



# Lady of the manor

Best known as the original 'Birkin Mom' from the hit TV show *Gossip Girl*, Kelly Rutherford is still making waves as a fashion icon – in large part, via her home's elevator. GRACE CAIN uncovers the secret of her style success

PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL McLEAN STYLING ELIZABETH REYNOLDS



Kelly wears, this page Loro  
Piana top £3,140, waistcoat £3,050,  
skirt £3,765 and shoes £1,250.  
Opposite page Dior dress £34,000,  
belt, price on request, and shoes  
£1,160. Boucheron earrings  
£50,400, and necklace and  
ring, prices on request

low-key elegance comes so easily. And it's this casual approach – combined with Rutherford's enviably effortless style – that has made her something of a viral phenomenon. "It was not premeditated at all," she says. "It was literally just convenient. I simply wanted to support the brands I was wearing and have fun. My daughter had to teach me how to hold my phone properly. I guess in the beginning I was doing it wrong. I don't know..." She shakes her head serenely. "I didn't think it would become a thing – or that I would end up in the elevator so much."

I posit that the risk with elevator selfies is that someone else might get in and catch you in an awkward state of posing. She bursts out laughing. "It's happened once or twice! And I'm just like, 'Hi!' But most of the people who live in my building know about it now. They even take pictures of themselves and send them to me with a little wink. A friend of mine actually called me when I was out of town and said: 'I just want you to know that the elevator's being serviced, so it's a good thing that you're away.'"

Rutherford's laid-back approach to fit pics is mirrored in her attitude towards the outfits themselves. "I never felt very showy or overtly sexy," she says. "I always just wanted to be comfortable and elegant, with pieces that represented quality over quantity." So she must have been ecstatic during the Great Quiet Luxury Boom (and it's surely no coincidence that the viral trend corresponded with her own Insta-renaissance)? "Yeah, because it's always been my thing," she smiles. "I didn't even know there was a phrase for it, I've just always loved it."

She must also be happy, then, to be wearing Loro Piana – a brand renowned for its IYKYK sophistication and use of the finest materials – on the cover of the magazine you currently hold in your hands. "It feels right. I've always been a big fan of Loro Piana – it's one of my favourite brands. So yes, I'm really happy," she nods. "I've shopped there for many, many years – gosh, probably even before we were doing *Gossip Girl*."

If you're not familiar with the era-defining Noughties drama, I'll summarise: a stylish New York City backdrop; iconic (there's no other word for it) fashion moments; and the scandalous lives of Manhattan's elite teenagers – and their parents. Rutherford played Lily van der Woodsen, kindred Birkin Mother and on-screen mother to one of the show's It-girl protagonists, Serena. And it was a show known for its wardrobe choices, something that is definitely not lost on Rutherford. "The fashion is really its own character – *Gossip Girl* wouldn't have been the same without it," she says. "You wouldn't have felt the energy of the time. I think that's what makes it so special."

If Rutherford's style is still constantly compared to Lily's, it's probably because she had a hand in developing it alongside Eric Daman, head of *Gossip Girl*'s costume department. "He was so open and lovely and generous in terms of exploring who the character was," she says. "In the beginning, he would bring racks of clothes and >

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do these angel cards every day, and look at the first card I pulled today!" From a hotel room in St Tropez, actor Kelly Rutherford holds up a tiny prettily illustrated oracle card that reads 'Grace'.

Frankly, I am astounded. "And your name is Grace, *and* my daughter's middle name is Grace!" she says, delightedly spinning her phone around so I can say hi to the aforementioned daughter (first name, Helena). "You know, these cards are so amazing," she continues. "I've been doing them almost every day for years and they're so accurate, they really start to speak to you. They've got such positive energy, and they only really say sweet things, that's why I do them – there's nothing like..." She trails off, as though she doesn't even want to allow the inkling of a bad omen to cross her mind. "They're just very sweet."

Even through a screen, Rutherford's own tranquil breed of charmingly optimistic energy is tangible. And if you follow her on Instagram, you'll already know what I'm talking about. In between positive affirmations and uplifting quotes, you'll find the nonchalantly snapped outfit pictures that have cemented her title as the internet's favourite 'Birkin Mom'. Shot on an iPhone in the mirror of her apartment building's small beige-tiled elevator, the relaxed selfies feel like a fitting medium for someone whose innate sense of



Kelly wears Khaite coat £16,190; Tove dress £795; Tiffany & Co. earrings £26,100 and ring £13,800



Kelly wears, this page Erdem coat £3,495; Prada shoes £850.  
Opposite page Erdem coat £3,495; Dior choker £870 and headpiece, price on request

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**And I think clothes – like anything**

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fabulous things, and then I would request pieces that wouldn't normally have been there, but which I felt made sense.”

Rutherford says it was a “conscious choice” to give Lily the same old-money style that she herself is known for. “I could have made her more hip with the clothes. And originally there was a conversation about her being a bit competitive with Serena,” she says. “And I just thought that was boring, because Lily is her own woman. So, then it was like, how does she dress versus the mom that's trying to be young and cool? And I tend to go in that direction in my own life: conservative rather than trendy. I think that's how we are alike – that similar way of living in the world.”

I ask if it's true that all of Lily's Hermès bags were actually Rutherford's own. “There weren't that many,” she says, coyly. “I have friends that have crazy collections of bags! I don't have *that* many. But yes, they were all mine – but that was just because we couldn't get them anywhere else at that time.”

One of the hallmarks of Rutherford's style is her unpretentious approach, and it's gratifying to know that while she appreciates the finer things, she's not precious about them. When I ask if she hopes to pass down any of her fashion finds to her children (Rutherford also has a son who just so happens to be named Hermes), she laughs good-naturedly. “They're already being passed! My daughter will come in and take stuff, and I don't know if I'm getting it back. But I figure, why not? I'm not the mom that's like, you can only have this when you're a certain age or you can have that when I'm 80. I want them to enjoy whatever I have now, as long as it's age appropriate. But I think they both have a very good sense of that, because – even though the bling is out there – their dad and I are both very conservative.”

She is also an advocate for regularly clearing out your wardrobe (here is where a style-savvy teenage daughter comes in useful), or even putting certain pieces away for a while before bringing them back in the future. It all comes back to her perennial quest for positive energy. “I really *love* the idea of energy,” she emphasises. “And I think clothes – like anything – carry energy after a while. You know when you look at a particular shirt and it makes you think of the times you wore it, or the person you were with when you bought it? So I do like to weed things out from time to time,” she gives me one of her quiet smiles. “You know when you put something on that makes you feel happy, just because it's got new energy to it? That's when dressing up can make you feel *really* good.” >



Kelly wears Loro Piana top  
£3,140, waistcoat £3,050,  
skirt £3,765 and shoes £650

Kelly wears, this page Chanel dress £8,515.  
Opposite page Victoria Beckham  
dress £1,490

Fine Jewellery and Luxury Accessories,  
Ground Floor; Womenswear, First Floor;  
Harrods Shoe Heaven, Fifth Floor, and  
harrods.com

Make-up Justine Jenkins using Hourglass  
Cosmetics; Hair Nao Kawakami at The  
Wall Group; Nails Michelle Humphrey  
at L.M.C Worldwide using Essie; Digital  
Operator Jamie Appleby; Lighting  
Assistant Archie Scott

Shot on location at Hatfield House,  
Hatfield, Hertfordshire

