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KATY PERRY

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Oh, that's going to be a problem," says celebrity manicurist Naomi Yasuda, gesturing at my BlackBerry. "It would be better if you had an iPhone."

She's not the first person to suggest this. But she is the first one to say it who also has decorated the hands of Madonna, Alicia Keys, and Lady Gaga, and who offers the advice while sitting at my kitchen table and adhering fake nails to my hands as I divulge nonsensical details about my personal life. (Imagine if a bartender held your hands for two hours—that's the kind of confessional setting that evolves when a manicurist comes to your house.) As Yasuda snips and shapes my new two-inch translucent extensions—think zombie nails—in preparation for the first of a dozen layers of polish, I wonder: How long can I—and my nails—go before I want to murder someone? I figure this urge will be inevitable, either out of frustration or because it will be a natural instinct once I have the talons to do it.

Manhattan, where I live, must be the global epicenter of cuticle concentration; here, nail salons seem second only to Starbucks in ubiquity. And even in this historically nail-obsessed region, it's safe to say that the past decade has seen an unusual spike, so to speak, in artistry. This has included the advent of the no-chip, indestructible gel manicure (which lasts upward of three weeks), the Beyoncé-beloved Minx adhesive graphics, and a general explosion in Japanese nail art. At Sakura, the nail salon on New York's Upper East Side, the custom 3-D designs—sushi rolls, cityscapes, gemstones, bows, polka dots, florals—resemble art-class bas-relief.

With all of these options literally at our fingertips, nail obsessives—particularly those in the public eye—are going to new lengths. Nails may not be the first thing one notices about rock and hip-hop divas such as Adele, Lana Del Rey, or Jessie J, but watch any stage show featuring these women and eventually the question will arise: What's up with the claws? To be fair, the current pop-star look is less Halloween and more Holloway, as in *Mad Men*. They're oval, elongated, and lovingly lacquered—symbolic of a certain pampered lifestyle rather than decorated for decoration's sake. The new long nail may not be great for using a BlackBerry, but it is well suited to a vintage rotary model.

On the runways, where music-world trends don't always translate, nails vary widely according to the show. For fall, nail art reached new refinement at Donna Karan: Rich red tips on an otherwise naked nail looked laborious but not outré. But the current fave is the nouveau neutral,

Photographed by Wendelin Spiess

## TIP ADVISER

With manis long and simple or short and ornate—and everything in between—on offer for fall, **Sloane Crosley** finally comes to grips with the flaunt-'em-if-you've-got-'em glory of nail art



or “mannequin” manicures, in which polish is perfectly matched to skin tone. (The best of these are mixed up by manicurist Jenna Hipp, the creative mind behind HIPPxRGB, a range of nudes as subtly varied as the skin complexions that inspired them.)

And there are ever more products on offer: Next month, Dior will introduce a crackle polish to match the gold-and-khaki mélange seen on the house’s fall runway. For the steady of hand, L.A. hipster brand The New Black sells DIY nail-art accoutrements, such as tiny sticks on rhinestones and studs. If you prefer to save your studs for your heels—or your pit bull—The New Black also makes, well, a new black: an inky polish with a leather-esque finish, as well as clever ombré nail kits that include a shade for each finger, spanning the spectrum of a single hue.

When I was a teenager, Hard Candy released a range of opaque pastel lacquers that had a sort of grunge-meets-Lilly-Pulitzer effect. This was not your mother’s nail polish, or not my mother’s, anyway—her frequent manicures came in only three variations: red, coral, and French. But unlike many of my peers, I never bought a bottle of

Hard Candy. I was still too scarred by my only other nail role model, my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Pierce, who had keratin cliffs that jutted into the air beyond her hands. She had them painstakingly painted with pastoral scenes for each holiday. Let me tell you: You haven’t seen anything until you’ve seen the baby Jesus on a human pinkie. Can you blame me for opting out of almost every nail-polish trend to have come my way since? This includes the noir obsession that Chanel initiated with Vamp in the ’90s, as well as its mid-2000s resurgence, plus the futuristic Le Magnetique nail polish Lancôme unleashed in 2007 (requiring the wearer to wave a freshly painted finger over the magnet on the bottle to create a design).

Unfortunately, in all my eschewing, I wound up with some pretty boring fingers. I tend to not overtend my nails, keeping them short and nude or—if I want to get crazy—a mild-mannered mauve. And then along comes Adele (with, on Grammys night, a “Louboutin” manicure—painted red *underneath*, people) making me wonder if I’m missing out on all the fun.

Striving for some perfect combination of music-world show and fashion-world chic, I asked Yasuda for something “neutral with a bit of flourish.” Now, different

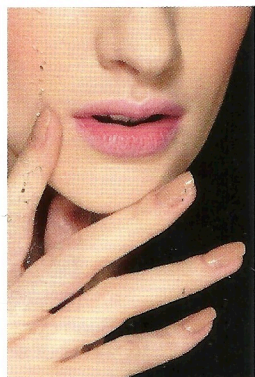
**CLASSICS, TIMES TWO** Chanel Le Vernis polish in (top row, from left) Beige, Coromandel, and Particulière; (bottom row, from left) Pirate, Ballerina, and Dragon

people have different definitions of “a bit of flourish.” I should have known Yasuda’s would be more generous than mine, since her own

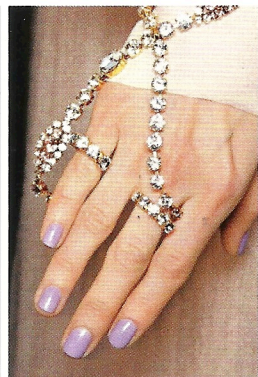
nails bore the words THUG LIFE spelled out in Old English font. In hand-painted blocks of color broken up by slivers of tweezer-applied gold tape, Yasuda’s interpretation of my request looked like a Mondrian painting and an Easter egg had a baby. Ten babies, more accurately. They were pink, orange, off-white, and purple, and almost a full inch longer than I’m accustomed to. On top of these, she glued a smattering of metal squares that looked like computer chips and reflected the light in my kitchen. As she worked, I kept thinking of that old Yellow Pages slogan, “Let your fingers do the walking,” mentally tacking on the words *in six-inch heels*.

Yasuda wasn’t kidding about the Black-Berry. I was physically unable to type full sentences for the next week. As I tend toward verbose texting, almost everyone I knew thought I was mad at them. Meanwhile, here is a list of activities made easier by having giant 3-D nails: opening envelopes, removing allergy medicine from its

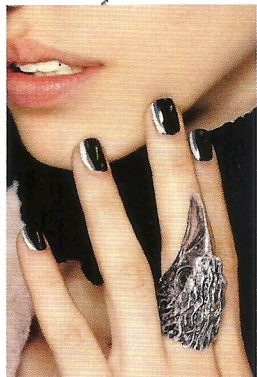
**DESIGNERS GILD** From the new long-and-neutral to a mani that’s literally tough as nails, the fall runways prove that—on your hands, at least—anything goes



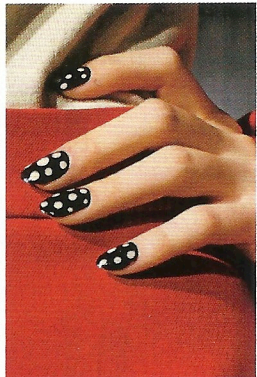
Elongated and skin-tone-matched at DIOR puts the new in nude.



At NINA RICCI, ladylike lavender offsets a handful of decadent diamonds.



Look closer: White, gray, and black create a 3-D effect at 3.1 PHILLIP LIM.



Peach dots on a jet-black base give preppy extra punch at KATE SPADE.

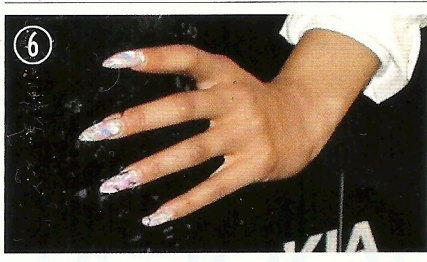


Jewelry designer Hannah Warner made lethal press-ons for MUGLER.

Photographed by Thomas Paquet; runway: imaxtree.com

# MATCH POINT

Who's got the lacquered talons? Which hipster details her tips? You know these famous faces, but can you ID their red-carpet manis?



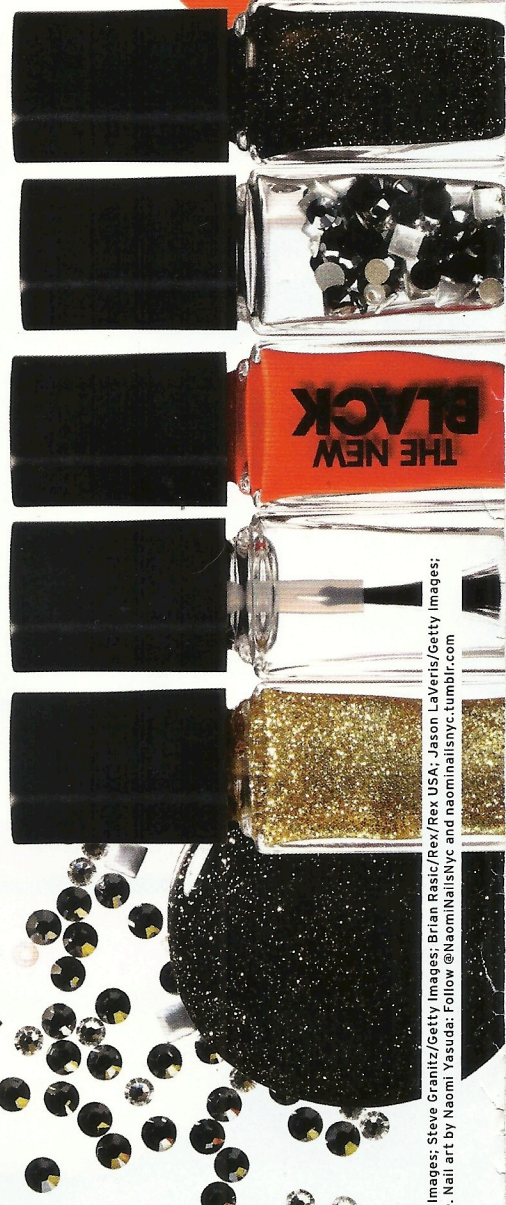
Answers: 1. Jessie J 2. Jennifer Lopez 3. Rihanna 4. Adele 5. Zoëy Deschanel 6. Nicki Minaj

packaging, untangling headphones. Now here's a list of activities that are more challenging: everything else. For the first couple of days, I found myself endlessly picking at the topography of my fingertips, the way you do when you first get braces and spend the day idly rolling your tongue over your teeth. A dedicated nail-biter, I couldn't stop touching, pressing, and flicking the gold chips, but thanks to the miracle of top-coat technology, they wouldn't budge.

Yet, as the week went on, the nails grew on me in more ways than one. They forced me to dress better and more colorfully, especially during the day, when the math didn't add up otherwise: jeans + tank top + the most glamorous fingers in New York City = plain wrong. To make the nails feel more at home on my body, I layered bracelets in a way I am normally too lazy to do and added extra rings to keep the nails company. I wore leather. I wore fluorescents. The nails also grew on me socially: Right after Yasuda left, I ran into an acquaintance on the street. I was embarrassed and kept my hands in my pockets like a cartoon burglar. But by the end of the week, I was gleefully accepting compliments from teenagers on the subway who told me my nails were "tight." What, these old things? In the right scenario, one in which long, awesome nails are a signpost for urban-lady prowess, the nails turned me into kind of a badass. As the teenagers got off the train and I tapped the metal subway pole, I thought: Bring it, abstract urban threat. Because any woman whose manicure has this amount of attitude is not to be trifled with.

Of course, for a myriad of reasons—practical, financial, temperamental—I had to go back to being me eventually. It took three women at my local nail salon an hour to file my Mondrians down and scrub their canvases all the way back to their natural state. Emotions ran high. "Too pretty," one of them lamented, dunking my fingertips into a bowl of nail-polish remover.

She was more right than she knew. Yasuda's nails made me feel like a rock star, but in terms of livability, they were just a little too pretty. They weren't me. To find that just-right, third-bed-for-Goldilocks level of nail glamour—more gloss, less glue—I went to Jin Soon, another New York establishment known for creating beautiful nails that fit squarely into my schema of "grown-up manicure." I perused the classics lined up on her shelves: Chanel's screen-siren-red Pirate; shocking-pink Nars Schiap; OPI's elephant-gray You Don't Know Jacques; I spotted my quietly pink standby and reflexively picked it up. Just as quickly, I put it back. Comfort zone? Not this time.



From top: THE NEW BLACK Rock 'n' Roll Royalty kit contains three dance-floor-appropriate shades, plus a vial of studs and rhinestones for (sort of) easy DIY artistry; few can top the lips done by nail-art impresario NAOMI YASUDA, a favorite of Madonna (she did Midge's Super Bowl nails). Yasuda handily uploads her latest masterpieces—such as the images shown here, including, at left, a mani inspired by Missoni—to Tumblr. Visit naomiyasudany.com.

Sidebar, from top: Andreas Rentz/Getty Images; Steve Granitz/Getty Images; Brian Rasic/Rex/USA; Jason LaVeris/Getty Images; Henry Lamb/Photowire/BEImages; still lifes: Devon Jarvis/Studio D. Nail art by Naomi Yasuda: Follow @NaomiNailsNYC and naominalsny.tumblr.com