



As we meet via video call, it's Amber's beaming smile and infectious laugh that strike us first. Second – that she's bald. Amber was just 15 when a friend found a small hairless patch at the back of her head. She was diagnosed with alopecia, an autoimmune condition whereby the body attacks its own hair follicles. More patches followed, and within a year she'd lost all of her hair. "There was so much confusion at the time. I was this happy-go-lucky girl, wanting to go to nightclubs, kiss boys and be normal. The only person I knew with hair loss was a middle-aged man. I developed this unhealthy habit of bottling up my emotions and it wasn't until my early 20s that it finally caught up with me and I had my first panic attack."

For Amber, acting provided a creative outlet – "it gave me so much purpose and passion". And when hair loss threatened to end her career early, wigs became her armour. "It meant I didn't have to face stares or uncomfortable conversations," says the Irish-born model and actress. However, the shopping experience was woeful from start to finish. "You'd go into a dodgy old place where an old man with smoky fingers would place wigs on

your head and tell you everything was going to be OK. They were shoddy and nothing made me feel beautiful – but I had to make do."

Being scouted by top model agent Fiona Ellis – who famously discovered Karen Elson and Erin O'Connor – signalled a turning point. It gave Amber the boost she needed. But when she started to lose her "luscious" eyebrows at 19, the agency dropped her. It was a devastating blow and a time in her life she describes as her "lowest point".

In an effort to provide the support she never had, Amber launched Hair Free in 2018, an online platform

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

When hair loss almost ended her career, Amber Jean Rowan picked herself back up. Now, the model and actress has created a wig line after years of feeling unseen

Words ELLE SIXSMITH

sharing sage advice for anyone managing hair loss. It features beauty tips, too, like how to create natural-looking, fluffy brows – Amber's speciality. "I wouldn't feel like me without them and they've taken years to perfect. I use Glossier's Brow Flick pen and I have about ten Illamasqua Eye Brow Cake powders." And what about skincare? "I have dry skin, so I love anything that's super nourishing, like Weleda Skin Food. I also have an addiction to FaceGym – they basically give you new cheekbones. My mum has all their devices so I always steal them when I'm home in Ireland."

Now aged 29, Amber has graced the covers of top fashion magazines hair free and modelled for the likes of Rixo and Sweaty Betty. "The industry has changed dramatically. I started out as a 15 year old who was never encouraged to model without a wig, and now I'm getting the best jobs of my life."



Skin Changer, £38, FaceGym

ABOVE Amber wearing her Amber Jean 'Sugar' wig

It was Amber's online community that inspired her new venture and eponymous brand, Amber Jean. A line of stylish and ethically-sourced wigs that have been expertly cut and coloured by a team of hair stylists. There's 'Holly', a rich

caramel balayage, and 'Amber', a fiery copper – and everything in between. "I felt like women deserved better than what was currently on offer. I wanted them to feel beautiful and empowered wearing my pieces," says Amber, who carries out client consultations personally. "The support has been overwhelming. And hearing women's stories of strength and courage makes everything I'm doing feel worth it."

Amber's own relationship with wigs has come a long way since her teenage years. Today, she wears them out of choice, not necessity. "Wigs are an amazing way for me to express myself and I love getting to choose who I want to be for the day. It took a long time for me to feel comfortable with myself, but now I love being hair free. It's a part of my identity. I'm completely confident walking out with my egg held high."



Skin Food, £13.50, Weleda

Eye Brow Cake, £18.50, Illamasqua



Brow Flick, £15, Glossier