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MAIN**

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5 ARTISTS ON
COMING OF AGE IN
THE SPOTLIGHT

It Girl

Amanda Ruisi on being a go-to, make-it-happen, tree-shaking PR pro

Thirty floors above the Hudson river in her brand-new apartment, power publicist Amanda K. Ruisi stands before her sparkling, oversized windows, taking it all in. “It’s so surreal. I look down at the *Intrepid* and remember doing the Macy’s 4th of July Special on it when I first started in the business,” the doe-eyed brunette says with the wistfulness of a woman twice her age. “Now here I am, all these years later. I almost have to pinch myself.”

At just thirty years old, Ruisi heads up her own public relations agency, AKR PR, with a client roster that reads like the pages of *US Weekly*. With a main office in her hometown of Westport and satellite offices in Manhattan and Los Angeles, life is a jet-fueled ride. “My clients become like family to me,” she says, “so I’m there for them 24-7.”

ON THE RISE

Sure, you might find Ruisi roaming the aisles of Balducci’s in Westport on the occasional weekend, but the suburban Zen ends there. “Soon the two phones in my purse will start ringing and I’ll be putting out fires in the aisles,” she says. “A client can get in a car accident or arrested or there’s a product issue. With all the social media, there’s no delay time. You have to react. I always like to be proactive and stay ahead of the game.”

Ruisi became a major player in her former role as NBC Universal’s East Coast senior press and talent relations manager, overseeing publicity on everything from *The Apprentice* and *Law & Order* to major award shows like the Primetime Emmys and Golden Globes. All



Westporter Amanda Ruisi

the while she was juggling celebrity personalities, from The Donald to George Clooney. “I never get starstruck,” she says, “but George is the most charismatic person I’ve ever met.”

The dynamo’s career started, of all places, in her own front yard. “We were next door neighbors with actor Michael Ian Black when I was living at home while attending Fairfield University. I told my mom, ‘Don’t bother the neighbor!’” But ever the determined mother, she darted across the lawn in a robe and slippers to ask the actor if he could help her daughter land an internship. Days later, Ruisi was cutting her teeth in NBC’s entertainment department. “My mom was the ultimate networker,” she says.

It was her mother who ignited Amanda’s passion for PR. “When I was fourteen, my

mom said, ‘You’re such a social butterfly and I know you’re going to put those skills to use as a publicist.’ I thought, ‘What’s a publicist?’ She knew my destiny before I ever did.”

TURNING POINT

At twenty three, just as Ruisi’s career was skyrocketing, her world came crashing down. Her mother was diagnosed with stage IV uterine cancer and lost her battle just thirteen months later. But she never stopped championing her daughter’s career. Ruisi recalls visiting her at Greenwich Hospital after appearing on the *Today Show* earlier that morning. “It didn’t matter to her that she was suffering... the nurses said how excited she was to watch me and wanted everyone to see.” Her mother’s condition worsened just before the holidays, and Ruisi told her bosses she needed to shut down. But her mom refused, telling her to live her life. Two days later she passed away.

“It was a pivotal point,” Ruisi says. “My mom was my best friend. I could have sunken into a slump, but I went the other way.” While staying strong for her younger brother, Greg, then a junior at Staples High School, Ruisi threw herself into her career with even more intensity. Four years later, at twenty-seven, she launched her own firm with just \$500 in her checking account and no investors. “I can’t tell you exactly what I was thinking back then, but I woke up one day and said, ‘I think it’s time,’” Ruisi remembers. “My career was thriving, and I was torn about leaving. But I’ve been fortunate to have a loyal and reliable reputation thanks to NBC, and that gave me the courage to go off on my own.” »

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“I actually moonlight as a matchmaker... I ducked out after fifteen minutes because **they were doing so well.**”

In January 2010 AKR PR launched with a handful of clients, including NBC, plus product lines for sought-after celebs like the Kardashians and Jay-Z. In the past two years, Ruisi says there has been interest in acquiring her company. “It’s flattering but I’m not sure I’ll ever have a ‘For Sale’ sign up.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Ruisi’s five-year-old King Charles spaniel, Ruby, comes over to the window for a nuzzle. The pooch was a gift from actress and former NBC client Lindsay Price, whom Ruisi set up with *Top Chef Master* charmer Curtis Stone. “I actually moonlight as a matchmaker,” she laughs, recalling the night she accompanied Lindsay and Curtis on their first date to a hole-in-the-wall pub in Beverly Hills. “That was the plan, but I ducked out after fifteen minutes because they were doing so well. Now they’re married and have a baby boy.”

When Ruisi isn’t stepping in for Cupid, she’s playing house with Robert Sorrentino, her beau of seven years. “We were introduced by friends. I didn’t want to go out to meet him but my mom made me,” remembers Ruisi. “She said, ‘You can’t sit here and stare at me all night!’” The relationship evolved and keeps her grounded to this day. “Bob has been with me through everything and is my rock,” she says. He laughs at my go-go-go type A personality. I literally decorated our apartment in twenty-four hours. He knows I can’t sit still.”

Are there wedding bells? Says Ruisi, “When I get married I’d like to do a destination wedding at the Acqualina Resort in Florida. We love it there.” She pauses. “My mother always said she wanted to wear champagne to my

“No matter how much I travel, **Westport is still home to me. ...I’m so much closer to my mother when I’m in Westport because of all the memories.**”

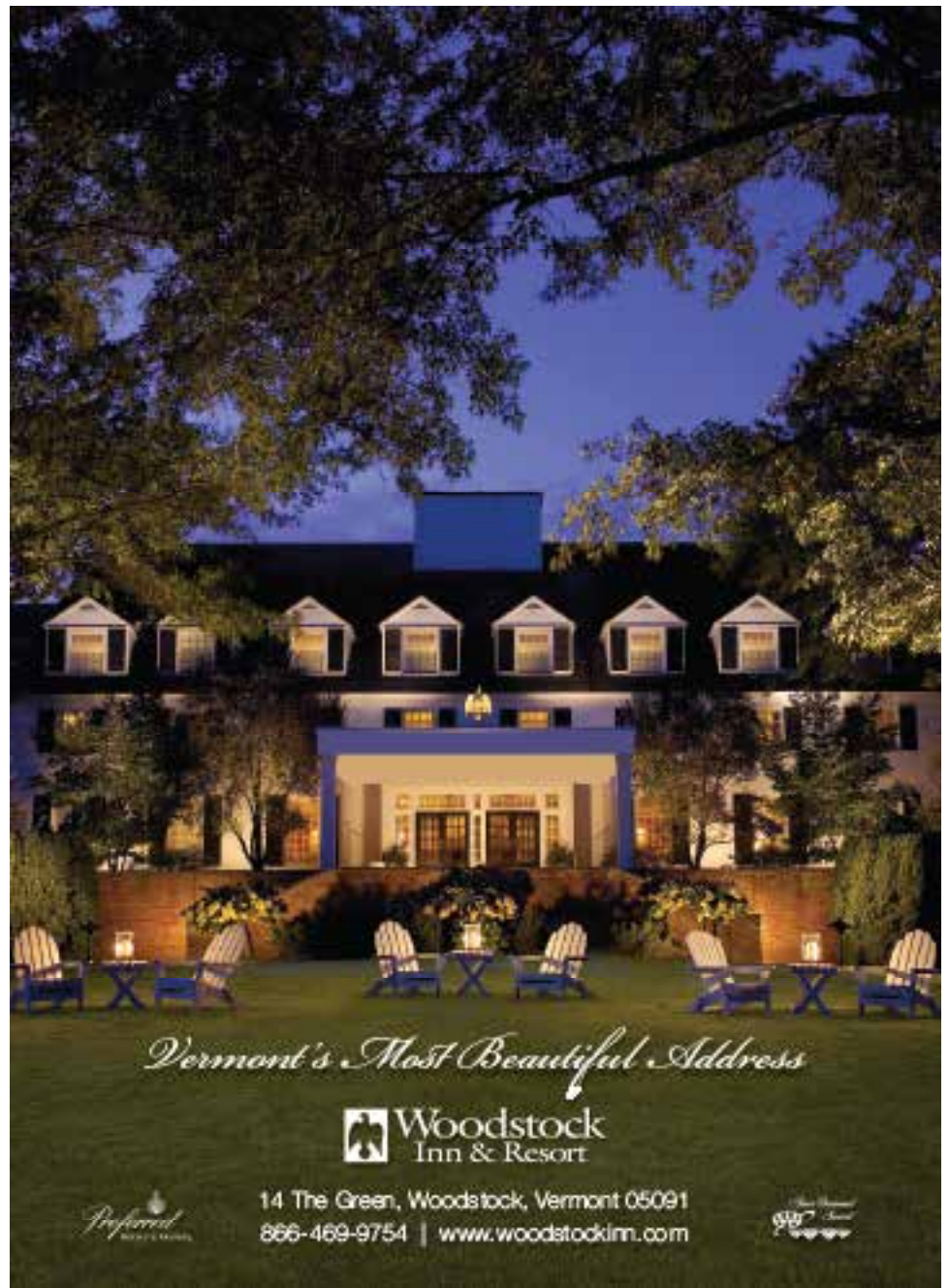
wedding, and I’m still wrapping my head around the fact that she won’t be here to do that.”

For now, the dynamo is focusing on building her business. She also stays active in the local community, from speaking engagements at area universities to raising awareness among her 10,000 Facebook friends and nearly 50,000 Twitter followers for local animal rescue organizations to volunteering with longtime friend Diana DiGuido-Krauss at children’s charity Al’s Angels.


Ruisi recently celebrated her thirty-first birthday, which began with kayaking on the Saugatuck, followed by a dinner party hosted by childhood pal Taryn Bolotin (Bolotin is her married name) at her famous father Michael Bolton’s Westport pad.

“No matter how much I travel, Westport is still home to me,” says Ruisi. Staying close to her roots also provides a crucial tie to her past. “I’m so much closer to my mother when I’m in Westport because of all the memories,” she says. “My mom was like the mayor of Fairfield County, with friends everywhere.” You’ll even see that close connection in the publicist’s moniker. “I include the initial ‘K’ in my name to honor my mother,” says Ruisi. “Her name was Lois Kathryn and I am Amanda Kathryn. I know she’s been guiding me and watching me along this whole journey.”

From where her daughter Amanda K. Ruisi stands, Lois might say the view looks very, very good. W



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WRITERS



Riann Smith

Who is your dream interview for the magazine? Talia Balsam and John Slattery (*Editor's Note: wholeheartedly agree!*) "They're married in real life and play an ex-married duo on *Mad Men*. I would love to delve into their personal dynamic, what makes them tick as a couple....Are you listening Roger and Mona?"

Memorable interview moment? Melissa Joan Hart. "To move to a new town and in a short time develop such a strong sisterhood of women is impressive."

What was your favorite story for the magazine? Homeward Bound. "I profiled a group of Westport ex-pats...who gave me their inside take on traveling in style to their home countries."

Writing for magazines is... "a luxury in an iPad-obsessed world."

When I'm not writing, I'm... "on the beach with my husband and son. I was raised in Santa Barbara; it's in my DNA."

Best place in town to recharge... "Dovecote, with a credit card."



"Homeward Bound," about travel, May/June 2012



Christy Colasurdo

"I was fortunate enough to find a home at *Westport* magazine about ten years ago after hanging up my hat as Special Sections editor at *New York* magazine and moving to Westport to raise my kids. Diane Sembrot is the rare breed of editor who is confident in her stable of writers and has given me the freedom to choose stories that piqued my interest and dovetail with my passions.

In my time with the magazine, I have written about everything from **The Talking Heads** to Paul Newman to entrepreneurial women. The best part of writing for *Westport* mag is discovering new people and stories in my backyard. After I file a piece, I usually walk away with a renewed appreciation for living in the midst of so many smart and creative people.

I recently completed a story about the changing face of Westport [see page 62], and it, too, hammered home the point that Westport is in the throes of an exciting new growth phase, complete with reinvigorated arts centers, a flurry of new eateries and better riverfront usage. I love keeping a finger on the pulse of what is on the horizon."



"Rock Royalty," on Chris Frantz & Tina Weymouth, Aug. 2007



Brigitte Quinn

How do you prepare for an interview? "Research like crazy and then read, read, and then read some more about my subject."

Who was the most memorable interview for the magazine? "**Christopher Plummer**. I know it's not his favorite role, but Captain Von Trapp—oh my!"

Who is your dream interview? "Keith Richards!"

Writing for magazines is... "a great way to meet some of the more interesting people who live right here in Westport."

Favorite book... *Gone with the Wind*. "Scarlett rocks!"

The first time I wrote for Westport magazine, I... "profiled José Feliciano and was amazed not only by his success, but also by his longevity in the industry."

When I write, I must have... "coffee. And if I'm home, '70s music on low volume."

When I'm not writing, I'm... "reading and itchy to be writing again."

I'd love to meet... "Paul McCartney." "ish he would move to Westport so I could profile him but I'd probably scream, then faint during the interview."



"Going to Extremes," on Christopher Plummer, Jan./Feb. 2012