

Leaders in Luxury | 1 hour ago

WATSKIN Founder Lois Robbins on her Protective Sunwear Label

The actress discusses campaigning for skin cancer awareness and setting up her own business.

By Irenie Forshaw



Lois Robbins in her palazzo pants and matching top / ©WATSKIN

When her doctor spotted a squamous cell carcinoma on her face during a routine check-up, Lois Robbins was devastated. Not only would the actress need to undergo surgery to remove the skin cancer, she was also told to avoid the sun as much as possible.

“It was so depressing,” she tells me from her home in Miami. “I love being outdoors. I love being out on the water paddleboarding. I just thought, ‘How am I going to live my life and enjoy all the things I love to do?’”

Unable to find UPF50+ (Ultraviolet Protection Factor) clothing to suit her tastes, the self-confessed “fashionista” decided to take things into her own hands. After researching and buying some colorful fabric and high-quality zips, Robbins took the materials to her friend (“an amazing tailor”) and together they created a catsuit and matching skirt.



"I loved it so much I asked her to make me five more and I started wearing them every day," she laughs. "Everywhere I went I kept getting stopped. People would say to me 'I love what you're wearing, where can I find it?' On the umpteenth time of being asked, I had this sort of 'Aha!' moment where I realized: this is a business!"

And so, Robbins set about creating WATSKIN. During a trip to St Barths, Jenny Sweeney – a glamorous ex-model with her own sustainable swimwear business – approached the actress and complimented her on her catsuit. The pair formed a close friendship and Sweeney helped Robbins to put a team together and establish the company.

WATSKIN has been in business for just shy of eight months and Robbins is relishing every minute. Today, the actress is wearing a marine-blue top and palazzo pants fresh from the new Spring/ Summer collection. Her wavy chestnut locks are perfectly coiffed, and she looks every bit the film star (thanks to a top New York doctor you would never even know she's had surgery).



Unlike other UPF50+ clothing, this is very much a lifestyle brand / ©WATSKIN

It's clear from chatting with Robbins that her business is far from just a day job – it's her passion. She is keen to stress that WATSKIN is very much a lifestyle brand. Unlike other UPF50+ clothing, her designs – as well as being highly protective and fast-drying – are fashion statements.

"I have a business lunch today and I'll wear it there, but I could easily go for a swim when I'm done," she beams. "Then, in the evening, I could wear this out for dinner by dressing up the pants with a great pair of sandals. Oh, and it's unbelievable for travel – it doesn't wrinkle. I'm very proud of it!"

The business goes beyond simply making a profit; for Robbins, it was essential to give something back. "I was raised by two extremely charitable parents so that's always been a huge part of my life," she explains.



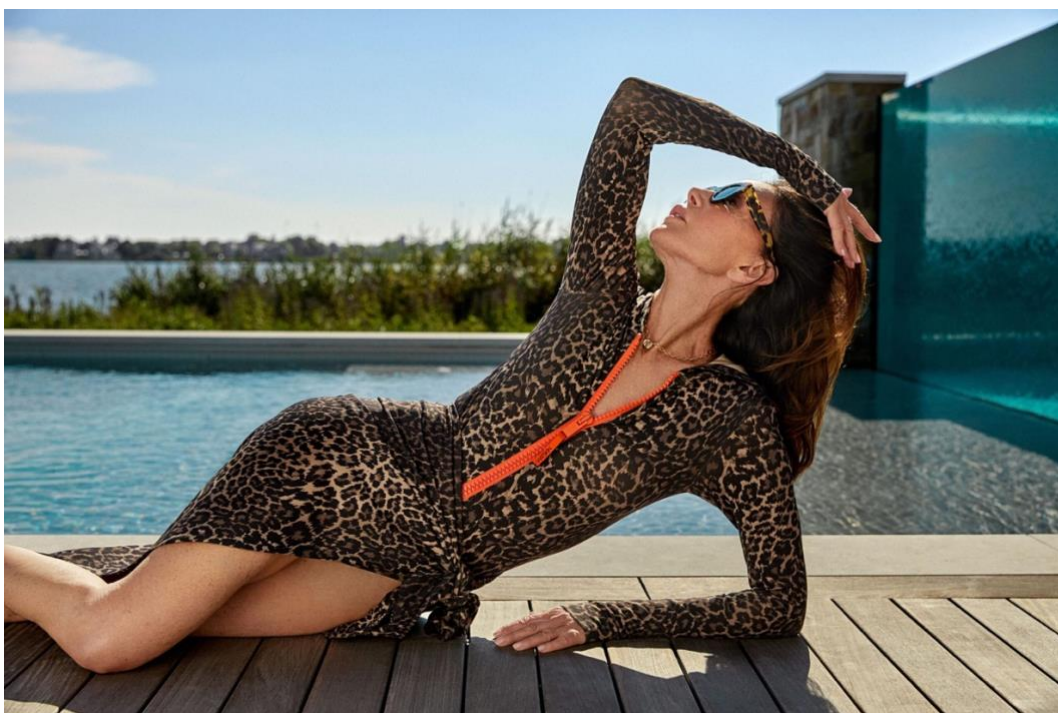
The pieces are fast-drying and protective / ©WATSKIN

Given her own experience with squamous cell carcinoma, she partnered with the Melanoma Research Alliance – a non-profit that aids scientific discovery and new treatments for the deadliest type of skin cancer. Today, 5% of proceeds from every WATSKIN purchase are donated to this critical research. With rates of melanoma doubling during the past three decades in the US, outpacing almost all other cancers, it's certainly a worthy cause.

Ahead of skin cancer awareness month in May, Robbins will also be hosting and talking at a Melanoma Awareness Panel moderated by actress Sharon Gless at Showfields Miami on Wednesday 19 April. Alongside CEO of the Melanoma Research Alliance Dr. Marc Hurlbert and board-certified dermatologists Dr. Christopher O'Connell and Dr. Annie Gonzalez, the group will be discussing how to spot early signs of skin cancer and ways to stay safe in the sun.

It's been a busy few months for the actress. And, while she admits running the business while taping auditions isn't always easy, she insists the payoff has been more than worth it. "I'm not going to say it's been seamless because it has its challenges – it's time-consuming and expensive," she tells me. "But I'm so grateful to have this incredible experience at this time in my life. I'm loving every aspect of it."

The most rewarding moments come when she least expects them. "I'm living on Fisher Island in Miami right now and I walk around and see so many women wearing the pieces and it's just so exciting," she says. "I was playing pickleball yesterday morning and I saw someone wearing the orange body suit and tennis skirt and she just looked adorable."



Robbins in one of her catsuits from the new collection / ©WATSKIN

Her eyes light up as she launches into a list of what's next for WATSKIN (children's clothing, golf attire, and even a piece to be worn under ski suits, to name a few).

Having been diagnosed with melanoma myself earlier this year, it's inspiring to see Robbins turn her skin cancer experience into something so positive. After the inevitable fear began to subside, one of my first questions was whether I would ever be able to enjoy going out in the sun again.

Robbins is living proof a cancer diagnosis doesn't have to hold you back. These days she gets her skin checked twice a year, dons her UPV clothing and never goes outside without a hat. "You know what they say?" she tells me, with one of her warmest smiles. "Today's tanned beauties are tomorrow's wrinkled prunes!"

watskinsunwear.com

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