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GIFT GUIDE

**SNEAK PREVIEW:**  
SPECIAL HOLIDAY  
CALENDAR

DAZZLING  
DONNA  
MILLS





# True Dynamite!

*In front of a camera or in person, Donna Mills is a knockout.*

DON'T YOU DARE say a word in the presence of Donna Mills against Abby Cunningham Ewing, the sultry schemer whose intrigues give the high voltage power to "Knots Landing" on CBS. Abby may be, as some fans gleefully declare, the worst villainess (they might choose a more colorful description) on TV. But she's certainly not that in the eyes of the woman who plays her.

"I like Abby," says Mills. "I think she has really good qualities. She's a mother, she loves her children, she would do anything for them. I like her ambition. I like the fact that whatever problems are presented to her—as they always are in nighttime drama—she finds a way to get around them. She never cries on anybody's shoulder or moans or whimpers and groans and complains. She *never* does that. She says, 'Well, okay, now what do I do? How do I find a way around that, to get what I want?' She's very singleminded. It's a great character trait."

Abby Ewing clearly isn't the only woman around here who knows what she wants and is determined to get it. Donna Mills, without any of the negative characteristics one might be tempted to apply to Abby, has enough drive and determination to leave Mrs. Ewing behind in the dust, panting for energy.

Donna Mills knew at age five that she wanted to be a performer. That's when she started to study dance, in Chicago, and more than anything else in the world she dreamed of being a ballerina. She went on dancing, right through her college years at the University of Illinois. And then her career path changed. She auditioned for a role in Neil Simon's

**By Norman Kolpas**

Donna Mills is resplendent in a fitted black velvet gown with rhinestones by designer Rita Mezrahi for Claire's Collection. Photography by Dick Zimmerman. Hair by Bren Plaistowe.

Styling by Anne Framroze.

Flowers by Terry O'Rourke, La Vie en Rose, Venice.









## "WHENEVER I DO

*something, I try to be very sure that I know who I'm supporting and what I'm supporting so that it doesn't turn out to be somebody or something that's bad for the public."*

—Donna Mills

"Come Blow Your Horn" at the acclaimed Drury Lane Theatre in her home town. She stayed on with the company there to appear in two more productions. And, she decided to leave her professional dance career behind, determined now to act.

It's a decision she doesn't regret. "I'm not sorry I didn't go in that direction. Dancers have a very short professional life and it's a very, very tough life." But Mills hasn't cut herself off completely from those roots. She has a dance studio in her home, where she works out at the ballet barre as often as possible. She also actively supports professional dance companies—particularly the Joffrey. "I'm very happy that we have a company of its caliber, that the Joffrey has a home here in L.A."

Mills first left her Chicago home to tour for several months with the cast of "My Fair Lady." Then, she decided to pursue her acting career where they play for the highest stakes. She moved to New York City. Not long after arriving, she won a regular role in a soap opera, "The Secret Storm," followed by a starring role in another soap, "Love Is A Many Splendored Thing." But she didn't sit back complacently during these early successes. "I studied all the time, so I could take whatever I studied in class right into the work situation." She worked in New York for three years, and towards the end of that period got another major break. She'd been hired for a guest starring role in Burt Reynolds' TV detective series, "Dan August." Her work impressed him. Reynolds, in turn, talked about this talented young actress to his friend Clint Eastwood, who was casting the film that would mark his debut as director/star. Eastwood had a look at the "dailies" (the unedited film) from the "Dan August" episode and decided to cast Donna Mills as the romantic lead in "Play Misty For Me."

"I finished my contract on the soap on a Friday," says Mills, "then flew out here, went up to Carmel and started shooting 'Play Misty' on the following Monday."

Things were moving very fast indeed. After finishing the movie, Mills moved to Los Angeles. Within two weeks, she had landed a starring role, opposite Larry

Hagman, in a half-hour situation comedy called "The Good Life." The premise was great. She played Hagman's wife. He was a stockbroker who decided to leave the rat race behind; together, they became butler and maid to a wealthy couple played by Hermione Baddeley and David Wayne. What's that? you say. Haven't heard of "The Good Life"? There's a pretty good reason, as Mills explains. "Unfortunately, we premiered opposite a show called 'All in the Family.'" That unforeseen disaster did not get Donna Mills down. With no other series on the horizon, she threw herself into another kind of screen work, making a succession of 21 television movies, in most of which she played the victim.

But today, there are no more victim roles for Donna Mills. Now that she's playing a woman of action, there's no turning back. As far as she's concerned, things should only get *more* active, starting with Abby Ewing herself. "She has power, but she has it through other people. I'd like to see her have it on her own." Mills can feel her own power growing and she actually feels she owes some of that to Abby. "I think she's helped me a lot—in confidence, in having ambition. When you play somebody who's very self-assured all the time, I think *you* become more assured."

That assurance is showing in every facet of her life, as she begins to move beyond her acting career. She is taking that big step into the role of producer of her own television movies. Though she has been in on the development of other films, her first as a full-fledged producer was "Intimate Encounters," which aired in late September. Other projects are, as Hollywood is known to say, in the works.

"I like it very much, the control you have over your work. It's very gratifying to see a project go from conception all the way to the finished film." Along the way, she's learning the Hollywood art of compromise, though she sounds more than a little bit like her television alter ego when she adds, "I imagine the more you learn, the more you are able to get what *you* want while *looking* like you're compromising."



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