

marta dusseldorp

*She's starred alongside some of Australia's finest actors, yet the chances are you don't know her name. That should be changing when Channel 7's epic new drama **A Place to Call Home** hits our screens this month*

WORDS DAVID SMIEDT

Photo: EMMA PHILLIPS/LIZARD MANAGEMENT

Marta Dusseldorp. Say it out loud. Roll the syllables around your mouth and allow an image of an actress with this name to form in your mind. It may be reminiscent of old-school glamorous German stars like Marlene Dietrich, but this 39-year-old mother of two from Sydney's eastern suburbs is undoubtedly of the here and now.

A striking synthesis of porcelain and steel, Marta is one of those ensemble players who so submerges herself in roles that you barely recognise her from one to the next.

In the past two years alone, she has starred in the critically acclaimed ABC drama *Crownies*, proved the ideal foil for Guy Pearce in *Jack Irish* and poked fun at the food world in the feature film *Burning Man*.

But it's Channel 7's new period drama *A Place to Call Home*, which debuts this month, that's set to finally propel Marta into the limelight. Playing the role of Sarah Adams, she's indisputably taking the lead in this series set in rural Australia in 1953. The brainchild of *Packed to the Rafters* creator Bevan Lee, it sees her character challenging the class-stratified social mores of the era, as well as modern assumptions about a woman's place in society.

"It was a time of great social upheaval in Australia," she says. "My character is re-evaluating her own social status and what, if anything,

"MY character is re-evaluating her own SOCIAL STATUS"



Photo: EMMA PHILLIPS/LIZARD MANAGEMENT



marta's favourite destinations:

CAPE LEVEQUE
IN
WESTERN
AUSTRALIA

» *"It's just so remote and unspoiled. It feels eternal."*

TASMANIA

» *"It rips my heart out every time. It's brutally romantic."*

JAPAN

» *"I'd live there in a heartbeat. The culture, lifestyle and architecture stand in such contrast to what we see here in our daily lives."*

that entitles her to. In that regard it mirrors contemporary society as we look at questions of social and economic equality."

In addition to fronting what is shaping up to be Australia's answer to *Downton Abbey*, Marta flits between the parenting and career roles known to so many Australian women. "It's different for everyone," says the mother of Grace, five, and Maggie, three, "but for me it comes down to not judging yourself too harshly when you can't be superwoman. I always check in

with my husband and kids. Our weekends are all about them during shooting, and so far no one has changed the locks on me."

So how does she ensure her girls are exposed to quality stimulation in the YouTube era? "I think children gravitate to what you surround yourself with," the actress replies. "My husband [fellow thespian Ben Winspear] is fascinated by all things medieval, so he's made the girls swords and shields and castles. They totally love jousting."

Despite the fact she will soon be taking over lounges around the nation, she confesses a love of theatre. "You know if a live performance could have been better by the instantaneous response of the crowd, and I adore that," says Marta. "With television, you're far more removed. Sometimes I'll stare at Ben after a scene on TV until he says, 'Yes, that was great.' I love it when people text me during the show."

Marta is the granddaughter of Dick Dusseldorp, the philanthropist and founder of multinational

BELOW: Dusseldorp with the cast of *A Place to Call Home*



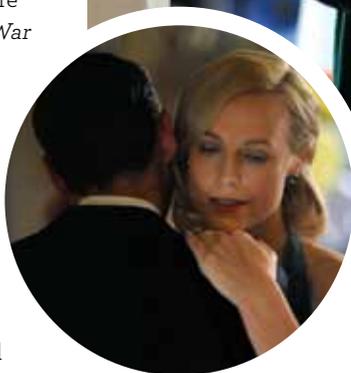
Top photo: EMMA PHILLIPS/LIZARD MANAGEMENT Cast photo: COURTESY OF CHANNEL 7



property company Lend Lease, who secured the contract to build the Sydney Opera House. A less ambitious soul would have raised a mojito to grandad and considered it a day's work. However, she chose a profession where last names don't guarantee success. A profession where 15-hour days are common, and one that saw her stand utterly still for 75 minutes in a blizzard of gold foil in the Sydney Theatre Company's production of *The War of the Roses*.

Like most actors, Marta knows in an instant which historical character she would most like to play. "It would have to be [Dutch wartime spy] Mata Hari, after whom I was named," she says. "I am a huge fan of strong women who transformed themselves into something more than they were. Norma Jean Baker's transition to Marilyn Monroe is just as fascinating to me. I'm drawn to females that manipulated male ignorance to their own ends over the course of history, wreaked a bit of havoc and were punished for it."

Marta's own penchant for playing troublemakers comes to the fore in *A Place to Call Home*, but it was also on feisty display in *Crownies*. To prepare for her role as a law graduate making her way through the courts, the actress shadowed Margaret Cunneen, the granite-



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TOP/INSET:
Scenes from *A Place to Call Home*

tough crown prosecutor who has jailed many of Australia's most notorious killers and rapists.

"Watching her take on this vitally important role in society, and do a job that is so emotionally wrenching, helped me build a character that I hoped did crown prosecutors justice," Marta says. "I was a little nervous about what she'd think, but she simply texted me the word 'Yes!'. It was one of the best reviews I've ever had."

If early reports of *A Place to Call Home* are anything to go by, it's likely that such praise will be lavished on her again in 2013. But just as her late-night baking sessions allow her to temporarily leave the demands of her career aside, it's certain she will be leavening this heady mix with a pinch of salt. ■