



London,

Baby

GO OFF THE GRID, TAKE A LEFT, AND YOU WILL FIND LONDON'S MOST CHARMING INDIAN-BRITISH BEAUTY SPOTS—AND ONE VERY DELICIOUS CURRIED APRICOT-CHICKEN SANDWICH.

YOUR TOUR GUIDE TODAY WILL BE BRIDGERTON'S **CHARITHRA CHANDRAN**, NBD. BY ANITA BHAGWANDDAS

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROSALINE SHAHNAVAZ

These pages, sittings editor: Tchesmeni Leonard. Hair: Declan Sheils. Makeup: Neil Young. On-set producer: Joseph Beattie. Locations: Pak Cosmetics, Spice Shop, Iris Avenue. To create a similar makeup look: Matte Signature Liquid Dip Eyeliner in Blue, True Match Mineral Blush in Bare Honey, and Rouge Signature Lightweight Matte Lip Stain in I Create by L'Oréal Paris.



JUST BEHIND OXFORD STREET—

London's shopping district—is a family-run deli with vintage Formica tables and a retro vibe. There is precisely zero pretense at Paul Rothe & Son, the 122-year-old sandwich shop where actor Charithra Chandran, who appears in the second season of Netflix's *Bridgerton* (out this month), has suggested we meet. "It is a London institution," she emails before our interview, and a girl's gotta eat. "I love sandwiches. They have, like, 100 different mustards. I love mustard."

Chandran is a first-generation British South Indian, and we're here to talk about her London, but first things first: "I'm feeling Coronation Chicken today," she says. That's a British filling created for Queen Elizabeth II, and it's a curious mix that includes roast chicken, mayonnaise, apricot jam, and curry powder—it tastes much nicer than it sounds. Then Chandran politely addresses the dilemma of so many first meetings these days: "Are we hugging?" (We are.)

Over a cup of English breakfast tea and a cacophony of "White or brown bread, mate?," Chandran tells me about the unexpected turn her life took over the last year and change. After studying philosophy, politics, and economics at Oxford, she was set for a corporate career; instead, she pursued acting, which had been a hobby, studying at London's National Youth Theatre. After a raft of auditions, she was cast in Amazon's spy thriller

Alex Rider, and then as *Bridgerton's* Edwina Sharma. "It's really key to me that [Asian women] aren't just supporting characters and vehicles for other people's stories—we have stories of our own," says Chandran. "It's been such an honor [playing Edwina]."

One story that's inescapable here is the legacy of colonial rule: Though colorism existed before Britain colonized India in 1858 (until 1947), colonialization amplified it. And, some 100 years later, it's something Chandran has personally experienced. "All my life I grew up with people telling me that I would be pretty if I was lighter-skinned. I remember [someone] said to my grandma, who is quite light-skinned, 'Your granddaughter's cute—shame she didn't take after you.' She meant my skin color." Chandran recalls trying to wash the color off of her hands when she was younger, until something started to shift: "When I was 16, seeing



"I STILL USE COCONUT OIL IN MY HAIR ONCE A WEEK, USUALLY SUNDAYS."



CHANEL JACKET AND TOP, OPPOSITE PAGE: CHANDRAN'S OWN CLOTHING.

FOLLOW THE THREAD. Far right: Chandran gets threaded at London's Iris Avenue salon. "I'm going to be dictatorial about this: I don't trust any other way to do my eyebrows," she says. "Threading is just so clean and your eyebrows look so neat. I used to go with my mom to her eyebrow place. I was 11 or 12 my first time, and was so scared that I said, 'Mommy, please hold my hand,' and I would just grip her. But it's not that painful. If you're going to thread, always do it at least 24 hours before an event, because it will be swollen. Wait at least one sleep."



SPICE OF LIFE. "Food is the center of society, right? It's how you connect with other people and learn about parts of the world, which is why I visit small businesses [like the Spice Shop, near left]," says Chandran. "[They sell] rose water, which my mom has always used—it's better than any kind of micellar water to take makeup off and just so cleansing. Turmeric has spiritual meaning too, and is supposed to ward off evil spirits to protect you. Literally, every day of my life growing up, I had turmeric on my skin. I still make my own masks and scrubs with [traditional Indian ingredients like] turmeric, yogurt, and chickpea flour. Why spend so much money [on beauty products] when you have these natural, amazing ingredients in your pantry?"



people like Mindy Kaling have her own show and Lupita Nyong'o at the Oscars in her blue Prada gown, I just thought, These people are beautiful.... Oh, my God! I'm beautiful too. And I don't need to change anything about myself."

Now, beauty is how Chandran stays connected to her Indian heritage, inspired by memories of visiting Tamil Nadu in India. "My grandmother would sit me on this little stool, put oil in my hair, plait it, and then buy fresh jasmine flowers to put in it," she

says. "I still use coconut oil in my hair once a week, usually Sundays." It's her body moisturizer too; and instead of perfume, Chandran's ultimate scent is sandalwood soap.

"Obviously, [Britain] has a lot of issues, and I don't want to take away from that," she says. "But it's also a multicultural success story. [When I was younger,] my friends would be jealous of my skin color and I wouldn't understand why. I think part of being British is actually learning to accept the skin I'm in."

WIGGING OUT. "It's important to acknowledge that, [historically], Black women have been wearing wigs and creating these beautiful hairstyles," says Chandran. "My love for wigs is very new and it was mainly brought on by [wearing them in] *Bridgerton*. I need to keep my hair pretty standard for my career, and wigs [like the ones at Pak's Wig World, far left] are such a fun way to experience different looks and have fun with your identity. [Growing up,] I wasn't allowed to dye my hair or to have extreme haircuts, so now I fear committing to anything. But I desperately want a wig [that looks] like Tokyo from *Money Heist*'s hair [a black bob]."