

Crowning the Capital City

Hope Driskill and
Ashley Strohmier

*Bring out the
Beauty of
Jefferson City*



FROM LEFT: HOPE - Animal print tank w/removable necklace by Libra \$62.50; Marcasite & silver drop earrings by Ms. Ashley \$14.00.

ASHLEY - Tuexo front blouse by Tribal \$49.00; Silver leopard scarf by Ms. Ashley \$35.00; Venus rising bracelet by Brighton Collectibles \$78.00.

By Porcshe Moran | Photographs by Travis Duncan
Styling by The Perfect Fit Boutique | Marshall & Co.

The countdown is agonizing for both of them.

Under the bright auditorium lights, in front of a crowd that includes family, friends and complete strangers, both women have something to lose. Girl after girl with flawless makeup, perfect hair and shimmering gown smile for the cameras and fight through their heartbreak to graciously accept defeat. The announcer continues the eliminations until finally a winner is named and history is made.

On Nov. 14, 2010, at the Juanita K. Hammons Hall for the Performing Arts in Springfield, Mo., Hope Driskill was crowned Miss Missouri USA 2011 by Ashley Strohmier, Miss Missouri USA 2010. Driskill, 21, and Strohmier, 22, are the first Jefferson City women to win the Miss Missouri USA title back-to-back.

"I think I was the most shocked person in the auditorium," says Driskill. "I am pretty sure that I just blacked out when they started announcing the runner ups. I never cry, but when it all happened, tears just started flowing. It was the most exciting moment of my entire life."

For Strohmier, it was the best possible outcome to the bittersweet moment of passing on her crown. "I freaked out. I was happy for her. I wanted to crown her. It made it a lot easier for me to give the title up to someone that I have known for so long and someone that I know can do an excellent job."

Strohmier got into pageants by chance. Her first passion was sports, but an injury gained from playing basketball in high school prevented her from pursuing her athletic goals. She competed in her first pageant, Miss Missouri Teen USA, during her senior year of high school as an outlet for her competitive nature. "I am a tom boy," she admits. "I had no fashion sense whatsoever." She was first-runner up in the teen competition and then went on to compete in Miss Missouri USA twice before being crowned in 2009. "I knew eventually that I would win because I put so much time and effort into it, she says. "I didn't want to stop because so many people have fallen short and come back and won."

Driskill entered her first pageant, Miss America's Outstanding Teen, during her

freshman year of high school in 2006. She says that she did horribly and vowed to never participate in the pageant circuit again. "I didn't even make top 15," she says. "I have always been so focused on school and academics. I figured it just wasn't my thing."

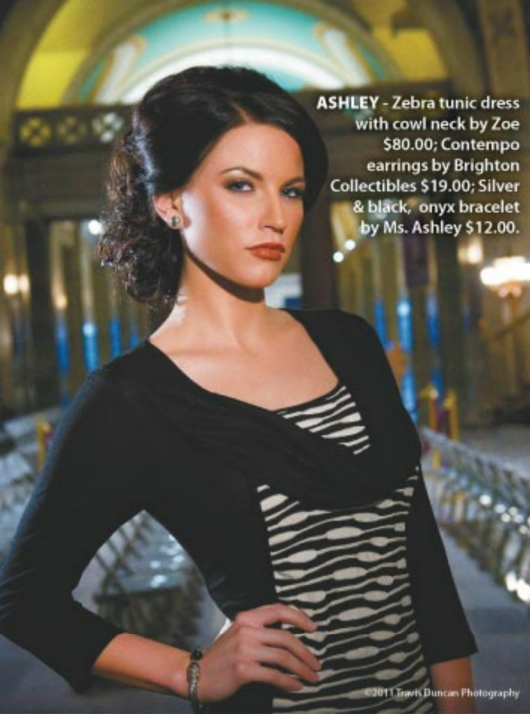
On an overcast January day, I make my way to a bakery café where Driskill, Strohmier and I agreed to meet. Just a week before, I had spent a full day with the two young women as they were primped, styled and photographed for HER's first cover and spring fashion spread. They arrive to the eatery almost simultaneously even though they drove separately to our meeting. Both are dressed down, Driskill in a baby blue sweatshirt, leggings and UGG boots, her blond hair pulled back into a ponytail, and Strohmier in black sweats and a worn MU baseball cap that covers her coal black mane. They draw no attention to themselves in the crowded eatery and don't possess any of the pretentiousness that you might expect from women in their position. They both order coffee before settling down across from me in a roomy booth.

When I ask Driskill how a girl with limited pageant experience who calls herself "the least competitive person in the world" ends up as Miss Missouri USA on her first try and is now a contender for the title of Miss USA, she gives some of the credit to Strohmier. The two grew up on the same block in Jefferson City and attended Montessori school together. Driskill says that her childhood friend encouraged her to send in an application for the Miss Missouri USA pageant. She put it off for a while, still not considering it as she gathered with friends at her sorority house in the spring of 2010 to watch Strohmier as she competed on national television for the Miss USA title. Strohmier went on to place in the top 10 out of 51 contestants. NBA player Carmelo Anthony, celebrity chef Paula Deen and Olympic figure skater Johnny Weir were among the judges of the Donald Trump-owned pageant.

"My friends and I had a watch party. I think I was more nervous than you were that entire time!" Driskill says to Strohmier. "Never once when I was sitting there did I ever think I would be doing something like that."

Strohmier laughs at the irony, "And here you are a year later!" Weeks passed before a hesitant Driskill sent in her application for the pageant. "I couldn't get it off of my mind,"

CROWNING continued on page 18



ASHLEY - Zebra tunic dress with cowl neck by Zoe \$80.00; Contempo earrings by Brighton Collectibles \$19.00; Silver & black, onyx bracelet by Ms. Ashley \$12.00.



HOPE - Shades of blue water color belted chiffon sheath dress by Jolibel \$125.00; Twinkle chain by Brighton Collectibles \$75.00.

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she explains. "It was something that I didn't want to regret not doing."

Strohmier knows well what the next year holds for Driskill. After winning Miss Missouri USA, the Helias High School graduate took a semester off from her criminal justice degree program at Central Missouri University to focus on her titleholder commitments. She estimates she gave 60 speeches during her reign to bring attention to her platform issues of sexual abuse, youth drug prevention, and foster care and adoption. There was also the grueling physical and mental preparation that was required for Miss USA, which is broadcasted live in the United States on NBC and distributed internationally in 170 countries.

"If I wasn't sleeping, all of my time went to training for Miss USA," Strohmier recalls. "I did nothing but eat, sleep and breathe the pageant."

For a year, her schedule was a non-stop mixture of appearances and speeches around the state and daily, protein bar-fueled workouts that included running six to seven miles followed by yoga or P90X, an advanced home workout system that combines rigorous cardio and strength training. Then, there was the Miss USA boot camp that consisted of professional training for interviews, proper etiquette and walking.

"By the time I got home, I would completely pass out," she says. "There were times when I had three appearances in one day. I didn't say no to anything. I was so worn out, but it is so rewarding at the same time."

Driskill has already started to reap the rewards of her newly minted title. She, along with Miss Missouri Teen USA Sydnee Stottlemire, has visited the Shriner's Hospital for Children in St. Louis and attended events for the Central Missouri Foster Care and Adoption Association. In late January, she gave a speech on self-discipline for the students of Pioneer Trail Elementary School. She's also been busy working out with a personal trainer and selecting the extensive wardrobe that will be needed this spring for the appearances, photo shoots, parties and events that will accompany her two-week stay in Las Vegas for Miss USA. The Jefferson City High School alum has moved back to her parent's home in Jefferson City, after more than two years away in Columbia where she studies political science at the University of Missouri. She has an internship in the governor's office which will go toward her college credit count in lieu of a traditional on-campus semester.

"To see little kids and the way that they react to the sash and the crown and you, it really humbles you," she says. "It makes you realize how much you can do. It's your one shot of a lifetime. So, you might as well put your all into it."

Strohmier has also returned to Jefferson City. She takes classes part time and is an intern at the state Capitol for assistant majority floor leader Jeanie Riddle. On the weekends, she travels for modeling jobs. She says that while she had fun competing in Miss Missouri and Miss USA, she doesn't have any plans to participate in any future pageants.

"You don't understand what it is like until you do it," Strohmier says. "It sounds easy and girly, but it is not. "It is fun, but you are putting your whole self out there mentally and physically to be judged and scored."

As Driskill prepares to represent Missouri and Jefferson City to a worldwide audience, she says that she'll look to Strohmier, who plans to be in the audience to watch Driskill compete, for guidance. Again, the women will share the agony and the excitement of the countdown that represents their personal journey and their place in history.

"I feel like I've asked Ashley a million and five questions," Driskill says. "I am looking forward to the entire experience. It is so exciting. I don't know what to expect." ■

Watch Hope Driskill compete in the 2011 Miss USA pageant live on NBC, Sunday, June 19.



From left: **ASHLEY** - Cap sleeve butterfly blouse by Zoe \$77.00; Pebble Cascade earring by Brighton Collectibles \$34.00; Pebble Cascade bracelet by Brighton Collectibles \$64.00; Stackable bangles by Ms. Ashley \$15.00; **HOPE** - Sleeveless butterfly blouse by Zoe \$57.00.



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