

SALMA HAYEK

New film
tackles
themes
close to
her heart

Words by Jan Janssen
Interview and images courtesy of
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The popular actress portrays a masseuse in her latest movie **Beatriz at Dinner**, where she essays a comedic role that spins an interesting yarn while at the same time confronting social and political issues that resonate in real life. She also opens up on what's life like at home with her family and animals.

Park City, Utah - Anyone who has met Salma Hayek will doubtless be happy for whatever success she has enjoyed in life since she is one of the most pleasant, upbeat, and good-natured individuals you will ever meet. (Not to mention her disarming neon smile and fabulous figure!)

But it was much more than beauty and talent that earned Hayek her place in the film world. She needed every ounce of her prodigious sense of determination to gain acceptance in an industry that had very few parts for Hispanics, let alone someone with a thick Mexican accent.

At the age of 20, she abandoned her comfortable life as a soap opera star in her native Mexico and moved to L.A. in the hope that she could one day become a Hollywood movie star. That gamble paid off, and films like *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *Wild Wild West*, *Frida*, and *Savages* have left an indelible impression on audiences.

Hayek's new movie, **Beatriz At Dinner**, directed by Miguel Arteta (*Youth in Revolt*) earned rave reviews upon its premiere at this year's Sundance Film Festival and critics were almost unanimous in their praise for her performance.

The comedy follows Hayek's holistic health practitioner and massage therapist character who attends a wealthy client's dinner party only to find herself debating social and political issues with a Trump-like billionaire business mogul played by John Lithgow.

"I couldn't believe my luck when this project came to me and of course the timing is unbelievable," Hayek says. "It's rare that you find a movie that says something important about social issues and is also so well-written."



"I also liked the fact that for the first time in my career the director (Miguel Arteta) was going to deliberately film me in bad light and without make-up. It felt liberating not to play a sexy character but a very real woman and great character who speaks her mind."

The film also carries with it a double dose of irony for Hayek. She has voiced her fierce opposition to the real Donald Trump and his policies, especially those regarding Mexican immigration and his proposed border wall. She also happens to be married to a billionaire herself, albeit a kinder, gentler, and more enlightened one in François-Henri Pinault, CEO of Kering, the Paris-based luxury goods empire that owns various brands such as Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, and Balenciaga.

The 50-year-old Hayek lives mainly in London with Pinault and their 9-year-old daughter Valentina. Hayek is also stepmom to Pinault's three older children from his previous marriage. They also have homes in Paris and L.A. while Salma maintains an animal ranch in the state of Washington.

In addition to Beatrice at Dinner, Hayek will be seen later this year in The Hitman's Bodyguard opposite Ryan Reynolds, Gary Oldman, and Samuel L. Jackson.

QH: *Salma, how did you come by this project?*

Hayek: The writer Mike White (Nacho Libre, School of Rock) has been talking about doing a project together for years but it never happened. Then two weeks before my birthday he told me that he finally had the right idea, that it was about a masseuse and the story takes place at a dinner party, and he sent me the finished script on my birthday. Mike had the vision to understand all the undercurrents that we saw during the election campaign last year and he was able to bring out so many important issues.

QH: *There's a very key scene in the film involving scuba diving. Had you ever dived before?*

Hayek: What's funny is that Mike and I have known each other for a long time and we have so many things in common that he's like my twin brother.

But he didn't know that I'm a diver, and that diving is one of the greatest passions in my life. I've been diving since I was 10 years old and I honestly feel happiest when I'm deep underwater. It's almost dangerous because I love to go as deep as I can and push things to the limit. But every time I come back out of a dive I feel like I'm a different person and I'm super relaxed.

Like me, Beatriz grows up by the water and it's a safe place for her.

QH: *You get to speak both in English and in your native Spanish in the film. Was that also interesting for you?*

Hayek: It was a great opportunity for me. It was very rewarding to play Beatriz because in speaking in both languages you get to see how one's personality changes with each language.

That's because each language expresses so much about its specific culture and it connects you to your place of origin and that world which shaped you. Your

language is very important in expressing your individuality and way of looking at the world.

QH: *So you and Beatriz express different elements of who you are when you speak in English?*

Hayek: There's a very different vibration than when she speaks in English which is her adopted language. I understand that very deeply. When Beatriz speaks Spanish you feel the sense of nostalgia she feels for her country and home town in Mexico. When you move away from your place of origin something inside you dies. I still have deep memories of Coatzacoalcos (Mexico) where I grew up and my life in Mexico and I often think about that time.

QH: *You moved to Paris several years ago and now you live mainly in London. Do you ever feel out of place in Europe?*

Hayek: No, I love being in London. We also often spend our weekends in France and I enjoy French culture because it's very Latin and Catholic and I identify with that kind of spirit. I love the way the French take their time to enjoy long lunches and often organise beautiful dinners which are social occasions and part of their lifestyle.

The French appreciate good food and they regard mealtime as an occasion to think, talk, and take great pleasure in such occasions. They never just grab a cup of coffee and rush off. France is a Latin country like Mexico in that way. You always find time to eat together, share a bottle of wine, and have Sunday lunches with the in-laws. There's the same joy of living.

QH: *You've spoken often about devoted you are to raising your daughter Valentina. How does this affect your decisions with respect to your acting career?*

Hayek: It's important to me to stay active in films and I've spent a lot of time producing my own projects over the last few years and now I'm taking a break from that. I worked on The Prophet for three years and during that time I never saw my friends.

But even when I was at my busiest, I never stayed away from Valentina or my house for more than two weeks even though she saw how busy I was and how often I was talking on the phone.

Together with my husband, we are slaves to Valentina's school schedule, so I am only willing to work on a movie if it shoots in the summer or at Christmas or in London. It would be too stressful otherwise and I don't want to disrupt my family life or Valentina's schooling. I love being able to hold her hand and take her to school in the morning and then cooking dinner at home.

QH: *You are not only mother to your daughter Valentina, but you are also stepmother to your husband François's three children, Augustin, Mathilde, and François. How have you adapted to being a mother?*



Hayek: I always felt that I had good maternal instincts. With Valentina, I have to be careful not to be overly attentive and give her some time to be on her own because I always feel this need to be with her.

But I think I have learnt a lot from raising Valentina and being a very conscientious mother. Being able to devote yourself to others and experience that sense of responsibility also allows you to grow as an individual because you are not so focused on your own needs.

QH: *Do you find that Valentina is taking on some of your own characteristics?*

Hayek: I don't find that Valentina and I are that similar in terms of our personalities. She shares a lot with other members of my family who are more confident and light-hearted. For example, I often get stage-fright when I'm in front of the cameras. But she loves being on camera. It doesn't scare her at all!

QH: *You also maintain a ranch where you look after many animals?*

Hayek: I have nine dogs, alpacas, rabbits, chickens, horses, and many other animals on the ranch. It's another expression of my maternal instincts! I love being able to rescue animals and give them a safe place.

But I have promised my husband that I will stop adopting any more dogs which I'm always finding abandoned on the street.

QH: *During your time with your husband, who owns so many major designer labels, has he influence you in terms of your fashion choices?*

Hayek: François has taught me a lot when it comes to appreciating fashion. In my case, choosing a look is simple and complicated. I have many choices, but they don't always suit my body type. So that makes it a bit simpler because I just wear what fits! ■