enthusiasm.

Frederique's favorite indulgence is definitely a fantastic dinner with friends – and traveling across the world with Scyler – particularly to Costa Rica.

Our conversation turns to food – lots of it – and Frederique laughs as she paints this picture:

"My all-time favorite restaurant in New York is Indochine. It's a Vietnamese French restaurant. There's also a restaurant in New York called 'Estela.' They make fantastic, interesting and original dishes. I love a great tortilla; Lebanese and Japanese food tickle my taste buds too. I love lots of flavors. Most importantly, I love food that I can share with the people I love."

Scyler's favorite guilty pleasure is a large, yummy breakfast burrito!

Frederique talks about the places in the world that hold a special place in her heart:

"It varies. I have a farm in upstate New York and I'm always so excited to wake up and see the stunning beauty. Scyler and I recently visited Ojai in California and we just LOVED it! We stayed at the Turtle Conservancy and it was such a treat. I also love Amsterdam. It truly is one of the most beautiful cities in the world, and I enjoy wandering around it. Costa Rica evokes a special feeling in me. I've been going there for a long time. The beach, in particular, gives me beautiful memories of my mother."

On the topic of tolerance, Frederique speaks with absolute conviction:

"Travel is so important because it opens up our minds and gives us valuable perspectives on life. I said to Scyler that we need to visit an Arabic country so that we can better understand their point of view. On our visit to Morocco we were shown enormous kindness, particularly when we went up into the Atlas Mountains. We also saw first-hand how women are treated in some of these countries, and that was a shock. But it's important to see it first-hand. It requires moving out of your comfort zones."

Scyler adds her own important perspective:





“I’m so grateful that I have parents who’ve led multi-national lives. Dad is a writer, and he’s lived in Paris, Venice... Mom is originally Dutch and she’s very inclusive of everybody – no matter their nationality. Through my parents’ example, I’ve been able to embody many cultures, and I regard myself as a citizen of the world. Mom and I are great travel buddies. On our recent trip to Morocco, we absorbed so much – from the richness of a centuries-old culture to the colors and the array of food choices. We navigated the city as avid adventurers.”

Frederique speaks passionately as she proposes her greatest wishes for the world:

“I sincerely hope that we all take climate change seriously. We need to wake up and each one of us can play a meaningful part in slowing its progression. The polar melts are serious. Also, I wish we could put aside our racism; our aversion to other nationalities and cultures. At the end of the day we are all members of the human race, and we need to work together cooperatively.”

She continues, “I would love to see more young female leaders in the world. Look at the Prime Minister of New Zealand and Iceland. They are doing brilliant jobs. They have sensitivity, empathy and humanity. Because these examples are becoming such pillars, I believe that more young women will step up into leadership.”

It’s Scyler’s generation who will lead the world in the next few decades, and she is enormously hopeful about her peers. She offers this assurance.

“My generation is passionate about accountability, honesty and transparency. We don’t tolerate things being swept under the rug. Through the advantages of technology, we are very engaged in everything, and we’re vocal. If something is not right, we will call it out immediately. We don’t stand for racism and sexism, and we believe that showing respect towards everyone is important. The stakes are higher for my generation, and we do feel a lot of pressure. But, there’s also a lot of aware-



ness, and I believe that we are heading in the right direction. I’m a real mix of American and European, though I intend to return to the USA so that I can be a part of a constructive future here.”

Our sincere gratitude goes out to Iconicfocus Models NYC/LA for an A-list team whose artistry beautifully portrayed this special mother daughter relationship. Our thanks, too, goes out to Jami von Heidegger (of Retrouvé Skincare) whose Malibu property became our gorgeous cover shoot backdrop. 🌿

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