



Queen Elizabeth

With a new boyfriend, a successful swimwear business and a new royal television role on the horizon, life's not so bad for 47-year-old Elizabeth Hurley. Her only dilemma is which of her two country estates to sell, as she tells her old friend **WILLIAM CASH**

Photography by **NIHAT ODABASI**



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lizabeth Hurley has always had eclectic taste when it comes to reading. As an English actress working in Los Angeles in the 90s, when we used to share a house in the Hollywood Hills and she had just landed her Estée Lauder modelling contract – yes, 20 years ago now – she used to have an old-fashioned school trunk beside her bed packed with old Penguin paperbacks.

The books ranged from the complete works of Evelyn Waugh to Vladimir Nabokov, Nancy Mitford to Jilly Cooper. The more beautiful, sad or mischievously lustful the prose (a bath-oil smothered copy of *Riders* was usually in the bathroom or by her bed), the more the book cover would be dog-eared with re-reading. One of her very favourite novels was – and remains – *The End of the Affair* by Graham Greene.

The title of Greene's 1951 impassioned but tragic novel has a certain poignancy for Hurley right now, following her split before Christmas from the legendary Australian cricketer Shane Warne. After first meeting at Glorious Goodwood, Warne made a whirlwind proposal to Hurley after only a few months of dating, when the couple were guests on Australian tycoon James Packer's boat. The public announcement came when Warne produced a huge blue sapphire and diamond rock at a celebrity golf tournament at St Andrews in October 2011.

Today, Hurley is busy running her 450-acre farm in Gloucestershire, while also supervising the decorating and renovation of her Herefordshire country house near Ledbury. The former couple bought the sprawling, 12-bedroom property and 270-acre estate for around £6m from an eccentric eighties music producer and his wife, after Hurley had first seen an advertisement for it in the pages of this very magazine.

'To be honest, I wasn't actually looking for a new property,' says Hurley. 'I've always loved my farm in Gloucestershire. It's private and I have friends around Cirencester and it is where Damian calls home. But when I saw the picture of Donnington, I just fell in love, although I was a bit suspicious of the Barbie-pink façade. When I arrived for

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the viewing, I was relieved to find the house wasn't concrete pink at all – which must have put a few potential buyers off – it was a lovely mellow stone.'

The one bizarre aspect to the sale, however, was that just before she arrived for her first night, she got a call from the local estate agent saying the previous owners had left 'a few items behind – was that ok?' Hurley thought nothing of it, until she arrived to find almost the entire contents of the house still in situ – along with a wine cellar, an entire library of books and all the beds still made up.

'For the first six months or so, if we camped there overnight, I didn't need to buy any wine or even plates or cutlery. But there came a point when I just had to kit the house out afresh and put my own stamp on it.'

Her chosen decorator was Jane Churchill with whom she not only gets on well personally – they have mutual friends in common – but they also work well together. Nothing fazes Jane. I mention this as Hurley has not always seen eye to eye with the extravagant decorative schemes, or – more to the point – bills, of certain other 'celebrity' decorators she has hired over the years, which have ended in 'decorator divorce'.

'Jane helped us with the decorating and I thought she was terrific,' says Hurley. 'She's totally open to everything and if I had a dodgy idea like "let's paint the downstairs loo purple", instead of raising her eyebrows, she'd say "what shade?". I loved her.'

Asked whether Hurley has made up her mind about staying in Gloucestershire or making the move to Herefordshire, she simply says that it 'remains to be seen'. One thing is certain. A life without a country base is unthinkable. 'I divide my time between London and Gloucestershire and would hate to have one without the other,' says Hurley. 'Before I had my son I travelled constantly and lived out of a suitcase. Now, even though I still have to fly a couple of times a







Elizabeth Hurley wears kaftans
and swimwear all available
from Elizabeth Hurley Beach
(elizabethhurleybeach.com)
and jewellery by Monica
Vinader (monicavinader.com)

LOCATION

Mosaic Palais Aziza & Spa,
Marrakech

TEAM

Hair: Cyril Laloue for
Julian Watson Agency
Make up: Mary Greenwell

month for business, I spend a great deal more time at home and I love it.' Currently her family consists of her son, five dogs, two alpacas, 14 chickens and a parrot. And that doesn't include her mother who lives in a cottage on the Donnington estate.

Part of this decision may depend on how things unravel in the next 12 months with the new man in her life. He is the former hedge fund manager turned award-winning wildlife photographer, David Yarrow, who donates part of his photography sales to Tusk, the African wildlife and conservation charity of which the Duke of Cambridge is the royal patron.

After I sat Yarrow and Hurley next to each other at my wedding lunch in February – both are old friends of mine with children the same age – Yarrow then took Hurley to The Friends of Tusk dinner at Claridge's, which raised over £70,000 for the charity.

Shortly after this outing, Yarrow came for a 'meet the parents' Sunday lunch at Donnington. I can report it went well, with Yarrow – who has been recently told off by his own mother for being photographed dressing like Don Johnson from *Miami Vice* – wearing a highly respectable blazer and being 'utterly charming'.

Hurley's family and friends are sighing with relief that she is once again dating a Brit. If their relationship blossoms, one expects that Hurley may also become more involved in wildlife causes. Not only because of Yarrow, however, but because Hurley herself is passionate – make that obsessed – with apes, gorillas and anything simian (the name of her film production company with Hugh Grant was Simian films and her personal car plate is APE).

The passion for the monkey-life goes back to her days with Hugh Grant, with a bedroom at her Gloucestershire farmhouse named The Monkey Room because it was decorated entirely in monkey print. Before Yarrow even started dating Hurley, he sent her a copy of his new photography book, *Encounter*, that included a photograph of a gorilla that now keeps her company whilst at Donnington.

'David is extremely nice and is a fantastic photographer,' Hurley says. 'I now have a large gorilla of his, shot in Rwanda, which is hanging on a blood-red wall of the library at Donnington. It's quite magnificent.'

Donnington Hall is a big country house and if Hurley decides to keep it, at least she will have no shortage of wall space to hang more of Yarrow's acclaimed giant photographs. Other collectors include the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge (who spent an hour with Yarrow having a private tour of his last exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery in Chelsea).

Not only does her romantic life seem to be entering a happy new chapter, but also her acting career is very much back on track. After her break-out success playing the lead in Dennis Potter's classic 1988 drama, *Christabel*, Hurley's television work (with the exception of the cult hit *Austin Powers*) has often been where she's played her best roles. In America, she was acclaimed for her portrayal of a glamorous, man-eating English cougar in *Gossip Girl*.

Her latest role is playing Queen Helena – a fictitious Queen of



England. It's the lead role in E! channel's new series *The Royals*. 'It's sex, drugs and rock'n'roll at Buckingham Palace. The pilot was a hoot to shoot and I can't wait to start the series.'

E! will be filming over the summer, with Hurley conveniently holed up in her trailer at stately homes like Blenheim Palace – substituting for Buckingham Palace – just up the road from her son's Oxford prep school. 'The locations used for the pilot were breathtaking,' says Hurley. 'The majority will be shot on a sound stage in London, but all the exteriors will be shot on location.'

With a new boyfriend who lives just around the corner from her in Chelsea, and a summer's filming in London and Oxfordshire, Hurley is relieved that she can finally enjoy some time in England – without having to be forever jetting off to Australia on 24-hour flights, or India, for that matter, as she used to when married to Arun Nayar.

'It's been a while since I've been in a relationship when I can just drop round for a kitchen supper and it only takes five minutes in a cab to get there,' says Hurley. 'Actually, David is a very good cook which makes it even more enjoyable. The first dinner he cooked for me was a delicious roast English fillet of beef. It was superb.'

She admits she has to work hard to keep her body in shape. 'I've just joined a gym for the first time in over 20 years. It's the very swanky women-only Grace Belgravia'

She will not be drawn any further on her new private life, however. 'I think everyone's heard quite enough about it for the time being and I'm hoping very much to maintain some kind of degree of privacy moving on. Any chap who comes within six feet of me at the moment is outed as my "new boyfriend". It's funny in a way, but less so for my son.'

Meanwhile, her beachwear company is doing well. 'Sales are up and we're hoping to open a boutique in 2015,' she says. Clients and fans include Elle Macpherson and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley, who are regularly photographed on exotic beaches, from Mustique to the Maldives, sporting her creations.

She still loves wearing her own designs, although she admits she has to work hard (especially with Yarrow being a restaurant lover and talented cook) to keep her body in shape. 'I've just joined a gym for the first time in over 20 years. It's the very swanky Grace Belgravia for women only.'

As she turns 48 this June, it is good to know that the Hurley stock is still riding high and leading from the front – with pop star Lady Gaga, of all people, now copying the Hurley style. It was recently reported that the black Versace dress, famously held together with several large gold safety pins that she wore, aged 29, to the 1994 premiere of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, has been voted, in a poll of 3,000 women conducted by Debenhams, the most iconic dress of all time. It leapt to pole position ahead of Audrey Hepburn's white flower patterned Givenchy dress, worn to the 1954 Oscars, and Jennifer Lopez's revealing green Versace number worn to the Grammys in 2000.

It is her staying power as a British fashion icon that still keeps her under contract for Estée Lauder. 'I'm just celebrating my 20th year with Lauder. They've been the best company to work for and they're like family to me. I've used their products religiously and if you've taken good care of your skin, it really begins to show in your forties; we all need a lot more moisturiser than we think!' ■

elizabethhurleybeach.com