

THE  TIMES

MAGAZINE

04.05.13



BRAND KARDASHIAN

How three sisters made \$80 million
– by selling themselves

PLUS JOHN LE CARRÉ ON CLASS AND AGEING ● CAITLIN MORAN ON HOLLYWOOD'S MOST HATED

Special K

How Kourtney, Kim
and Khloé Kardashian
made a killing

*The queens of American reality TV
tell Helena de Bertodano how they
turned their life into a brand*



From left: Khloé wears
**blouse, £30, and skirt,
£35.** Kim wears **dress, £45.**
Kourtney wears **jacket, £55,
shirt, £30, and shorts, £35.**
All Kardashian Kollection
exclusively at Dorothy Perkins

PORTRAIT Ellen von Unwerth

The three Kardashian sisters are discussing childbirth with each other – in the blunt way that only the Kardashians could do in front of a stranger. “It can’t feel good to have a baby coming out of your vagina,” says Khloé to Kourtney, who recently gave birth to her second child on *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, the reality TV show that has turned the family into a worldwide phenomenon.

“It does,” says Kourtney, 34, enthusiastically – who was seen on the show calmly pulling baby Penelope out of her body with her hands and lifting her onto her chest. “I think [childbirth] can be a calm experience, so I’m glad that people could see that.”

Kim, 32, the middle and most famous sister, is more subdued. She’s due to give birth in July to her first child, by musician boyfriend Kanye West, and she says she would not contemplate a water birth – which Kourtney did consider. “I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I definitely won’t be doing that,” says Kim adamantly.

The three sisters are sitting next to each other on a black leather sofa in a converted loft studio in Santa Monica, California. This is the kind of chat that makes *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* essential viewing, and has generated a collective net worth estimated at \$80 million (£52 million); Kim is thought to be worth half that herself.

When I arrive, Kim and Khloé are tapping on their iPhones while Kourtney has her phone pressed to her ear, the cover stamped with a picture of her two children. All three are wearing six-inch stilettos but Khloé, 28, the youngest, has removed hers – Christian Louboutins – and planted them on the table in front of her. “They were messing up my nail polish,” she says, rubbing her toes. All three lay down their phones simultaneously (albeit only momentarily) – we are here to discuss the Kardashian Kollection, their latest clothing line for Dorothy Perkins.

In putting their name to everything from lipstick, false lashes and teeth-whitening products to lingerie, tights, nail polish and shoes, through the Kardashian Kollection label or their Khroma Beauty company, the Kardashian sisters have become a multimillion-dollar brand. On top of Dorothy Perkins, they have a clothing line in the Kardashian Collection for US department store chain Sears, and another, K-Dash, for the home shopping channel QVC. True, Khroma Beauty is currently under a preliminary injunction after two companies, Chroma Makeup Studio and Kroma Beauty, accused the Kardashians of trademark infringement. But there’s still their own store in the Mirage hotel, Las Vegas, your first port of call for mugs emblazoned



Left: Kourtney, Kim and Khloé at Kim’s wedding to Kris Humphries in

August 2011. Below: Kim with Kanye West in New York last month

“When we are fighting, we’re like, “God I hate her!” Then five minutes later it’s like, “Hey, do you want to go get some fro-yo?””



with photographs of the sisters, beach towels with Kim in her bikini, yo-yos, bumper stickers and, of course, gambling chips, all with the Kardashians’ monicker. And the two books, *Kardashian Konfidential* and the novel *Dollhouse* (published in 2012 and 2011 respectively). The sisters’ exploits not only feature daily in newspaper showbiz pages, but are fodder for the never-ending cyber-tattle of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

The family are known universally, but they’re not universally liked. As *The Hollywood Reporter* wrote in 2011: “Why, despite the eye-rolls of half of America, does the other half worship at the altar of a family that unabashedly embraces, celebrates and monetises that post-millennium cliché of being famous only for being famous?”

The sisters take exception to this view and stress how incredibly hard they work. “We had four call times at 5am or 5.30am last week,” says Khloé, who recently presented the US version of *The X Factor* and is married to Lamar Odom, who plays basketball for NBA team the Los Angeles Clippers. When I first interviewed Kim two years ago she pointed out: “You don’t just show up – there’s a lot of work put into building a brand. I’m very involved in every last step.”

The Kardashians started to become famous in 2007, shortly after a sex tape featuring Kim and rapper Ray J (who went on to star in his own VH1 dating show, *For the Love of Ray J*), made in 2003, went viral – Kim later sued Vivid Entertainment and settled for \$5 million (£3.25 million). That same year, Kim’s mother, Kris Jenner – the girls’ “momager” – approached producer Ryan Seacrest with the idea of turning their family life into a reality TV show. He immediately saw the potential in the family – dominated by outspoken, argumentative, attractive women – and there have since been seven seasons of KUWTK (the eighth airs in a few weeks) as well as spin-offs such as *Kourtney and Kim Take New York* and *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*.

The show includes their two younger half-sisters, Kendall, 17, and Kylie, 15 (you’re getting the “k” theme...), their mother and their unfortunately initialled stepfather Bruce Jenner, once an Olympic decathlon champion, now a henpecked husband with a predilection for plastic surgery. The three older girls (and their brother, Rob) are children from Kris’s first marriage to the late Robert Kardashian, a lawyer and part of the defence team for OJ Simpson, his best friend.

Today, all three sisters are dressed in something from the Dorothy Perkins

collection – Kourtney is wearing a sleeveless black top and a faux leather black flared miniskirt which leaves nothing to the imagination as she totters up the glass stairs to the loft before the interview. Khloé is the most covered up, in a pink blazer and her own faded jeans. “I personally do not like my arms,” she says, “so I love to hide them.”

Kourtney touches one of them: “You have gorgeous arms...”

“Oh, Kourtney;” gushes Khloé in mock rapture. I ask why she doesn’t like her arms. She grimaces: “If I gain five pounds they all go to my arms. It’s the first place that gives away how fat I am. That’s the great thing – we have three different body types, three different women, three different trends and three different designers having input into the collection. Whatever her insecurities are... [she motions to Kourtney] or hers... [she motions to Kim], if you two have any... [“perfect little bitches” she adds in a playful aside] you get to say: ‘I need pants or I need a blazer.’”

“Blazers are very me,” agrees Kim who sits with her legs crossed and her body hunched forward, showing a prodigious amount of cleavage. Her green dress rides up her thighs and is pulled tightly over her stomach. But she is at that stage of pregnancy where you wouldn’t know if you didn’t know. I ask if she’s gone up a bra size. “Oh yes – at least three sizes. I’m normally like a 36, 38, and now I’m like a 42, 44.” Soon after our interview, the US press have a field day writing about her size, and unfavourably comparing her with the Duchess of Cambridge (who is at the same stage of pregnancy). And the internet, so important to the Kardashians’ success, was instantly awash with trolls (“Hungry-hungry-hippo Kim,” ran one contribution to New York-based online community *CafeMom*).

Of her dress Kim says: “I mixed it with the Stella McCartney blazer that I had at home. I love to mix the highs with the lows.” The girls all stress how much they love the British sense of style. “I love how everyone is just so unique,” says Kourtney.

By now, it is clear that the Kardashian phenomenon is no flash in the pan. Two years ago, Kim had nearly 8 million Twitter followers. Now she has more than 17 million (Kourtney and Khloé boast 8 million-plus each). She has more than 1,000 photos on Instagram (and another 8 million followers there). Adept at using social media, the whole family employs Twitter to urge followers to watch their show or to flog products: “Anyone notice the hot pink jacket I was just wear [sic] on KKTm?” tweeted Kim on April 7. “Its Kardashian Collection. At Sears now! Looks so cute :-)”

With a report from *The Wall Street Journal* estimating that having 500,000 followers on Twitter can convert into earning a six-figure sum, it’s clear that the Kardashians’ online



From top: Kim and Kourtney Take New York, 2010; Kourtney giving birth to Penelope

‘Filming at home, that’s when you’re most comfortable... People get shocked when they see I am more shy in public’



Dress, £40, blazer, £55, clutch, £25, skirt, £35, all Kardashian Collection at Dorothy Perkins (dorothyperkins.com)

and social media presence far exceeds their reach on television (in the US, for example, KUWTK is watched by around 3.5 million people a week – a significant but far from huge audience). Kim, reported the *New York Post*, received \$25,000 (£16,000) for a single tweet about a jeans brand. Naturally, they’ll be tweeting this Dorothy Perkins collection, as they did the last.

The public’s appetite for all things Kardashian has become insatiable. While there will always be people such as *Mad Men* actor Jon Hamm, who last year dismissed Kim as a “f***ing idiot”, there are many more who cannot get enough of them. Part of the allure of the show is escapism but, unlike *Dallas* or the glossy shows of yesteryear, this family is “real”. And therein lies the key to their success. Not only can we see their glamorous lives on screen but, unlike actors, who tend to be different from the characters they play, we can also follow the Kardashians around the rest of the time, too. The media – and the Kardashians themselves – feed the public hunger. *The Washington Times* ran a piece earlier this year saying that the obsession with the Kardashians lies at the heart of the decline of US society: “Here’s why America should care: the Kardashian saga illustrates our nation’s moral, spiritual and cultural decay like few other media stories do.”

But it’s not just in the US – worldwide, they have arguably become the most famous family in existence. We may think we know a lot about the Windsors, say, but it is nothing compared with what we know about the Kardashians. In this country, interest in Kim’s impending baby grabs almost as many column inches as the upcoming birth of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge’s first child. One newspaper last month declared a “bump off” – comparing the maternity outfits of Kim and Kate. Pictures of Kim’s “pregnancy bump” are posted online daily – not only by paparazzi but also by Kim herself. Following speculation that she might be faking her pregnancy for publicity purposes, she uploaded a picture to her Twitter account of her naked baby bump.

The Huffington Post recently went so far as to compare the five Kardashian/Jenner sisters to a modern-day version of the five Bennet daughters of *Pride and Prejudice*, complete with overbearing, social-climbing mother and passive father. Hanna Flint’s piece provoked outrage in readers. “Wouldn’t one of the daughters have to be both intelligent AND beautiful for this to work?” commented one; “How dare this woman try to ruin my ➔

favorite literary character by comparing her to Kim Kardashian?? Kim has no class, no wit, and no pride," said another.

A lot has happened to Kim since we met in May 2011: then, she was in a relatively new relationship with basketball player Kris Humphries. She subsequently married him, separated 72 days later, then began seeing Kanye West. Humphries initially sought an annulment on the grounds that the marriage was a publicity stunt and therefore fraudulent. In a deposition in March this year, Kim insisted she did love Humphries at the time of their marriage. The case was only finally settled – and a divorce granted – last month, after more than a year of legal wrangling and only weeks before Kimye, as the couple have inevitably been nicknamed, are due to have their baby.

Relationship sagas are, of course, part of the appeal of the show, as well as the warts-and-all portrayal of family life. In recent months viewers have not only seen Kourtney giving birth, but also Kim slathering Kourtney's breast milk on her legs to cure her psoriasis, and Khloé discussing her fertility challenges. The sisters don't hold back when they're fed up with each other: "[Kim] sits on her f***ing throne," complained Khloé in one episode. "She's always annoyed, she's ruthless." In another, Kourtney muttered: "I'm so over Kim." Which is not surprising when you consider this comment from Kim to Kourtney – ironic in retrospect: "If you knew how boring you'd become, would you still have had kids?" Even their mother does not escape the verbal lashings. "That woman is psychotic," says Khloé.

The sisters say airing their fights does not harm their bond. "I feel that our relationship is really strong," says Kim. "It is," agrees Khloé, "but it's funny: when we are fighting, we're like, 'God I hate her!' We'll just be so mean. And then five minutes later it's like, 'Hey, do you want to go get some fro-yo?'"

Khloé says that Kourtney is the most fiery, while she reckons that she is the worst at bearing grudges. As for Kim, it just depends on her mood.

Kourtney agrees: "Kim is very moody..."

Kim stares moodily ahead. I ask if she feels that is fair. "I didn't think I was moody like that," she sighs. "But I guess I am. When I'm in a bad mood, I'm in a bad mood."

Kim looks like she's in quite a bad mood today. Certainly, she is far less chatty than I remember – maybe it is her pregnancy, but she seems to have very little energy. And despite the thickly layered make-up – she is wearing far more than either of her sisters – she looks tired. She yawns a lot. Khloé and Kourtney are far more engaged. Khloé, the youngest sister, comes across as the most natural and fun.

Kim admits she has changed under Kanye West's influence. In February, she was quoted as saying, "My boyfriend has taught me a lot

Will Kim's child be on the show? 'I don't think so.' Khloé chimes in: 'Never say never though.' Kim shakes her head

about privacy... I'm realising everyone doesn't need to know everything." When we met previously, she'd sounded much more ruthless, saying any potential boyfriend would have to accept that their relationship would be in the public eye. "They know what they're getting and they're just going to have to accept it – I can't really stop my career for someone else."

West, however, has appeared only very briefly on the show, in his role as a fashion designer, helping Kim sort out her closet. "You don't need this," he said of a shiny leather shearling bag. "Shouldn't I just keep it for my daughter one day?" said Kim as the camera panned to West's aghast face. Two years ago, Kim told me she was keen to keep up the "K" tradition when naming her first baby. "Maybe Kameron," she mused, adding that she wanted a big family. "I've always wanted kids. At first I wanted six, now it's down to four. I could probably even push it down to three but I can't go below three."

Recently, there was a rumour that Kim was going to call it a day after the ninth season of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. She is at pains to clarify. "Our contract is up after nine seasons. But it's always been my personal goal to do a tenth season. I have other goals, but that doesn't mean I want to end it."

As for those other goals, she says, "I love our fashion line, I love our make-up line – each one is a full-time job."

I ask if she sees herself as two people, the one who is in front of the cameras and the "real Kim". Her answer is interesting, suggesting she is more herself in the presence of cameras than she is without them. "When you're filming in your own home, with your own family, that's when you're most comfortable... I think people get shocked when they see that I am a little bit more shy in public."

Khloé agrees. "You don't care if you fight in front of [the cameras]; they've seen it all. So we're not holding anything back – if anything, we're more crazy than if I were to meet you at a party. When I meet people they're like, 'Oh my God, you're so funny. Tell me a joke.' I'm like, 'I'm not Eddie Murphy,' and that surprises people."

"We film for 18 hours a day for six months," points out Kim, "and it's edited down. I mean, we are funny, we are wild, but

we also have this vulnerable side that maybe you don't see as much."

For Kourtney, having children has made it harder to do the show. "Definitely my biggest struggle as a mum is balancing work." She gets round it by including her two children, Mason, 3, and baby Penelope, in filming. I ask Kim if she plans to include her child-to-be on the show. "I don't think so. Not as of right now."

Khloé chimes in cheerfully: "Never say never though."

Kim shakes her head: "I love and enjoy seeing Mason and Penelope on the show, but Scott [Disick, Kourtney's boyfriend] and Kourtney are in the same business [of reality television], so it works for them."

She once said she was very glad she did not have a TV show recording her every action as a child and teenager – unlike her teenage half-sisters. Today, she says: "[Kendall and Kylie] have grown into these amazing young women who are very grounded and smart. It has turned out to be a positive, but I think it could have been a negative. It gives me great hope, even for Mason and Penelope..."

Kourtney, perhaps sensing some intrinsic criticism of her choice to include her children on air, interrupts: "I'm over this convo [Kardashian-speak for conversation] – like, what are we even talking about?"

Kim shrugs and we return to the safer subject of clothing. I ask if they would consider doing a maternity line. Kim exclaims, "I would love to do a maternity line." She picks up her phone and starts tapping: "I'm making a note of that to myself..."

There was a telling moment in the last series when Kim was on the phone to Khloé, reminiscing about the old days before they were famous. "I used to do my own hair and make-up and dress myself and be a normal human being," said Kim mournfully.

I ask if they ever get fed up with the constant pressure to look glamorous. "I love hair and make-up," says Khloé. "I don't like clothes. I'm a comfy girl; I'm in jeans. I would rather just be in pyjamas but completely glammed from the neck up."

Kourtney, never forgetting that this interview is about a clothes line, quickly weighs in: "I would rather have a cool outfit and no hair and make-up."

Kim smiles dreamily: "I love it all."

Don't they ever get sick of the cameras recording their every action? They look at me, bemused. As if anyone could be perturbed by a mere camera in their presence.

Kourtney points over my shoulder: "There are cameras over there." I turn around to look. "Only kidding," she laughs. ■

The Kardashian Collection exclusively at Dorothy Perkins launches on May 20 (dorothyperkins.com)