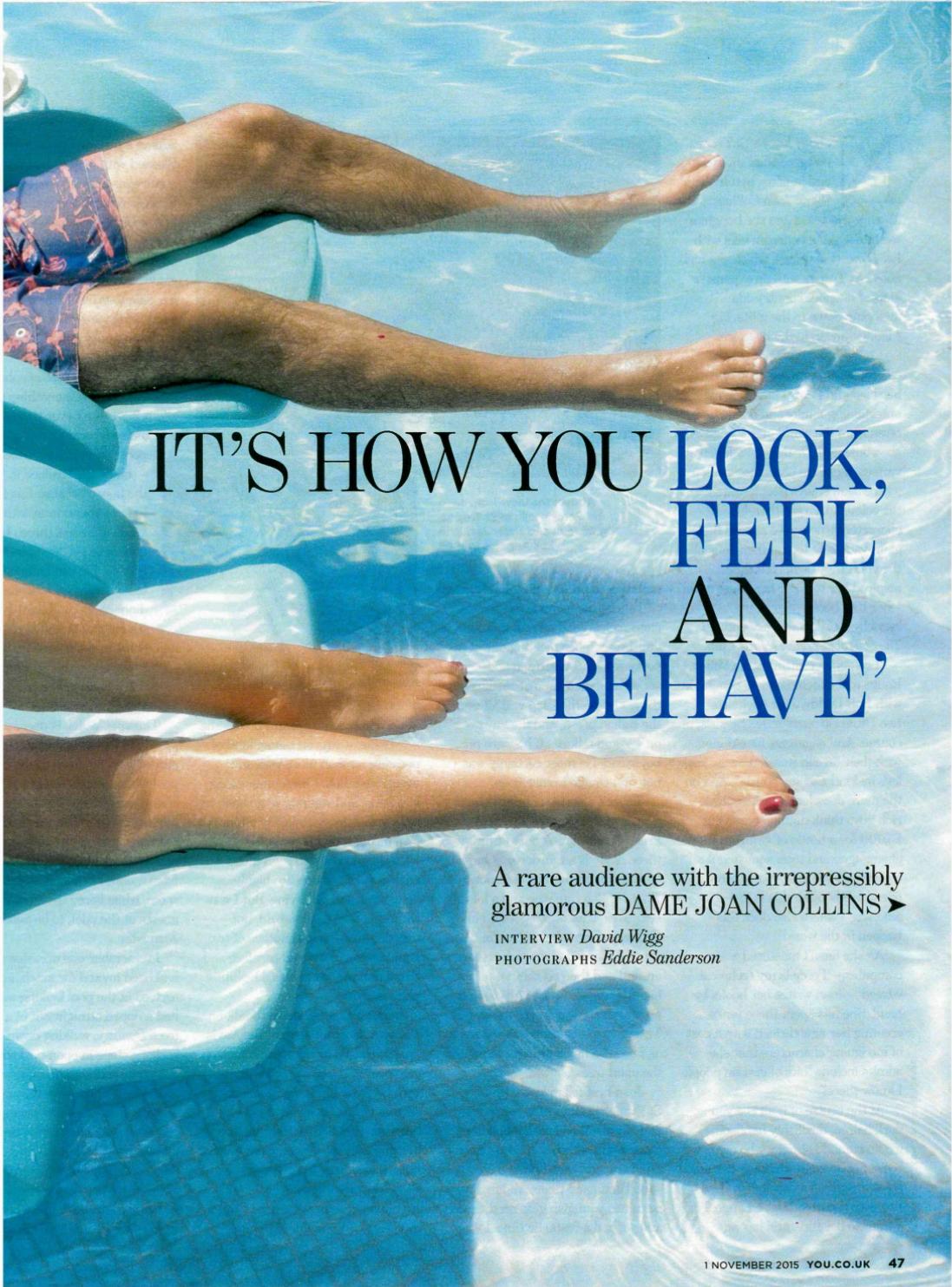


YOU *exclusive* interview

# 'AGE ISN'T IMPORTANT...

Joan and her husband Percy  
at their St Tropez villa

46 YOU.CO.UK 1 NOVEMBER 2015



IT'S HOW YOU LOOK,  
FEEL  
AND  
BEHAVE'

A rare audience with the irrepressibly glamorous DAME JOAN COLLINS ►

INTERVIEW *David Wigg*

PHOTOGRAPHS *Eddie Sanderson*

Nobody knows St Tropez, playground of the rich and famous, better than Dame Joan Collins.

Twenty-five years ago she bought a magnificent six-bedroom villa with her *Dynasty* earnings, which sits high above St Tropez with an expansive view of unspoilt countryside sweeping down to the glittering Mediterranean in the distance.

Completely private, it is here where, every summer, Joan and her husband Percy Gibson enjoy entertaining family and friends, often from the world of showbusiness. Or they take lunch at various exclusive beach hotspots, where Joan enjoys people-watching the colourful, larger-than-life characters who arrive aboard their giant yachts or top up their tans at the villas they own. And this inspired her to write her latest novel – her 16th book – a gripping, raunchy murder mystery entitled *The St Tropez Lonely Hearts Club*.

'I remember sitting at La Voile Rouge and watching boats coming in with Puff Daddy, Jack Nicholson, Leo DiCaprio surrounded by girls, of course. And oligarchs, fat old guys with their 6ft 2in Russian birds. Yes, let's be kind and say "birds". And on the more decadent beaches, these rich guys think nothing of paying £5,000 for a bottle of vintage champagne and then squirting it all over their squealing young lady friends. I thought, this is just so amazing – where else does this happen in the world?'

As she hasn't mastered a computer – 'Percy is my technical wizard' – Joan writes her books by hand. She has spent three years creating her new thriller, with a cast of intriguing characters that she admits include 'bits of certain people I know there!'

At the centre of it all is a young, dark-haired, devilishly handsome gigolo named Fabrizio, who cannot resist any woman whatever her age. He is described as an Italian Brad Pitt with the brooding sex appeal of a Benicio del Toro, and has an



Above: the view from Joan and Percy's villa in St Tropez. Right: Joan and sister Jackie in Los Angeles in 1988

ambition to become a famous singer.

Fabrizio is Joan's favourite character. 'We've all met that kind of guy. I remember meeting one at a party some 30 years ago and someone took a snap of us. The next thing I know, the snap was all over the Italian press, and the guy goes on TV and talks as if he were my boyfriend. He most certainly was not. You couldn't make it up.'

There's a series of unexplained deaths in the plot, but the local French police aren't sure at first if there really is a murderer at large among this glamorous community. There is also romance and a lot of sex. 'Well, a lot of sex goes on in St Tropez,' says Joan. 'I mean, you see them on the beach rolling around and then off they go. I have had friends who stay with me and say, "We're just going to the beach." Then they come back late afternoon and they've had a little romp behind the palm trees.'

Joan first fell in love with St Tropez back in 1970, when she and Natalie Wood took a holiday there along with her children Sacha and Tara, and they bumped into Jane Fonda and Roger Vadim. 'We were two youngish girls on the town and we had a fantastic time. I was



in-between marriages and so was she.

'To me, it was like some kind of paradise – much more wild and overgrown then. I remember being at a party and wanting to go back to my hotel. Johnny Hallyday offered to give me a lift on his motorbike, and we went zooming through those narrow roads, which are highly dangerous and terrifying. But I was without a care in the world, not thinking that I was a mother of two. People were young and carefree and crazy, and the world was a beautiful place in 1970.'

Joan has settled down to talk on a huge sofa in her elegant Belgravia apartment. Wearing a Ralph Lauren pale grey and white striped dress, with heels by LK Bennett, she has several of her favourite jewelled bracelets around her right wrist and her fine legs are tanned from her most recent stay in St Tropez. People always imagine she is tall from her screen appearances, but in fact she is 5ft 5in, her high heels

adding a further three inches. Blessed with high cheekbones, green eyes and full lips, she has a flawless complexion and comes in conversation as strong, positive and curious about everything. She doesn't suffer fools – or family gladly. But her husband is always on her side to protect her and so everything runs smoothly.

Joan usually spends three months each summer at her villa. 'The light and atmosphere is fabulous. There's something about it – I won't ever leave. I've just redecorated, heated

the pool and put in air-conditioning – totally modernised it. I got the house because this is where I get to spend time with family [she has three children and three grandchildren]. We can entertain, have wonderful lunches, dinners and midnight suppers. It's only taken us 24 years to get the pool heated and broke down this summer that's France. Everything always goes wrong!'

The villa, which is decorated mostly in lemon and white, has a garden leading down to the pool where guests are invited to have champagne before lunch. The kitchen is out of bounds to guests, as food is prepared by two young women under Joan's direction, and served from a buffet in a long elegant room, while Percy entertains guests at the pool, to be joined by Joan later.

I remember one occasion when I had been invited for lunch, and I arrived at the pool looking a little worse for wear. I had stepped straight out of a car from *Dynasty*, walking down rocky steps in open-backed gold-coloured high heels, a glamorous white wide-brimmed hat and an all-in-one white swimsuit, with lilac chiffon draped around her shoulders. Watching her floating on a lilo in the pool, I went out to warn her that she was rather close to the edge, when the water disappeared into the



“  
*I loved Jackie so much.  
She was a wonderful  
woman. I still cry three  
or four times a day*  
”

◀ below. 'Oh, wouldn't they just love that headline, David,' she cried. 'Joan Collins goes over the edge and shoots down into the valley from her own swimming pool. Don't worry, I'm perfectly safe.'

Liza Minnelli once came to visit for a few days – but stayed for ten. 'That's a long time and she stole my pillow,' Joan recalls. Recent visitors have included Julian Clary, Nigel Havers and Tracey Emin, whom Joan first met at celebrity hairdresser Charles Worthington's St Tropez villa some five years ago. 'She's been lots of fun. She's a girl's girl – a great artist. I have several of her works that she's given me.'

Joan is already planning for next summer. 'We're thinking of having all the family together and Jackie's children, too. I said to Percy, we're going to have to put up tents in the garden for the boys, but they're teenagers so they'll probably like it.'

Everyone who knows Joan is amazed at her energy and drive. Even Percy, who is 32 years younger, agrees. 'You try keeping up with her,' he remarks.

'I know,' says Joan. 'My mother used to call me Miss Perpetual Motion because apparently I never kept still for a second.' She is passionate and positive about everything, and believes in always dressing and being fully made-up as a 'star' so as not to disappoint her public – which she learned at 20th Century Fox. Retirement is not a word that enters her vocabulary.

'I intend to go on until I drop or until it all falls apart,' she says. 'Firstly, I don't feel any different from when I was 40, quite frankly. After I had my youngest, Katy, I had the same energy. My trainer, who I have been with for 15 years, says I can do everything I did 15 years ago. That I hadn't really changed at all. Maybe running up the stairs, not quite as good, but then who needs to run up the stairs?'

'I'm always on the move. I travel

**Right: at Joan's St Tropez home, photographs of friends and family sit alongside a gallery of magazine covers documenting her extraordinarily long career**



a lot. And I do very much believe that you've got to use it or lose it. But that does not mean feel the burn and feel the pain. I don't believe in that and I never have. I know a lot of women who over-exercised in their 20s and 30s who now have bad knees, bad hips, bad shoulders and have had to have operations. Thank God I haven't yet.'

Now 82, she refuses to be defined by age. 'I think what is important is not age, but how you look, how you feel and how you behave. Let's face it, a woman today who is in her 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, if she takes care of herself, can possibly go on to be 100. Well, I hope so! I believe in good food, don't eat junk, exercise and try to be as happy as possible in a world that is full of sadness.'

So what drives her? 'I was able to find a certain way of life from the time when I was a reasonably young actress in the 70s. I like that way of life, and the amount of money you had to earn in 1970 to have that way of life is about a quarter or an eighth of what you need today. I want to have the homes [she has four – in St Tropez, London, Los Angeles and New York] and I want to order a car whenever I want to. I don't have couture, I can't afford it, but I do have a good lifestyle,



**Left: Joan with her children Sacha, Katy and Tara in the 1970s and, below, with Tara and Sacha, after being made a dame in March**



“  
*I don't feel any different from when I was 40, quite frankly*  
”

and I also have a lot of dependants.'

Joan has always been there to support her three children in any way she is able – especially when they've come up against obstacles. She loves having them around her and they will all be together this Christmas at her Belgravia home.

'One should tell people who are having babies, they are there forever. You think, "Oh well, at 18 they'll leave." Forget it. Mine are in their 40s and 50s now. They're still my children, and I still worry about them. Sacha [49] is painting and has moved to London from New York. He has a new girlfriend. Tara

[52] is extremely happy living in Somerset with her two children. She has a new fiancé and she's going to get married soon. She's working on some scripts as a writer, being a social worker. Katy [48] is living in Boston with her boyfriend and she's very happy despite having a terrible fall three years ago [Katy fainted in her motor car in a Hollywood apartment and sustained an eye injury as she hit her head]. She's writing a lot and is a very good artist.'

After four marriages (Sacha and Tara are her children with her second husband, Anthony Newley) and she had Katy with her third husband, Ronald Kass), Joan met tall, handsome Percy in 2000. At the time she was touring America in a one-woman show, *One Night with Joan*, and he was the company manager. Now, in addition to looking after their four homes and handling travelling arrangements, he has also directed her recent successful one-woman show, *One Night with Joan*, which after playing in London took them around the world. They have now been married for 14 years – her longest marriage.

'It's Percy's birthday tomorrow. He'll be 50 – no more a toyboy. He says, erupting into laughter: "Well as a present, she was expecting a surprise party for me." They are inseparable. So why this marriage worked so well? Without any hesitation, she says: 'He's just so wonderful. He is an old-fashioned gentleman first and foremost. He's funny, incredibly kind, generous and non-neurotic. We are soulmates – we like the same things. Our fathers were of the same generation, so we had the same backgrounds. We were both brought up with authoritative figures and have a certain respect for authority.'

'We simply love being witty together. We're friends. We laugh at the same things. He makes the children laugh. And we have bathrooms, which is very important. We're always together. It is a love match, but also a friendship. Let's face it, the initial love

Joan and Percy with Joan's  
grandchildren (from left)  
Miel, Ava Grace and Weston



◀ affair with any relationship has to die down after a time. Otherwise one would become worn out. But we are still in love. I love him madly. You see, I left the best until last. I kissed a lot of frogs, but finally found the prince. I'm very, very happy with him. And he's made me very happy, particularly in the last three weeks when I've been unhappy.'

Joan has coped with most crises in her life, but recently she has had to deal with the sadness of her younger sister Jackie's death from breast cancer at 77. It left her devastated. 'God, I can't think about it. I still cry three or four times a day. We were so close. I loved her so much. She was a wonderful woman. But let's not talk about it any more; I will get too upset.'

Tears were beginning to form as she struggled to speak of the loss, so she took a break in her bedroom before continuing. On her return, I asked whether she found it strange that Jackie hadn't told her about the cancer when it was first diagnosed some seven years ago? 'Not strange - brave. She didn't want to upset me, my brother Bill and her children. So I think she did it the way she wanted to do it. She didn't want people to feel sorry for her. She didn't want pity.'

Joan has dedicated her new book

## JOAN'S HOT LIST

### READING

*Trigger Mortis*, the new James Bond book by Anthony Horowitz.

### WATCHING

*Homeland*.

### FAVOURITE DESIGNER

Coco Chanel.

### NEW MOVIE

Lily Tomlin in *Grandma*, which was premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

### BEAUTY TIP

I always keep my face out of the sun, but not my legs.

### FAVOURITE SHOP

Selfridges.

BEST WAY TO FRITTER AWAY A FREE AFTERNOON Shopping.

to Jackie with the tender words: 'For my sister Jackie. I will never forget you.'

'We had dinner together for her daughter Tracy's birthday in London, nine days before she passed away. She came over to England [from LA] and saw all of us - I think it was to say her goodbyes, to Bill, his wife Hazel and all of us. She was a totally remarkable woman and a wonderful writer. She wrote five

books after she was diagnosed.

'I had a huge party for my investiture which she came over for. She also came over for her own OBE the year before. She did all this travelling. She went to Australia by herself. She was extraordinary.'

Joan has also said, 'I used to nag my sister about getting mammograms, as our darling mother Elsa had succumbed to the disease in 1962 when she was in her early 50s. I was religious about having mammograms regularly. Jackie, however, refused. She didn't like going to doctors.'

Joan and Percy will be flying over to Los Angeles this week for a celebration of Jackie's life. The children are organising a big party for all the family and friends at Jackie's Hollywood mansion,



## Sixty years of a screen icon



Above, from left: with Jack Hawkins in *Land of The Pharoahs*, 1955; Stephen Boyd in *Island in The Sun*, 1957; Bob Hope and Bing Crosby in *The Road to Ho Kong*, 1962; Oliver Tobias in *The Stud*, 1978; Leonard Rossiter in the 1979 Cinzano advert; as Fontaine Khaled in *The Bitch*, 1979

*I kissed a lot of frogs, but finally found the prince*



which she herself had requested.

Joan has also just filmed a cameo guest appearance in the new *Absolutely Fabulous* movie, and in January she returns to our screens in the second series of *The Royals*, reprising her role as the Grand Duchess of Oxford, mother to Elizabeth Hurley's Queen Helena.

On 15 December, top Hollywood auctioneer Darren Julian is selling off a collection of items that have been in storage for years since Joan sold her big Hollywood home. There are a thousand pieces, which include dresses from *Dynasty*, theatre productions and public events, as well as paintings, pictures and memorabilia. An intriguing item is a love letter she received from Warren Beatty, to whom she was engaged in the early 1960s.

'Maybe you can get something straight. When I met Warren he was totally unknown. We became engaged and we lived together and all my friends were saying, what are you doing with this unknown actor? I introduced him to everyone: Ray Stark, Charles Feldman, Barbra Streisand. I said goodbye to him when I was about to go off to London to do *The Road To Hong Kong* [with Bing Crosby and Bob Hope], but we decided to remain friends. He was too young – just 22.'

She still has the engagement ring in a safe deposit box. 'I haven't put that up for auction – maybe I should.'

It seems they have remained good friends. 'Whenever I see him, which is quite often in LA, he says to Percy, "You know, I still love this woman." I said, "Oh yeah, but you were unfaithful." He said, "I was never unfaithful to you."'



Above from left: with John Forsythe in *Dynasty*, Zoe Lucker in *Footballers' Wives* and Elizabeth Hurley in *The Royals*

## Style and scandal on the Côte d'Azur

**S**ophie Silvestri, *grande dame* of cinema, arrives at the Cannes Film Festival at the start of a sizzling summer of murder and scandal. An exclusive extract from *The St Tropez Lonely Hearts Club*

As I attempt to sweep up the red-carpeted steps to the Palais des Arts, the agonising pain in my hips makes me feel faint. I clench my teeth, as well as the hands of Frick and Adolpho, my two faithful sty gurus who support me, whispering encouragement while I smile for the sea of lenses.

'Courage, Sophie. Be brave, you are still the most beautiful; don't let them see your pain,' Frick encourages.

And of course I won't, can't, let them see the effort it has taken n to strut up those velvet-sheathed stairs in six-inch Louboutins and a dress I haven't worn since *The Princess and the Playboy* in 68. Gina l let it out several inches, but even with the steel corset it's torture. 'Y must suffer to be beautiful.' The words of my mentor; the great direc Charlot Benedicto, ring in my ears as I recall his insistence on havin me strapped in corsets to play the young Marie Antoinette. The cor had taken my then 23-inch waist down to 18 inches, and I had worn the whole ten-hour shooting day, unable to eat or go to the bathroom I also cracked a rib but never complained. Not to his face, at least.

I smile again at the cheering crowds of paparazzi, and fans pushi who line the staircase. How ugly most of them are. Where do they come from with their hideous tattoos, their pierced ears, noses and tongues? And fat! Not one elegant jacket, not one nice shirt – just shorts and jeans and crop tops and pale ugly skin spilling out of the

At the top of the steps a civilised crowd awaits. Amongst the coiffe gowned and black-tied, I glimpse Deneuve and Depardieu, and mak gigantic effort with the last few stairs. Both my hips are now torturing me. Why hadn't I listened all those years ago when I was warned th the exercise videos I was making would eventually cripple me?

'Your bones are like Swiss cheese,' the blunt American doctor had pronounced. Did I detect a note of suppressed delight in his voice? Was I to be his retirement pension? 'If we don't give you two hip replacements within a year, you'll be in a wheelchair for the rest of your life.' He sounded slightly too pleased about that.

The rest of my life? How long will that be? I'm 74 now but I feel I and by the time I get to 104, I'll probably be long dead. But of cours don't look my age. No way. Frick and Adolpho see to that.

I wince as I make the top step and air-kiss Deneuve on both che The b\*\*\*\* looks far too good and, as I kiss, I try to check behind h ears, but all that real blonde hair (double b\*\*\*\*) gets in the way. Th crowd cheers, the cameras click, the flashes flash insanel, recordin the moment when two queens of the French cinema reunite, and I feel the instant rush of adrenalin that these events still give me. After all, I am still a star.

**The St Tropez Lonely Hearts Club** by Joan Collins will be published by Constable on Thursday, price £16.99. To pre-order a copy for £12.74 (a 25 per cent discount) until 15 November, visit [you-bookshop.co.uk](http://you-bookshop.co.uk) or call 0808 272 0808; p&p is free on orders over £12

