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# On the trail of the Kateaholics

**AS THE DUCHESS OF CAMBRIDGE STEPPED OUT AT THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY LAST WEEK,** cocooned

against the Arctic chill in a grey double-breasted coat dress by Jesiré, it wasn't just the paparazzi frantically snapping photos. Instead, hordes of young women – many of whom had been waiting all day to see her, their hair styled into K-Middy tumbles in honour of their idol – pulled out their iPhones and zoomed in on the young royal...

'I've emailed *all* my friends to say that I'm seeing Kate tonight,' Taylor Smith, 20, a Florida-born psychology student who is studying in London, told *Grazia* on the steps of the gallery. 'We don't want to miss her for anything. She's a true celebrity. We love her.'

Next to her is Erin Kavanagh, 20, an economics student who'd been waiting to catch a glimpse of the Duchess for five hours. 'Kate's like a real-life princess,' she gushed, gritting her teeth against the sub-zero temperatures. 'She's got amazing style but she manages to still be herself while being sophisticated and royal. We'd love to be like her.' Welcome to the world of the Kateaholics – a place where, dolled up in an exact version of Kate's LK Bennett red coat, I didn't look out of place...

Within seconds of the Duchess of Cambridge stepping out of the limo, mobile phone images appeared on Twitter. Kate

bloggers started a frantic conversation about where her shoes were from (Cosmic Jimmy Choos) and how to find her dress. (Best bet, apparently, is eBay...) Also sparking debate was her jewellery, as fans showed their minute knowledge of Kate trivia by stating, within minutes of her appearance, that her necklace was an Aspree button pendant that she last wore on her trip to Canada last summer.

But this reaction wasn't just a one-off, nor was it because last week was Kate's first solo appearance. In the 10 months since Ms Middleton married into the royal family, a whole network of Kate obsessives – who want to follow her every move, buy all of her clothes, and follow in her footsteps – has grown around the globe.

Take the Kate style blogger who didn't sleep for a week during last year's tour of North America. New York-based Makeda Saggau-Sackey, who chronicles Kate's every move on the Duchess of Cambridge Style blog, recalls, 'My roommate was saying, "Please turn off your computer, I need to be up for work." And then she'd wake up to go to work and I'd be asleep on my laptop. I didn't get out of the house for a week.' Saggau-Sackey describes her behaviour as 'very stalkerish!' But I didn't want to miss anything'.

**THE KATE FASHION** blogs are at the very heart of the so-called Princess Pandemic. The biggest is What Kate Wore, run from Michigan by 53-year-old former TV news producer Susan

She's one of the world's most photographed women, and inspires a shopping frenzy every time she steps out. She's the girl who are the girls so obsessed with Kate Middleton. *Grazia's* Angela Buttolph headed to Kate's first solo engagement last week to report on the 'Princess Pandemic'

PORTRAIT: AMIT LENN



Kelley, who is pretty much the Mummy Bunny of the Kateaholic community, claiming to be in contact with 'between 10-20 Kate bloggers or royal correspondents a week'. She has numerous anonymous email tip-offs, seemingly from staff at fashion labels or stores, who help her identify current and even past merchandise.

The What Kate Wore mission statement is 'following Kate Middleton fashions', but a quick glance at the blog's comments board proves that it is so much more. Forget Facebook, this is Katebook. At any hour of the day or night you can find commentators requesting and giving shopping advice. 'Where can I purchase the Sebago Bala moccasins Kate wore in Canada?' asks one Kateaholic. She, sadly, was out of luck. 'They are sold out everywhere (and have been since the day after Kate was spotted wearing them), but they are supposed to be remaking them,' replies fellow Kateaholic blogger 'Jami'. It's clearly not always easy to copy the Duchess's style, as bloggers reveal. 'Word of warning re the Long Tassel Conker Boot by Penelope Chilvers,' wrote one. 'These things are made for tall ladies. I'm 5ft 4in and... while the calf fit great... the tops were digging into the bottom of my knee caps. Super sad because they are really cool.'

**THE ONLINE FRENZY** has also spilled into reality as the Kate Effect continues to gather pace. *Grazia* has previously reported on Kate's estimated £1bn boost to the British clothing market, but last week Katherine Hooker – another favourite royal designer – revealed the extreme lengths that Kate's fans will go to, in order to emulate their style icon. 'We had this one girl who wanted the exact same blue Alexander jacket Kate has. So I had the exact same stuff but it was made by a different mill, and stupidly I said, "Well, it wasn't made by the same..." And her bottom lip was starting to wobble, and she was like, "I really want the same one!"' says Katherine of a recent incident in her London store. 'When we did a show in



«KATE IS HAVING A FAR-REACHING IMPACT FAR QUICKER BECAUSE OF TWITTER»

LA, there was this one woman who clearly came in just to look at me. She thought that I must be touched with some kind of royal dust or something like that.' Back in London, some visitors to Hooker's shop just off the King's Road (a Kate hot-spot, incidentally) are a little more private about their feelings. 'We always say, "So how did you hear about us?" Because we need to know what's working in the marketing department. And the ones that are Kate Middleton fans, who are usually tall and dark and look a bit like her, they go, "Oh, I don't know how I heard about you."'

But fashion designers know a Kateaholic when they see one. 'We have had quite a few [Kate] obsessives walk into our showroom and it is quite amusing to watch,' says Natasha Rufus Isaacs of luxury ethical label Beulah, from which Kate Middleton selected an elegant puff-sleeved, floor-length red wrap dress to wear to a charity gala in London last October. 'We had one customer come in last week dressed head-to-toe in items the Duchess of Cambridge wore previously (a burgundy LK Bennett coat and a pair of heels). She then bought the dress Catherine wore back in October.'

**OBVIOUS COMPARISONS** have been drawn with Princess Diana – who can forget the hordes of 30-something women requesting a 'Diana flick' from their local hairdressers? – but today's technology has made the style-stalking far more intense. 'I think Kate's having a far-reaching impact far quicker because of things like Twitter and Facebook,' says Ingrid Seward, editor of *Majesty* magazine. 'When Diana first came on the scene, people adored her but there wasn't the instant way of finding out what she was wearing. Instead, people had to wait a few days before the fashionistas identified what she had on and then actually go round the shops trying to find them. I remember once she wore polka-dot socks to a polo match. They sold out but it took some time. But with Kate, it's all so incredibly instant. It's quite phenomenal.'

**FOR THE TRUE KATEAHOLIC**, the Duchess is never far from their thoughts... especially when shopping. 'If I go to a store, I think "Kate would look amazing in that!"' says Saggau-Sackey. Miami student Ali Vidal, 20, who travelled to London to see Kate in action last week, agrees. 'I've been a fan of Kate since before the wedding. I love her clothes and style. I bought Kate's Zara honeymoon dress as soon as I saw it. It was amazing and she looked so beautiful, I had to have it! And thanks to Kate I'm now obsessed with Reiss. I shop there all the time.'

But what of securing an exact copy of the Jesiré coat-dress, made by a fashion label that went out of business in March 2011? Now that really will be a challenge for the Kateaholics.

the National Portrait Gallery in London – her outfit was instantly analysed around the globe by Kate-obsessed bloggers (below)