

By ROYAL APPOINTMENT

The daughter of a Hong Kong retail king
& the bride of a handsome European prince, the story of
MARIE-CHANTAL MILLER reads like a modern-day
fairy tale. PAUL KAY meets the Crown Princess of Greece at
her London home and discovers that she's working hard
for her happily ever after

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN GELATI





PERFECT POISE
THIS PAGE AND COVER
Dress by Dior; shoes by Christian Louboutin; bracelet by Cartier; watch by Franck Muller

eVEN FOR THE DAUGHTER OF A BILLIONAIRE, THE story of Marie-Chantal Miller's rise to the highest echelons of international society is nothing short of extraordinary. Born into fabulous wealth and status as the second eldest daughter of DFS tycoon Robert Miller, she grew up in Hong Kong with all the riches money can buy – before attaining something it can't through her marriage to Pavlos, Crown Prince of Greece, Prince of Denmark following a fairy-tale romance. Dressed in a pearl-encrusted gown designed by Valentino and rumoured to cost in excess of US\$200,000, Marie-Chantal wed Prince Pavlos in London in 1995 in an affair that counted Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Charles and the monarchs of a raft of European nations among its 1,300 guests. She lists Andy Warhol among her mentors, the kings and queens of Greece, Denmark and Spain among her extended family, and regularly features in best-dressed lists in the most discerning fashion and society magazines around the globe.



So it's a tad surprising when she steps through the door into the kitchen of her gorgeous three-storey Chelsea home swathed in a towelling robe, and offers her hand with a warm "hello" before making herself a cup of coffee. Marie-Chantal, it is safe to assume, is not your average princess.

It's a sunny morning in late June and Marie-Chantal – or rather, Marie-Chantal Claire, Crown Princess of Greece, Princess of Denmark, to give her full title – is preparing for the day's shoot. Even without a lick of make-up and with her hair still wet from the shower, she radiates a fresh-faced beauty. Her petite frame moves across the kitchen with a relaxed elegance before settling in a chair in front of our pop-up studio.

While the stylist blow-dries and coiffes her hair, and the photo team sets up to the tune of Daft Punk's *Get Lucky* (the princess's choice), I take in the eminently tasteful surrounds. The walls of the hallway and drawing room are adorned with works by Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Jean-Michel Basquiat, as well as two portraits of Marie-Chantal aged 16 by Andy Warhol. There are floor-to-ceiling bookcases filled with coffee-table tomes celebrating Greek history, fashion, interior design and the art of Mark Rothko, Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, Helmut Newton, Francis Bacon, Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo Da Vinci, and half-hidden among the shelves are a Keith Haring work signed "For Marie" and a series of small paintings – arranged in a loose cruciform, and by family friend Julia Condon – of the couple's five children. Through

the large window, the beautifully manicured garden stretches out towards the edge of the property, and two of the family's dogs – a Hungarian Vizla named Alfie and a Pomeranian called Storm – can be seen scampering to and fro. One can sense a creative – yet detail-oriented – spirit at work, and even if one were not familiar with the princess's eponymous line of children's wear, it would surely come as no surprise to learn that she has daily dealings with the muse.

"I've always had an interest [in art and design] since I was a little girl," says Marie-Chantal when we sit down to chat. "I loved drawing and illustration and I loved graphics." Her interest crystallised during her late teens in New York, when, at the age of 16 and while still at school, she arranged an internship at Warhol's now-legendary art studio, The Factory. Although she was doing typical intern work – "mixing paint, serving coffee, fetching lunch, running errands, answering phones, walking dogs" – Marie-Chantal says that the experience was invaluable training for a creatively minded career. "There was this incredible exposure and you could see how things were working and functioning," she recalls. "[Warhol] was constantly painting and was always busy, so I think that had a huge impact on me. If he wasn't collaborating with Basquiat, he was coming up with new ideas or he was visiting museums or going to schools and giving lectures."

Marie-Chantal sought to quench her thirst for creativity through spells at the New York Academy of Art, the Fashion Institute of

*“We met in New Orleans and that was it.
Love at first sight. Without sounding too corny”*





ROYAL OCCASIONS
CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP LEFT
 Marie-Chantal Miller and Prince Pavlos marry in London in July 1995; Marie-Chantal attends the opening of one of her retail outlets; Marie-Chantal and her daughter, Princess Maria Olympia, attend a private Valentino exhibition held in London in 2012; with dotting father Robert Miller at her wedding; the royal couple pose for pictures with their five gorgeous children; Marie-Chantal with her sisters Pia-Christina (left) and Alexandra (right)



IMAGES: AFP PHOTO; GETTY IMAGES; SPLASH NEWS/IMAGINECHINA

Technology and New York University, but she never really found her groove and she quickly lost interest in one course after another. After trying her hand at various aesthetically driven pursuits, she was then struck by a quite different desire to create, her marriage and the births of her first two children eclipsing her former endeavours. But later, while she was pregnant with her third child, the princess was gripped by what she describes as “this incredible urge to work, to do something creative”.

Originally intending to focus her attentions on the cosmetic industry, Marie-Chantal had a change of heart after talking it over with a friend, Sherry Baker, who was running Sephora in the United States at the time and who advised her to “do something closer to home”. And so the idea of launching a line of baby clothes was born. A serendipitous meeting with a children’s wear designer soon after sealed the deal, and the wheels were set in motion on what would soon become the Marie-Chantal brand.

The first collection arrived in 2001, and the brand soon became a favourite among the parents of elite tots. With a loyal following that includes Gwyneth Paltrow, Brad Pitt, Jessica Alba and Victoria Beckham, Marie-Chantal clothing can now be found in 18 countries around the world, with the likes of Harrods in London, Le Bon Marche in Paris, and Saks Fifth Avenue and Barneys in New York joining her boutiques in London and Hawaii in selling the brand.

The designs are “fun, fresh, playful and contemporary with classic elements,” she says. “I want kids to want to wear it, because times have changed – kids know what they want nowadays. Kids dress themselves, whereas our generation, we were dressed by our parents.”

Now a mother of five – Olympia, 17, Constantine, 14, Achileas, 12, Odysseas, eight, and Aristidis, five – Marie-Chantal has been able to look to her own children for inspiration. “My two youngest are the only ones that fit into the clothes now,” she says. “But Olympia was a huge source of inspiration. She’s my only daughter – I have four boys – so every collection when she was little was very much geared around her.”

Marie-Chantal remains closely involved with the day-to-day running of the brand, and in her role as creative director she oversees everything, from the designing of the collections and the company’s strategy for expansion to the minutiae

of the finer details. “As a Virgo, being a complete control freak, I’m in on everything, from the design of the office to the flowers. Anything creative, I’ll have a huge say,” she says. “You can sometimes find me in the shops merchandising. I love that. Having grown up in retail, that was my summer job, in the visual-merchandising department at Duty Free.”

Born in London in the early autumn of 1968, the infant Marie-Chantal returned to settle in Hong Kong with her family 18 months later. Her older sister Pia-Christina had been born two years earlier, and her younger sister Alexandra would arrive four years hence. Marie-Chantal was a pupil at The Peak School until the age of nine, before attending the prestigious Institut Le Rosey boarding school in Switzerland, then on to the esteemed Ecole Active Bilingue in Paris. But while her studies may have had a French flavour, it was always Hong Kong that loomed largest in her affections, and she would return to the city eagerly for the Christmas, Easter and summer holidays.

Her recollections of growing up in Hong Kong are, she says, idyllic. “It was a beautiful time. Hong Kong then was so romantic. It was before it became the Wall Street of Asia. We would do our [school] sports day on the cricket pitch beside the Bank of China. There weren’t skyscrapers all over the place, it was very relaxed, with incredible blue skies.”

The princess says she still regards Hong Kong as home and returns here about four times a year to visit her family and for special occasions – not least of which was her father’s 80th birthday party in May, which the family celebrated with a private dinner at their home on The Peak. “It was beautiful,” recalls Marie-Chantal fondly. “My mother, having this artistic streak, covered the entire house in scaffolding, in bamboo, because it was happening during Art Basel Hong Kong, and since we had so many artists and gallerists present at the dinner, she wanted to show that [bamboo scaffolding] in itself is an art form. And she hung hundreds of candles, so it was magical. [And my father] had a great time.”

The princess’s affection for her father is clear, and her face lights up when she talks about him. As well as giving her the best possible start in life, he also instilled a set of values that have stood her in good stead ever since, and which she in turn is passing on to her own children. “He was

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just a really sound family man with incredible discipline and a lot of courage,” Marie-Chantal recalls. “He has his world records [for sailing] and he likes to set goals and achieve them, but yet he was incredibly present in our lives, so that’s been a huge influence towards me. And, of course, there’s his business acumen. Just growing up with that gave me a sense of a more meritocratic existence. He has this motto that I love – “a good life with courage” – so it’s finding that balance. And he’s incredibly humble – for all his achievements, he’s never one to brag or boast, he just gets on with it.”

In addition to running her own brand, Marie-Chantal is a director of DFS, which affords her greater opportunities to hone her craft, and continue learning from her father. “This is my first year as a director, so I’m very much in the learning phase,” she says. “I love retail – I feel like it’s in my blood – and starting my own business from scratch has been my education, so I hope I’ll be able to give a great contribution to the business.”

So will we see the Marie-Chantal brand celebrate its 50th birthday in years to come, just as DFS did so spectacularly in 2010? “That’s the plan,” says the princess confidently.

The young Marie-Chantal’s father clearly had a defining influence on her. But the contribution of her mother, Maria-Clara, who’s known as Chantal, was also telling. “Being South American, she brought the creative element. She has an incredible eye for everything she does. I think she could have done anything had she put her mind to it. She was always very fashion-conscious, always beautifully dressed, and so for me it was always in my DNA.”

Style may have been in her DNA, but true love was seemingly written in the stars when she felt cupid’s arrow pierce her heart the very first time she set eyes on Prince Pavlos, the eldest son of the former King Constantine of Greece. The couple, who celebrated their 18th wedding anniversary on July 1, met on what one might call an elaborate blind date. “I had a Greek godfather

[well-connected New York investment banker Alecko Papamarkou] who for years had been trying to set us up,” says Marie-Chantal. “It had been the classic setup, where I tried to get out of it and he wouldn’t let me. We met in New Orleans of all places because we were celebrating the 40th birthday of a mutual friend, and we met there and that was it. Love at first sight. Without sounding too corny.”

Prince Pavlos proposed on a ski lift in Gstaad at the end of 1994, and the scene was set for one of the most spectacular weddings of modern times. And while their life since has been defined by elegance and glamour, Marie-Chantal says it’s the simple things that are the glue in their relationship. “I think in some ways we’re so similar – we like the same things and our values are very much the same, the way we want to raise our children. When the children were babies he was very much there as a present father, changing nappies and helping me out, and it’s important to have that. The children need that kind of structure from both parents. I think that’s given us that equilibrium.”

“And we also like each other very much,” she adds with a laugh. “I think people sometimes grow out of one another, and we’ve been able to maintain that. So there has to be a friendship, and there has to be respect for one another, and you have to agree together on how you’re going to parent and how you’re going to choose to live. Our priorities are our children, they come first – everything else is secondary.”

Given their parents’ good breeding, creativity, drive and focus on providing a loving environment, one would expect that the next generation of the dynasty is well-placed to bring further lustre to the family name. Indeed, Olympia recently appeared with her mother on the cover of Spanish *Vanity Fair* looking every inch the modern princess. Would Marie-Chantal like to see her follow in her own footsteps? “Well,” she says with a smile, “she *is* interning at Dior.” ■

STYLING: HEW HOOD AT LOVELY MANAGEMENT; HAIR: JOEL GONCALVES AT LOVELY MANAGEMENT; MAKE-UP: MARY WILES AT CAREN USING CHANEL COSMETICS; NAILS: LUCIE PICKAVANCE AT CAREN USING CHANEL COSMETICS; PRODUCTION: GEORGINA HOWARD AT PURE PRODUCTION



IN DREAMS

Dress by Alexander McQueen; bracelet by Cartier