

mina

the perks of
staying true to

yourself

photographs by yu tsai

by ashley mateo



ON NINA: Sweater,
Autumn Cashmere; shirt,
Splendid; skirt, Nanette
Lepore; necklace, Dola
Designs; belt, Wet Seal;
yellow and silver
bracelets, Joolz by Martha
Calvo; blue bracelet,
Dannijo; socks, We Love
Colors; boots, DSquared².

ON NINA: Sweater,
Dear Cashmere; shirt,
Moschino Cheap and
Chic; skirt, Jac
Langheim; necklace,
Dola Designs.



It's easy to think that Nina Dobrev is just like the pretty, popular girls at your school. She has a hot boyfriend (Ian Somerhalder, her costar on The CW's hit series *The Vampire Diaries*), she always looks perfectly put together, and she's naturally sweet and poised in public. But there's a secret wild side of Nina that's not on display for everyone every day. When she's with her girlfriends (and *Vampire Diaries* costars) Kayla Ewell, Sara Canning, Candice Accola, and Kat Graham, she's her hilarious, goofy self, taking road trips and hosting cooking parties. In fact, once a year, she ditches work and her boyfriend for an all-out girls' weekend. This year: Disney World! "I want to have funnel cake and pop, and just be immature with my girls," says the 23-year-old. "I think that's the most important thing about spending time with your friends—even though you're growing up, you should never stop having fun."

Nina's character in her new movie, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, also has a secret life—but one that's much darker. Nina plays a high school senior who *seems* to have it all together, but who is hiding the fact that her boyfriend is abusive. "I hope girls will see her situation and learn from it," Nina says. "In high school, it's easy to feel like you're the only one going through a certain thing or dealing with certain emotions. I hope the movie shows that everyone—even people you think are perfect—is going through something difficult. No one is alone."

Nina didn't have to dig too deep to channel the feeling of alienation that's at the heart of *Perks*. She had her own personal experience to draw from: As early as her sophomore year at her performing arts high school in Scarborough, Ontario, Nina had a schedule packed with activities like dance, volleyball, and after-school jobs, not to mention a competitive gymnastics career and her first big acting role, on *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. But her drive often made her feel like she didn't belong. "Nobody could say they did the things I'd done, like acting, which was

kind of cool," she says. "But I missed out on a lot of school while I was filming or traveling, and always felt slightly out of the loop."

That time gave Nina a fierce independent streak—"I don't need other people to make me happy," she says. "I enjoy their company, but I can be happy in my own company, too." And she doesn't feel like an outsider anymore: She has a career she loves, and a relationship and friendships that keep her happy and grounded. Nina opened up to *Seventeen* about how she built the life she always wanted—by staying true to herself.

17: It's hard to believe you were ever an outsider! What made you feel that way in high school?

Nina Dobrev: I did have a lot of friends in different groups, but I never unconditionally belonged to one specific clique—I was a jock, but I also took visual arts and hung out with the drama and musical theater kids. I was being pulled in so many different directions, I usually felt like a fifth wheel. But I don't regret that, because I got to try a little bit of everything, and that's the point of high school. You're looking for what inspires you and makes you happy. I eventually found that in acting.

17: Did you think of yourself as a "wallflower"?

ND: I think wallflowers are incredibly intuitive and observant of their surroundings, and they absorb a lot more around them. That's the kind of wallflower I was, silently watching and learning from other people's mistakes so that I didn't repeat them.

17: Your character in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is in an abusive relationship. What was it like portraying a girl in such a serious situation?

ND: It is a *really* heavy topic, and I hope my character gives girls some perspective. I think more than anything, girls allow abuse to happen because they're embarrassed. Let's say a girl gets into an argument with her boyfriend, and he hits her. In the heat of the moment, she's shocked, but when she has time to cool down, she thinks, Well, I egged him on. It's kind of my fault. It's really hard to be objective in that kind of

“**Even people you think are perfect are going through something difficult.**”

situation—she knows it shouldn't be happening, but she's so embarrassed that she allowed it to happen, so she either pretends it never happened or starts justifying it and making excuses for it. But there is no excuse for abuse. That's why it's so important to show girls that it's not their fault.

17: What do you think is the key to a good relationship?

ND: Make sure you're always smiling! I think people should be with the person who makes them smile. The minute you're not smiling anymore, you shouldn't be in the relationship. That's what you figure out by having good or bad experiences with boyfriends and finding out what qualities you like and don't like in a person. It's part of growing up and learning. You should always be with the people who make you feel happiest.

17: How can a girl find that kind of relationship?

ND: The best relationships are the ones that are a continuation of a friendship. I think you have to have a solid friendship to have a good relationship. You know when you're going on a first date with someone, and you get all dolled up for like an hour, you put on your best dress, and then on the date you say all the best things about yourself that you think he wants to hear? In a way, you're not showing him the real you. If you're friends first, there is no pretending, no act.

17: You and Ian always look like you're having so much fun when you are out together!

ND: You know what? The first time I was on the cover of *Seventeen*, the cover line said something like "Nina Dobrev: Why she won't date any of her costars." And then cut to two years later . . . it's funny that I said that, but it was honestly what I believed. You learn things about yourself and one thing I've learned is, "Never say never." But at that time I didn't *want* to be dating one of my costars—my goal on the show was to be professional. But sometimes you can't help who you

have a connection with, and you can only fight it for so long—which I did for a really, really long time.

17: So was that connection there from the beginning?

ND: When we first started filming *The Vampire Diaries*, the whole cast was incredibly close. And me, Ian, and [costar] Paul [Wesley, who plays Stefan] were inseparable—all three of us. We were friends first and foremost.

17: There are a lot of marriage rumors about you—is there any truth to them?

ND: There are so many rumors! Every couple of months, I'll get e-mails from my parents, after they've read an article in the tabloids, like, "Just checking in to make sure you're not married . . . Did he propose!?" Even my friends send me Google Alerts. It's hilarious. My parents married young, but I personally don't think there's any rush. Let's say you get married tomorrow. You'll be married, hopefully, for the rest of your life. So what is it going to change if you get married tomorrow or five years from now? Ten years from now?

17: Between your job and your boyfriend, you're always busy—why is your girlfriend getaway such a priority?

ND: Girls' weekend with the *Vampire Diaries* girls has become a big deal! The first year, all the boys made fun of us leading up to it, and

the day we left, they were begging to come with. We were just like, "No!" It's our quality time. When we get away, we cook dinner together, watch movies, lie on the beach, and take tons of pictures. It's a road trip and girl talk—you can't imagine the things we say in the car! It's so much fun to unload and not feel guilty complaining or talking about your insecurities or bonding over things that you thought you were on your own about. Sometimes you don't have the time to do that when you're busy. And it's not the same unless you spend the whole weekend together. I don't have that many very close friends, so it's important to invest that time. We have a special bond. **17**

“
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ON NINA: Sweater, Keds Clothing;
skirt, Marc by Marc Jacobs; yellow
and red rhinestone bracelets;
Joolz by Martha Calvo; rhinestone
flower bracelet, Flutter by Jill
Golden; black bangle, CC Skye.

