

DARE TO
BE DIFFERENT

Diamonds forever still excite glow

Before she was Elvira, Cassandra Peterson was a young starlet working as a showgirl in Las Vegas. After finishing high school in Colorado Springs, she travelled to Vegas for a role in the production *Vive Les Girls*. It was a road that led to exciting things. Her first on-screen moment came in 1971, when she was cast as a showgirl in the Bond movie *Diamonds Are Forever*, alongside the sexy Sean Connery. Though most of her scenes made the cutting-room floor, she can briefly be seen walking behind Bond at the casino.

Her likeness was said to have inspired the illustration of the redheaded bombshell on the movie poster, too.

"I was momentarily in the movie *Diamonds Are Forever*," Peterson confesses, "and yes, Sean Connery and myself and a couple of showgirls all met each other. "We actually had an amazing dinner. I went over to London with them all.

"I shot just as an extra one day over there on the film, as well as in Vegas, and I had lunch at the big studios in London.

"I was there with Sean Connery, Cubby Broccoli, who made the film, Michael Caine, Tony Curtis and myself, all at one table.

"It was pretty amazing."

With a dinner guest list like that, how did she know where to look?

"I know!" she exclaims. "I don't know exactly what Michael Caine and Tony Curtis were doing there. I think they were working on other projects, but we all ended up at the same table. All I can remember is being blown away that Sean Connery was actually bald. That was about 1970 and he was almost completely bald." Perhaps she should lend him an Elvira wig.



Bond memories: Cassandra Peterson had a showgirl role.



'THE WHOLE THING IS VERY SEXY. WHEN ANYBODY SAYS YOU CAN'T DO SOMETHING, YOU WANT TO DO IT'

Cassandra Peterson lives with evidence of another woman all around, but she's happily shared her home with alter ego Elvira for more than 30 years, writes Sally Browne

When Cassandra Peterson looks around her Los Angeles home, she sees evidence of another woman everywhere. There's the tall black wig. The racks of dresses. The props and memorabilia.

"I actually just moved to a new house so I'm seeing around me boxes of crap and piles of junk. Oh God! Bad timing on my part to move right before Halloween," the queen of darkness says.

It's all stuff belonging to her alter ego, Elvira, the sassy horror movie hostess, a character she has lived and breathed for more than 30 years.

In fact, the ravishing 61-year-old has "storage units and storage units" full of Elvira's gear, including the sexy sofa which she used to present her TV show *Movie Macabre*, and the "macabre mobile", a black '58 Thunderbird, from her 1988 movie *Mistress of the Dark*.

"At a big convention in the US recently, I had an Elvira museum set up for the weekend, so that was fun, but it was overwhelming, going through it all."

The Elvira brand is big business with films, dolls, comics and computer games generated

from her likeness. She travels to 10 or 12 conventions a year, and will be visiting Australia for Supanova next week. She hopes not to get a tan.

"I have really, really loyal, great fans," she says. "I have hundreds of pictures of people that have Elvira tattooed on them. I mean, now that's a good fan, isn't it?"

She has followers of every age, too. At a recent US convention, a small girl was so excited to see her idol that she jumped out of her wheelchair to run over and hug her, Peterson recalls.

"Her parents said, 'she loves you so much'. She had been going in for her 15th surgery on her back. She was six years old and she was going, 'You're the most fabulous and the most fashionable'. That was adorable."

At the same convention, there was a much older fan. In fact, his son brought him in a box. "He said, 'My dad never got a chance to see you and he's your biggest fan and I'm bringing you his ashes so that you can sign the box that he's in'. I signed it, 'Better late than never.'"

Peterson says it's the hidden and forbidden nature of the dark side that makes it

appealing. "The whole thing is very sexy. Of course, when anybody says no, you can't do something, you want to do it."

Although she may have fans far and wide, when she goes out as herself she's rarely recognised. "I'm one of the few celebrities in Hollywood that can go out on the street and not worry about putting on make-up and having my hair done."

So how are Cassandra and Elvira different? "Unfortunately I spend 99 per cent of my time just wrangling Elvira at the business end. I used to have hobbies and stuff. Now I don't. I pretty much run the Elvira business, do licensing and merchandising and write stuff, pitch stuff. So I'm more like the down-to-earth one, the business one, the one with maybe half a brain, I don't know."

Elvira still has plenty on her plate. She's working on a new comic book and is pitching a new reality show in the States, as well as a touring live show.

So one final question. With the current vampire craze sweeping the world, who does the Mistress of the Dark rate higher: Bela Lugosi or Robert Pattinson?

"Oh God, Bela Lugosi," she says with conviction. "Give me a break. I don't have to think twice about that one. I'm not into vampires that sparkle."

Supanova, November 9-11, RNA Showgrounds, Brisbane.