



Hair by Akhisa Yamaguchi using Bumble and Bumble Hair Care. Makeup by Kuma for Nars Cosmetics

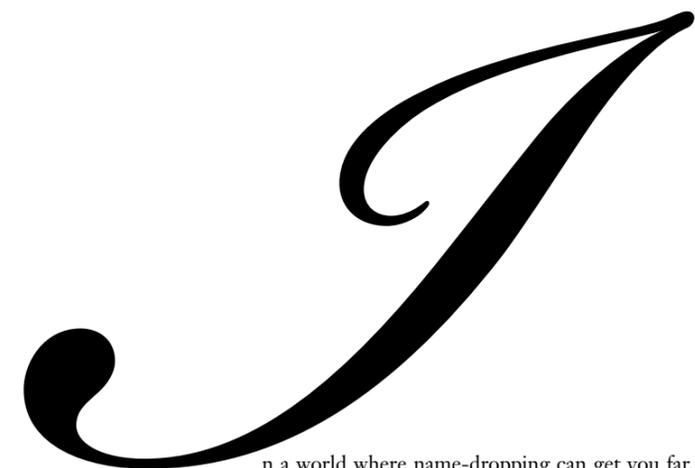
Gold Beaded Dress, **Ralph Lauren**  
Diamond Earrings, **Chopard**  
Diamond Ring, **Chopard**  
Shoes, **Ballet Beautiful**

# Ballet business

Ballet trainer to the stars, Mary Helen Bowers has transitioned from dancer to entrepreneur. **Danae Mercer** meets her in New York to talk through the challenges and rewards of fitness

**Photography:** Jovana Obradovic

**Styling:** Amit Gajwani



In a world where name-dropping can get you far, Mary Helen Bowers doesn't. She could. The New York based ballet dancer turned entrepreneur has an impressive client list consisting of celebrities and fashion's elite. Victoria's Secret angels like Lily Aldridge, Doutzen Kroes, Lindsay Ellingson, and Erin Heatherton credit Bowers for their physiques. "I've been doing Ballet Beautiful since 2013," explained Heatherton, also a *Sports Illustrated* model, to *People*. "I'm still in the falling-in-love stage. It re-taught me how to stand." Celebrities like Liv Tyler, Zooey Deschanel, and Zoe Kravitz are all fans of Bowers' classes.

Yet the name most immediately associated with Bowers is that of lithe Natalie Portman, whom Bowers trained for her Academy Award winning role in *Black Swan*. Bowers spent about a year working with the actress, adjusting her frame, instructing her in a specialised front-crawl 'swan-like' swim method, teaching her to plié and walk and dance. "Ballerinas have obvious physical qualities like long, lean muscles and beautiful posture," Bowers told *Shape*. "We wanted [Natalie] to look the part, but also wanted to make sure she was able to move and dance like a professional ballerina."

During our day of shooting Bowers in luxury gowns at her airy New York studio, the fitness entrepreneur doesn't mention Portman, or indeed any of her famous clients. In our interview, happening over the phone a week later,

she focuses more on the surprises of being an entrepreneur and the lessons she's discovered along the way ("Take each mistake, or moment where you stumble and maybe not hit your mark on the first shot, as an experience to learn," she notes at one point) than on the hundreds of people, both famous and not, who flock to her studio and website.

For Bowers isn't just a darling of the stars – she is a modern media celebrity in her own right. On Instagram, Bowers has 363,000 followers. Every one of her posts elicits a trail of comments and compliments. On an image of Bowers en pointe: "You have beautiful feet," "Gah! Gorgeousness!!!"; On another of Bowers dancing, 164 comments, including: "dream legs," "No words," and "Perfection".

Many of these followers noticed Bowers – myself included – when the dancer began posting photos of herself en pointe whilst pregnant with her daughter. "I was just capturing what I was doing in my daily life. That's so much of my Instagram account. The same was true when I was pregnant, but I think perhaps the shape for a dancer was much less expected. I was embracing the process of being pregnant, the changes my body was going through were so radical.

"Women are very scared of those changes sometimes. They feel a bit concerned, or insecure about their bodies. I really wanted to not only show what I



Burgundy Dress, **Tadashi Shoji** at **Bloomingdale's**  
Long Chain, **Cartier**  
Ring, **Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Earrings, **Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Shoes, **Ballet Beautiful**

Green Mermaid Dress, **Theia at Bloomingdale's**  
Bracelet, **Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Ring, **Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Earrings, **Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Shoes, **Ballet Beautiful**



*I* had to learn early on that if someone doesn't share your vision, it doesn't reflect on what you can do in this life. It's so important.

»FEATURED: BALLET BEAUTIFUL«

White Beaded Top, **Alice and Olivia at Saks Fifth Ave.**  
Light Blue Tutu, **Ballet Beautiful**  
Ring, **Cartier**  
Earrings, **Cartier**  
Bracelet, **Chopard**  
Shoes, **Ballet Beautiful**



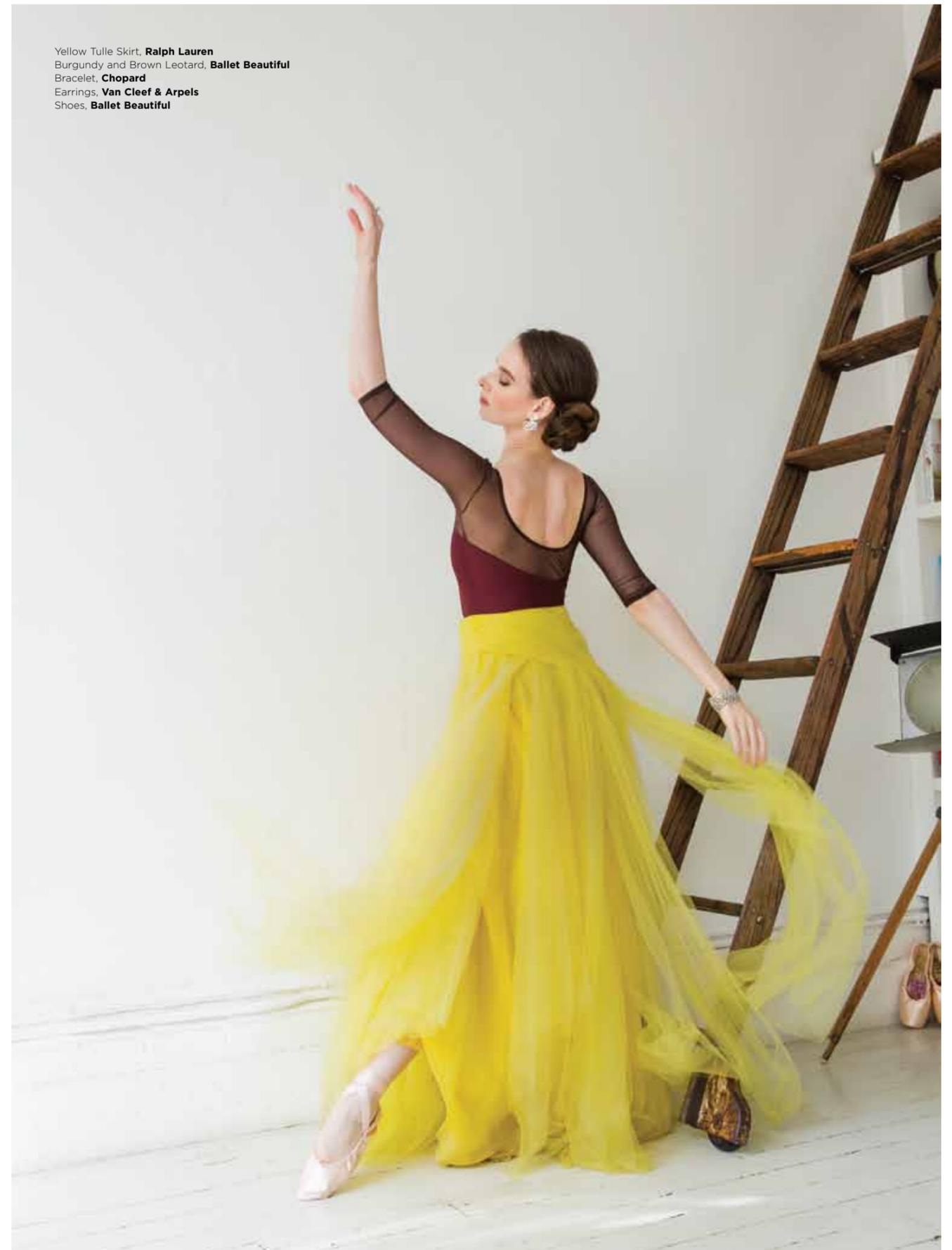
So many people look at working out as a punishment. My company is about infusing fitness and wellness with beauty and elegance.



Blue Dress, **Reem Acra at Bloomingdale's**  
Necklace, **Chopard**  
Earrings, **Chopard**  
Ring, **Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Bracelet, **Chopard**  
Shoes, **Ballet Beautiful**



Yellow Tulle Skirt, **Ralph Lauren**  
Burgundy and Brown Leotard, **Ballet Beautiful**  
Bracelet, **Chopard**  
Earrings, **Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Shoes, **Ballet Beautiful**



was doing, but share some photos that might inspire other women to embrace pregnancy and their bodies, their changing forms.”

The world of dance is notoriously judgemental about physiques. Bowers, who began dancing from a young age (“It was just something I was very drawn to,” she explains), joined the New York City Ballet when she was 16. After a decade, a degree at Columbia University, and an injury, Bowers launched Ballet Beautiful.

“My goal has always been to create a company that empowers women, that helps support them in leading a healthy life. I hate when people feel trapped by a certain body type they have, or limitations that often exist fully in their mind. So many people look at working out as a punishment and have a very unhealthy relationship with food and fitness. That’s something I’ve struggled with in the past. My company is about infusing fitness and wellness with beauty and elegance.”

There were challenges, of course. Bowers laughs. “Life is full of challenges. I’m a very positive, optimistic person, and I think that’s an important skill for an entrepreneur. You have to believe in your vision, that you will succeed, or you wouldn’t bother doing it. I had to learn early on that if someone doesn’t share your vision, it doesn’t reflect on what you can do in this life. It’s so important.”

Bowers began the business alone. Today she has a team behind her. Several flit about during our New York shoot. One stands at the wings, and occasionally Bowers glances over, smiling. Tutus and pointe shoes – some that Bowers sells herself, as part of her ballet-inspired fitness line – are scattered about absently. By the fourth hour, everyone is flagging – everyone, that is, save Bowers herself. She still arches en pointe, kicking one lean leg up as tulle floats around. Her quiet energy is endless.

“I love what I do,” she explains. “I love dancing, I love ballet, I love leading a healthy life, and helping other people do that. I can’t think of anything in my life that’s ever made me feel as excited and alive as dancing and ballet.” ♦

*Ballet Beautiful DVDs, online classes, and fitness apparel can be found at [BalletBeautiful.com](http://BalletBeautiful.com)*

In addition to NY, Sak's Fifth Avenue can be found in BurJuman Centre and Bahrain City Centre. saksmc.com. Bloomingdale's can be found in The Dubai Mall and NY. Bloomingdales.com. Cartier.com. Chopard.com. VanClee/Arpels.com. RalphLauren.com



Pink Gown, **Reem Acra at Bloomingdale's**  
 Pink Sapphire Ring, **Chopard**  
 Bracelet, **Chopard**  
 Earrings, **Chopard**  
 Shoes, **Ballet Beautiful**