

Our Kind of Girl

ASHLEY JOI

Let this weapon of a trainer with big ideas and a flair for psychology guide you towards a better life

BY SCOTT HENDERSON

"I've never understood: what is a 'female workout'?" It's a fair question from psychologist-turned-model-turned-trainer Ashley Joi. We're kicking back under the warm winter Californian sun after a brutal workout, and Joi is contemplating the current state of fitness. "Why do we separate the two?" In raising the point, Joi is identifying an oft-overlooked flaw in many approaches to training, perhaps a carry-over from wider society. It's something she has set about changing – just one of the many changes Joi wants to see in the world. And given her new platform as part of Chris Hemsworth's super-squad of trainers on Centr, she's on track to reshape a whole lot more than just your body.



The World According to Ashley Joi

IF IT SPARKS JOI...

Not since William Wordsmith has there been a more fitting aptonym than Ashley Joi. *MH* caught up with the Southern Californian on her home turf, and she could not have been more, well, joyous. "Joy is my middle name. I have always wanted to be known as 'Ashley Joy,'" she explains between sips of her post-workout smoothie. "When I graduated college, social media was consistent in everyone's life. So I made everything 'Ashley Joi'. Changed the 'y' to an 'i'. And made a persona in a sense. I made the person that I always felt that I was on the inside, that I wanted people to see me as."

The move proved to be a stroke of genius in personal branding, with Joi's infectious personality the catalyst for her rise to the top of the Californian fitness community within six years. But despite the abundance of sunny smiles and positive affirmations, don't expect a fluffy workout under her guidance. While she believes there's a place for frivolity, that place is *not* the gym. "I'm not asking you to do what I can do," says Joi, "I'm asking you to give me the best of yourself – and I'm going to be there to push you past that point."

IN YOUR HEAD

Joi's journey to super-trainer began with a psychology degree from the University of Rhode Island. "I originally wanted to be a therapist, a counsellor. Save-the-world type thing. I worked at an alcohol and drug rehab centre. I've worked with neglected children, autistic children, the emotionally disturbed." Joi credits these tough years with helping her to understand and connect with her clients. "They've basically chosen me to be that [caring] person, to see them at their weakest point and trust me to get them to another point."

While Joi is firmly on the fitness train now, if she has her way you might be seeing her from the therapist's couch again soon, in a hybrid existence combining her past and present. "I

still want to go back and get either my Master's in sports psychology or just be a therapist," she tells *MH* as LAPD choppers circle overhead. "I have this vision of being in my home and having a gym that opens up to the ocean. I would have my clients come over and we would train. We would walk out to the beach, there'd be two chairs, and we would end with a therapy session."

JOI TRIBE

Whether it be a partner, colleague or friend, Joi has a few prerequisites for those wishing to join her self-proclaimed 'Joi Tribe' – and they boil down to appreciation and respect. "If I didn't feel heard or appreciated or respected, fuck it, I'm not going back." And despite calling LA home, don't expect her to indulge your theatrics. "I don't like drama, so I'm not a gossiper," she says.

Joi's tribe is growing fast, thanks in part to her new-found platform with *Centr*. But success hasn't always come easily. "Being a woman of colour, you have to fight a little bit harder for yourself and what you stand for, and know there's only one spot for you," she says. "You're up against every shade of brown as a woman of colour. It doesn't matter if it's Hispanic, Latino, anything." Despite the ongoing battle, her trademark optimism is never far from the surface, and she brushes off the reality she's just described with a shrug. "It's just the way the world is right now. You only get one shot. So bring it all. Be yourself."

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

Relocating to LA and building an empire has afforded Joi access to a variety of personnel rarely accessible to personal trainers. She now counts a publicist and make-up artist as permanent fixtures of her team. "The people around me, we're all talented – we just haven't made it yet," says Joi. "But we can make it if we work together."

It was only recently Joi realised she



INSTAGRAM @ASHLEYJOI

shouldn't be afraid of asking for help. In fact, she should embrace it. As a result, she now has a personal advisory board that would make any aspiring Hollywood starlet envious. She counts former *US Biggest Loser* trainer Jillian Michaels, Hollywood trainer Jeanette Jenkins and comedian Damon Wayans as mentors.

In fact, it was Wayans who initially highlighted to Joi the importance of career mentors. "You need a mentor or people to hold you accountable," Joi remembers Wayans saying. "You can't just walk through life thinking you've got it." After outlining her goals to Wayans in the same conversation, the comic heavyweight delivered advice that has underpinned her approach to life ever since. "He told me not to care about what other people are telling you to do. He said, 'Fuck what people are saying you should do. You need to do what you want to do.'" The result for Ashley? A whole lot of Joi. ■