

# “I’ve learned what is right for me & go with my instincts”

Darcey Bussell talks to Victoria Young about how she toughened up, growing old gracefully – and returning to the *Strictly Come Dancing* fold this autumn

**D**arcey Bussell, 44, grew up in London and Australia. She went to the Royal Ballet School at 13, and was the youngest ever principal dancer at the Royal Ballet at 20. She’s married to Australian Angus Forbes and they have two daughters, aged 12 and nine. She was awarded an OBE in 1995, and a CBE in 2006, and stopped dancing in 2007, aged 38. Last year, she joined the judging panel of *Strictly Come Dancing*. She’s also the ambassador for the new Sanctuary Spa Active Reverse skincare range, and has a range of children’s bed linen coming out with Ashley Wilde.

**I was already a great fan of *Strictly* before I started on the show.** I loved watching the professional dancers, and how they got the best out of the contestants.

**I still have more to learn but one thing I’ve learned from *Strictly* is timing.** For me, the dance is easy. I love the detail, the techniques, the change of attitudes you have with each piece. But doing the show has taught me the craft of the talk – because I don’t do the talk. I don’t ever bother with one-liners... I leave that to Len, Bruno and Craig.

**With Len, I bow down and say “I am not worthy”.** He’s such a gentleman,

and he makes my knees turn to jelly when he smiles at me. That’s just him, and he doesn’t play any game. It would be lovely to dance with Len again, but I don’t know if it’s on the cards. When we do anything together, he laughs and says, “Darce, if we were in the 70s, it would be perfect.” He stopped dancing in 1978, and has been judging since then.

**Bruno gets incredibly overexcited and passionate,** and I just want to hug him all the time because he’s



so gorgeous. And then Craig I know a little bit better than all of them. Maybe I’m a little bit too familiar with him because we sort of have the same backgrounds.

**At the beginning, everyone was critical** – of everything I did! I knew the public would either totally hate me or love me, but I’ve been criticised throughout my career. That’s part of the game, so I knew it came with the territory.

**And then there were the “yahs”!** Weirdly, I didn’t even know that I said “yah” all the time. I think they started because, if I coach someone, I want to have feedback and I want to know that they’re understanding. I realised that the “yahs” were nerves, and as soon as the nerves went, the “yahs” went as well. And then, of course, the producer was upset and wanted them to return!

**I say to my kids, “It’s definitely all about hard work.”** It might be only about ten per cent talent, but the rest is hard work. And if you want something enough, and you’re determined and slightly thick-skinned, it does help.

**I found my thick skin but I was pretty pathetic when I first started at the Royal Ballet School.** I felt very sorry for myself when I first started. I was 13 and all the kids had been there since they were 11, so I was two years behind everybody else. It was very,

very noticeable, and I was very aware of it. I thought, “I’ve made the biggest mistake and there’s no way I’m going to be able to catch up.” I cried a lot.

**Then a teacher actually suggested I give up.** She told me, “You have to have the head for it as well as the ability, and if you can’t take it, this isn’t the right thing for you.” As soon as she said that, I thought, “I have to prove her wrong.”

**I was very fortunate because my mother wasn’t a ballet mum.** She only sent me to ballet class because I had knock knees. And she didn’t actually want me to go to Royal Ballet. She didn’t think it would suit me.

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**Mum had dabbled in dance but never become a professional.** She really valued her training and she does have a great straight back. My dad would always say, “I was so attracted to your mum because she walked in the room with this beautiful straight back.” Well, she had a lot of blonde hair as well, so I’m sure there were other things that attracted him to her!

**Mum and I always had quite a harmonious relationship.** I’m the oldest and people always thought I was her younger sister. She looked very young and we’re very similar – a large mouth and always smiling. We’re both very stubborn, but she was a great influence for me, because she ran her own fashion business, so I always had a working mum >>



as a role model. I loved all her clothes, and at eight I had my own cowboy boots, a suede mini-skirt, and a purple denim jacket with studs – I was a little extrovert.

**When I was performing there were certain things I just couldn't do.** I couldn't go out – I'd stay in to conserve my energy. On big tours it was so tempting to go and sightsee, but I'd say, "I need to sit in my room – while everyone else goes to the beach." Luckily, I loved my job enough that it didn't feel like I was missing out.

**Through dancing I learned discipline, and that never goes away.** But I have let my guard down and I can have a bit more fun than I used to. These days I drink more than I used to; I like Champagne and red wine.

**Everyone thinks that we ballerinas don't eat, but actually you have to eat incredibly well.** Like a marathon runner, you burn off food very quickly, and as soon as I had children, I knew that if I had to get through show after show, the only way was by keeping my body well nourished, eating regularly and never missing a meal.

**I'm an outdoor person, so I'm always active.** I have two spoodles, or cockapoos – spaniel mixed with

poodle – called Lolli and Pop. We got them in Australia and they get me out every day, which is great.

**I didn't know instantly that Angus was The One – and nor did he!** We met through friends at a drinks party I had at the end of a season once. He works in the city, so he was often at work at 6.30am and I wasn't waking up until nine, then I wouldn't get home until midnight. It's amazing it worked! It took us a while to get together. I can't even remember who was the persistent one. I met him when I was 23 – that was 21 years ago.

**The secret to a successful long-term relationship is keeping busy.** You both have to have the same feel for life – in our case, you go out and get it; you don't hang around waiting for it. Angus is a get-up-

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and-go person, and I love that about him. We both have our own interests, and obviously love is a big thing in there. We're both very supportive and try not to be selfish. I think it works because we're from very different worlds. He brings me down to earth, and I keep life interesting for him.

**We left London for Australia when the girls were six and three.** We have a lot of family and friends here, so when we came back to London last year, the girls were excited to see everyone again, but now they have the same in Australia too. We mainly feel lucky that we have two places to call home, but it's also hard because the two homes are so far away from each other.

**The girls still found the move hard, but we do a lot of Skyping.** The friends they made in Australia will always be friends, and people are much better at communicating now.

**I understood a lot more what my mother went through when I became a mother.** Before, I was, "Yeah, yeah, I know," and then suddenly I really did know! And I then just wanted my mum around a lot more.

**My mum is very independent and she has her own life as well,** so she wasn't just going to come and stay with me when I first had kids, but she was always very close. My parents live in France, which is great for them after living in London and working all their life.

**Having moved around a lot, and been on tour, I want my home to be comfortable and homely.** We're only renting and I'm very conscious that we put so many pictures up, and we have a lot of our rubbish here! I've really worked at not having too much stuff, but I'm a bit of a hoarder.

**My approach to ageing is to age gracefully and slowly.** I think if you can keep it at bay as long as possible, that's great. I'm conscious about giving myself more time to look after me, which I never did in the past.

**The way you look after yourself is essential for your self-esteem.** I just take that extra bit of time now, and I feel so much better for it. I love Sanctuary Spa Resurface & Refine Ultra Polish because it exfoliates and feels like I'm toning my body as well – it boosts circulation and smooths my skin. The citrusy smell really wakes you up.

**I also use Sanctuary Spa Firm & Boost Body Butter,** which leaves my skin feeling nourished and firm, plus I'm a fan of Sanctuary Spa Lipid Recovery Facial Oil, which I use on my face at night to rehydrate. I had no idea that

an oil would be that helpful, but skin dehydrates during the night because you're not drinking water.

**Botox terrifies me!** It scares me that we don't know anything about it, and it's just plugging something false into your body. I used to think "Why not?" but I have to say I'm really pleased I've never done it.

**When it comes to fashion I'm a high street girl.** I do a lot of Zara, I like Reiss and I do a little bit of LK Bennett, mainly their bags. I like Kate Spade as a treat. Style-wise, I keep it simple – and easy. I love colour and the old movie star look – silhouette shapes and pencil skirts.

**Girly nights and girly weekends away are very important.** A friend has a place she rents about two hours from London, and we get magazines, watch movies, do treatments... and talk non-stop.

**I'm a saver, not a spender.** But I'll splurge on clothes – and shoes. My last splurge was a pair of Lucy Choi purple snakeskin shoes. But I also bought silver shoes from Aldo that have sparkly pointed toes. I'll never get bored of cheap and cheerful.

**My big pleasure in life is music.** I love things like Dinah Washington – everything from jazz to Jimi Hendrix. I'm passionate about the classics too, and generally just want to have music on all the time, which my husband finds a bit annoying because he likes the quiet.

**The best thing about this age is having a different kind of confidence.** Everything is put into perspective when you have children. I've learned what is right for me and to go much more with my instincts.

+ Sanctuary Spa Active Reverse skincare is available from boots.com.  
+ Darcey's Tiny Ballerina and Classical Patchwork bedding range (pictured) will be in stores from August. Find out more on page 165 and at ashleywildegroupp.co.uk.

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UP CLOSE WITH DARCEY BUSSELL

**Who are you closest to?** My husband.  
**Earliest memory?** Swimming in the sea in Spain with my mum.  
**What can't you live without?** My family. And my eyelash curlers.  
**Biggest fear?** Dying young – I want to see my kids get married.  
**What do you value in a partner?** Being a good listener.

**Relaxation is...** Putting my feet up and having a massage – a massage is proper relaxation.  
**Foodie weakness?** Posh chocolate, like Green & Black's.  
**What are you best at?** Being busy.  
**Biggest regret?** I don't have any regrets.  
**The one thing you'd change?** Trying not to

travel as much, but I don't think I'll ever be content in one place.  
**When did you last feel really happy?** Yesterday. I had a day with my husband. We went to the horse races, got dressed up and it was a really special day, and a rarity for us to spend the day together. It was just lovely. **w&h**

For a behind-the-scenes look at the making of the cover, go to womanandhome.com/darcey