

# Spells. IN THE City

There's more to being a witch than smelly potions and spell casting, but can you really juggle your magical alter ego with life as a 21st century female? Absolutely, says *Ursula James*

**W**hen you watch TV shows and films such as *Harry Potter*, what do you think of the witches depicted in them? Are you frightened by their exploits, intrigued by their powers or totally convinced you might like to, be one? Often portrayed as dark and ugly figures, with an insatiable desire to cause trouble, these individuals have become a worldwide phenomenon since J. K. Rowling cast Hogwarts and magic into the spotlight several years ago. But what is the reality of living as a modern-day witch?

## A mysterious trade

While it may seem slightly contradictory to talk about life as a modern witch, especially when the majority of images we're exposed to seem to depict these characters during much older times, it's entirely possible to live your life as one in today's society.

But first of all, it's important to establish what a witch actually is. There are a number of definitions attempting to clarify this term; but, for me, the simplest description is perhaps the most accurate; it's someone who makes magic happen. An individual who genuinely respects all things and people, and lives by the creed, 'Do what you will, but harm ye none'.

In all honesty, trying to define the reality of being a witch is about as easy as herding cats! They really are singular creatures and can't be distinguished by their clothing, or even their sex, alone – in fact, I have some very good friends who are male witches, so it certainly isn't an exclusively female domain!

## 21st century magic

Being a witch in the modern world is much easier now than it was in the 1950s, when the Witchcraft Act still existed, meaning anyone found to be using herbal remedies could be imprisoned. These days, at least there's no danger of being hanged!

Living as a witch nowadays means believing we're all blessed creatures and connected to one another in a powerful way.

Unsurprisingly, ever since the Harry Potter phenomenon, more people are defining themselves as witches than ever before. These are ultimately individuals who make magic happen,

who see how humans and the natural world are connected and are not afraid to put different things into the mix of their lives.

Art, music and celebrations are also a big part of being a 21st-century witch, as are commemorating changes in the seasons, respecting other belief systems and participating in important rites of passage.

## A personal journey

For me, witchcraft is a very natural extension of my understanding of the world and something that simply endorses a belief system – one highlighting the importance of nature, being comfortable with one's self and caring for other people – that I've practiced, and tried my best to adhere to, all my life. All the principles it highlights are ideas I've held dear since long before the days I understood what it meant to be a witch and all that went with it.

Mystery is part of the craft itself and it's up to each person to discover their own path to the Source of their magic. For me, it was through a connection with the spirit of a deceased witch named Mother Shipton in Yorkshire – the county of my birth – who taught me how to be magical. Visiting me as a child to protect me, and then returning to me as an adult when I'd grown tired of the life I'd created – one consisting of me basically doing everything I thought I should, rather than what I really wanted – she helped me completely turn things around, and I now live a very magical existence indeed, full of wonderful people and enchanting coincidences, which is inspired heavily by both the natural and supernatural.

I've discovered the joys of making my own natural preparations, both to eat and for cosmetic purposes, and the excitement of sharing my ideas with others without any fear, which, for me, is perhaps one of the best parts of all. I have a lot more fun with my spells these days, and feel a huge part of being magical is passing my knowledge on to others so they can do all the things I do too, which is why I wrote my book *The Source: A Manual of Everyday Magic*.

Anyone can be a witch; you simply need to believe in your inner power and totally trust in your own talent; you'll be amazed how easy it is to create magic and may well realise there's always been a bit of a witch in you, too!

"WITCHES ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO MAKE MAGIC HAPPEN, THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO SEE HOW HUMANS AND THE NATURAL WORLD ARE CONNECTED"

## 21st century witches

**SABRINA THE TEENAGE WITCH**  
Perhaps one of the hippest witches of the 90s, Sabrina, played by actress Melissa Joan Hart, challenged the stereotypical image of what a witch traditionally looks like and made the idea of magic fashionable again.



**ELVIRA**  
One of the sassiest witches to have ever graced our screens, Elvira, played by Cassandra Peterson, inspired women all over the world to embrace their naughtier sides and rebel against the status quo.



**ISABEL BIGELOW**  
The 2005 film version of *Bewitched*, a popular TV series from the 60s, sees Nicole Kidman take on the role of Isabel Bigelow, a mild-mannered witch who casts a spell over a man who's wronged her.



## Try it yourself!

If you'd like to create a little magic for yourself, try this simple spell on Halloween:

- Find a space where you won't be disturbed and light a white candle; doing this will create a safe space while, at the same time, focusing your spiritual energy.
- Decide on one thing you'd like to see happen in your life – remember, this isn't a shopping list, so try your best to limit it to just one.
- Close your eyes and focus on your wish. If it's a person, visualise them in as much detail as possible, while those wishing for a new job should imagine themselves walking into their desired place of work on the first day and what they'll be wearing when they do so. Paint a picture of how it'll happen, imagining how you'll feel, and give yourself a deadline for when you'd like it to materialise.
- Say, 'So mote it be' and then open your eyes and blow out the candle, ensuring you only ever use it again for rituals and spells.

## Mother Shipton and me

Mother Shipton, my teacher, guardian and friend, became real to me twice in my life. Once when I was a child, when she protected me from harm and taught me the power of mind flight and meaning of magic, and many years later, when I was a successful adult with all the things I could possibly want – everything, that is, except magic. Following our initial encounter, I'd attempted to cut off contact with her after realising speaking to a dead witch wasn't common practice.

However, when I opened my mind to her again, using hypnosis, and invited her into my life, my entire outlook on everything completely changed. No longer feeling the need to control events, but happy to embrace the chaos of the universe as part of my journey, I became a new person because of her and will be eternally grateful for the lessons she's taught me.

## About Ursula

Ursula James is a scientist, lecturer and of *The Source – A Manual of Everyday Magic* (Random House; £12.99). For more information go to [ursulajames.info](http://ursulajames.info)

