



DAME JOAN COLLINS

“ON-SCREEN KISSING IS HORRIBLE, ABOUT AS SEXY AS A SANDWICH”

On a visit to Australia, Dame Joan Collins, the star of '80s soap *Dynasty*, talks to **Sheree Mutton** about fame, lust and the death of her sister, author Jackie Collins.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **PETER BREW-BEVAN** STYLING BY **MATTIE CRONAN**

HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY GAVIN MORRIS. JOAN WEARS TONI MATICEVSKI JACKET. THESE IMAGES HAVE BEEN RETOUCHEDED.

DAME JOAN COLLINS, the woman most famous for putting the über-bitch into 1980s super soap *Dynasty*, is – at almost 83 – still a head-turning Hollywood diva. Even shopping with Dame Joan is a lesson in panache, poise and palpable presence.

Here to launch her personal range of cosmetics and fragrances, Joan, who played the fabulously acid-tongued Alexis Carrington Colby and in the process revived a stage, film and television career that has now spanned eight decades, is strolling through Sydney’s fashionably chic Double Bay accompanied by her 51-year-old husband Percy Gibson and *The Weekly*’s Style Director, Mattie Cronan.

Fresh from the studios of Foxtel’s TV Shopping Network (TVSN), Joan arrived looking every bit the style

icon. Clad in a striking black and white print Roberto Cavalli dress and jacket, a leopard coat casually draped across her shoulders and sporting a pair of two-tone sling-back pumps from Chanel – the fashion world’s most coveted shoes – Joan is Hollywood glamour personified.

Walking from boutique to boutique with Percy, ever the gentleman, strolling behind carrying her shopping bags, Joan instantly drew looks, recognition and even a measure of adulation. “I adore your coat and shoes,” says one woman. “I want them.” Joan, almost as famous for her acerbic wit as her classic beauty, fires back, “Then what would I wear?”

Such is the world of Dame Joan Henrietta Collins, the globetrotting and still stunningly attractive octogenarian, who, it seems, is as active and astute as any woman 30 years her junior.

A few days previously, Joan invited us to her room with sweeping views of the harbour at Sydney’s InterContinental Hotel for an exclusive photo shoot and wide-ranging interview. Over lunch, she revealed that she is not only agile, but also feisty, witty and incredibly funny.

More than that, Joan, elegantly attired in a tailored monochrome blazer, extravagant jewels and black Christian Louboutin heels, is also opinionated, self-assured and extremely good company.

She does not shy away from difficult topics, speaking candidly about her glamorous lifestyle, her days as a young starlet in 1950s Hollywood, her marriage to Percy – husband number five – and the death of her beloved and equally famous sister, Jackie, to breast cancer.

Percy, a former theatrical manager whom Joan met during a stage tour >

of the United States, sits in the background during the shoot, answering emails on his laptop computer, fulfilling both his unofficial role as Joan's advisor and his much more attentive role as companion and lover.

"Love is almost a luxury for a lot of people," says Joan. "The reason most people get married is that they fall in lust

and once that wears off they look at each other and think, 'What the f*** have I done?'"

After four divorces – and an engagement to a young and then unknown Warren Beatty in the 1950s – Joan knows what she is talking about. Her first marriage was to a roguishly handsome Irish actor, Maxwell Reed, a popular British matinee idol during the '40s and '50s, whom, she has claimed, raped her on a date when she was just 17 years old.

Joan wrote of the ordeal in her autobiography, revealing that Maxwell, 12 years her senior, plied her with rum and gave her pornography to read. "The next thing I knew, I was out, flat on the sofa in that living room and he was raping me," she has said. "And what he had given me was a drug. He had drugged my drink. It wasn't my fault, but I didn't know. I went out with him."

Joan also said she naively continued seeing him, eventually marrying him in 1952, rationalising that, "Well, I better [marry him] because you know, he took my virginity," she said. "I really hated him, but I was so filled with guilt, that he had done this thing to me." They divorced in 1956, after just four years, but Joan was already establishing herself in the US by then.

She went on to marriages with British actor and singer Anthony Newley – with whom she has two now grown children, Tara and Sacha – a third marriage to former manager of the Beatles' Apple records Ronald Kass,



Above, left: The role of Alexis Carrington Colby in *Dynasty* made Joan an international star. Above, right: Joan found her Mr Right in Percy Gibson.

with whom she has a daughter, Katy, and a fourth marriage with Peter Holm, a Swede, in 1985.

Yet it is with Percy, Joan says, that she has found her prince. "I kissed a lot of frogs before I found my Mr Right," she says. "He is great in every respect and we have a great relationship. I'm not saying we don't bicker or we totally agree about everything, but we are with each other 24 hours a day."

And that means that their relationship, like any relationship, must be set on solid foundations. They have "trust, friendship, humour, honesty and, of course, looks are important," Joan says, casting a smile in Percy's direction. "My eldest daughter, Tara, is getting married for the second time in August, which is very exciting. I think she has finally found her Mr Right. She kissed a lot of frogs, too. She followed in her mother's footsteps too much."

Being a mother, Joan reveals, is one of her greatest pleasures. "Once a mother, always a mother," she says. "My grandchildren are fabulous, too. One of them wants to be an actress. My first piece of advice was, 'Don't!', then it was, 'You have to train, you have to learn your craft. Don't expect to get a layout in *OK!* magazine and become a star because that won't last.'"

Joan was born on May 23, 1933, in London, England. She was reportedly so beautiful as a baby that her mother put a sign on her stroller warning friends and acquaintances, "Do Not Kiss". She made her first stage

appearance aged nine and landed her first film role – a walk-on part in a movie titled *Lady Godiva Rides Again* – aged 17. After growing up in a strict household, she was an innocent embarking on a career teeming with men eager to exploit her beauty. "When I was 15, I was still playing with dolls," she says. "I had never seen a naked man.

I didn't even know what sex was."

And yet, alongside that beauty, Joan was also a talented actress. "Joan Collins was, without doubt, one of the great beauties of her age," says one film critic. "But she could certainly act, too. Those early films showed a great versatility and range that helped establish her.

"One of the first films she made in the US was called *Sea Wife* in 1957. She starred with Richard Burton. Joan more than holds her own with him and gives a fantastic performance. Even though she didn't make that top tier of Hollywood greats, I think she was greatly underrated as an actress."

Joan was 20 when she landed in Los Angeles, just when Hollywood was entering an iconic era of filming making. Yet with that came many dangers for a young woman looking to make a career, dangers she was warned about by another young and beautiful actress, Marilyn Monroe.

"I met Marilyn only once," Joan recalls. "It was at the bar at Gene Kelly's house. She said, 'Watch out for the wolves in Hollywood, honey.' I said, 'We have wolves in England, too. I know how to handle wolves.' This was a time when men went around touching girls inappropriately all the time – on their shoulder, on their bottom. They would pull out your dress and look down your cleavage. They just did that."

Not that Joan ever succumbed to the "casting couch" mentality. "I never did that," she says, emphatically. >

ALAMY, REX FEATURES; OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER BREW-BEVAN, JOAN WEARS RACHEL GILBERT GOWN, GLOVES FROM THE VINTAGE CLOTHING STORE, KENNETH JAY LANE CUFF AND OSCAR DE LA RENTA EARRINGS FROM PIERRE WINTER.



"I had never seen a naked man. I didn't even know what sex was."

After winning a contract with 20th Century Fox, she was ordered to slim down. “They wanted me to be eight-and-a-half stone [54 kilograms],” recalls Joan, who only weighed 58 kilograms at the time.

“The studio doctor put me on a diet. It was bananas and cottage cheese or tomatoes and cottage cheese or cottage cheese and cottage cheese,” she says.

“He gave me these green pills and said they would kill my appetite. They also killed my sleeping habits. They were Dexedrine. I lost eight pounds [four kilograms], but I also lost the ability to sleep. Everybody smoked like crazy because we all believed if you smoked it killed the fat.”

However, she made an impression. In 1955, she appeared in *Land Of The Pharaohs* for legendary director Howard Hawks. Also that year she replaced Marilyn Monroe in *The Girl In The Red Velvet Swing*.

Joan made a long list of films through the '50s, '60s and '70s – *The Virgin Queen* opposite Bette Davis, *The Bravados* with Gregory Peck and *Rally 'Round The Flag Boys* with Paul Newman. She was offered a role in the James Bond films, but turned it down.

“I was pregnant,” she says. “Roger Moore was a good friend of mine. He suggested it. I didn’t really care. I was busy having babies and being a mother.”

Yet it was as Alexis Carrington Colby, the arch bitch of *Dynasty* that finally set Joan on the path to world fame. It was a TV role like no other – all high camp, high couture and high ratings – and it fitted Joan like a glove, earning her a Golden Globe for Best Actress in a TV Drama Series, in 1983.

“I always base a character on somebody I know,” says Joan. “I had this friend, Cappy Badrutt, who was married to the man who owned the Palace Hotel in St Moritz. She was one of the most glamorous women you’ve ever seen.”



Above: With the launch of her Timeless Beauty range, Joan can add cosmetics queen to her long list of achievements.

Alexis was a mix of Cappy and another acquaintance, billionaire Donald Trump. “He was for the business acumen and ambition,” she says. “He’s changed a bit since then.”

What she didn’t love was all the on-screen romance. “On screen kissing is horrible,” she says. “It’s about as sexy as this sandwich.” She points to a club sandwich of bacon and avocado.

While she might be almost 83, Dame Joan has the complexion of someone much younger. She says creating her Timeless Beauty range, available on TVSN in Australia, was something she wanted to do for years.

“I was always being asked what lipstick I was wearing, so finally when [businessman] George Hammer asked me if I wanted to do a beauty line, I said, ‘Yes, it’s about time’. It had to be based on everything I used in the past, that is the last 400 years,” Joan says.

The self-proclaimed feminist is also outspoken about the problems that women face, including inequality and domestic violence. “Domestic violence is one of the most horribly insidious and vile things in our society. It’s accepted far too much,” she says. “It isn’t taken seriously enough by

government. I’m horrified at what people get away with. In certain cultures, it is accepted to abuse your wife, to rape your wife.” She shakes her head. “Certain cultures that are misogynistic, that hate women. I believe women can do everything that men can do and they should be allowed to.”

While Dame Joan is acutely aware of the challenges others face, perhaps her own toughest moment came last September, when younger sister and world-renowned author, Jackie Collins, died of breast cancer. Jackie kept her illness a secret from Joan up until two weeks before she passed away.

“I understand why she did it because she wasn’t expecting to die,” Joan says. “When she told me, she said, ‘Well, I’m taking these drugs and I’m going to last another two or three or four years’, so it wasn’t like, ‘Oh, I’m going to die soon, I should tell Joan’. She was fully expecting to go on.”

Then, nine days before her death, Jackie made the trip to the UK. “It was to say goodbye to us, to her daughter, Tracy, to my brother, Bill, to her friends and Percy, and me,” reveals Joan.

“We were very, very close when we were young. I mean we were very close most of our lives. We had a little rift for a time. It wasn’t really a rift; we just didn’t see each other much. That was during the *Dynasty* time. She hated my husband, Peter, and I wasn’t mad about her boyfriend.”

Joan says the pain of losing her sister is still raw, seven months on. “I have a pile of letters from her,” she says. “I loved her very much and I know she loved me.”

Nevertheless, losing her sister hasn’t forced Joan to think too much about her own legacy. “I honestly don’t think about death a lot or what people are going to think about me. I hope people think I gave them some pleasure either as a friend or as an entertainer, a writer or beautician.” #



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER BREW-BEVAN. OPPOSITE: JOAN WEARS MAX MARA COAT, BLOUSE AND PANTS, AND OSCAR DE LA RENTA NECKLACE FROM PIERRE WINTER.

“Marilyn said, ‘Watch out for the wolves in Hollywood, honey’.”