

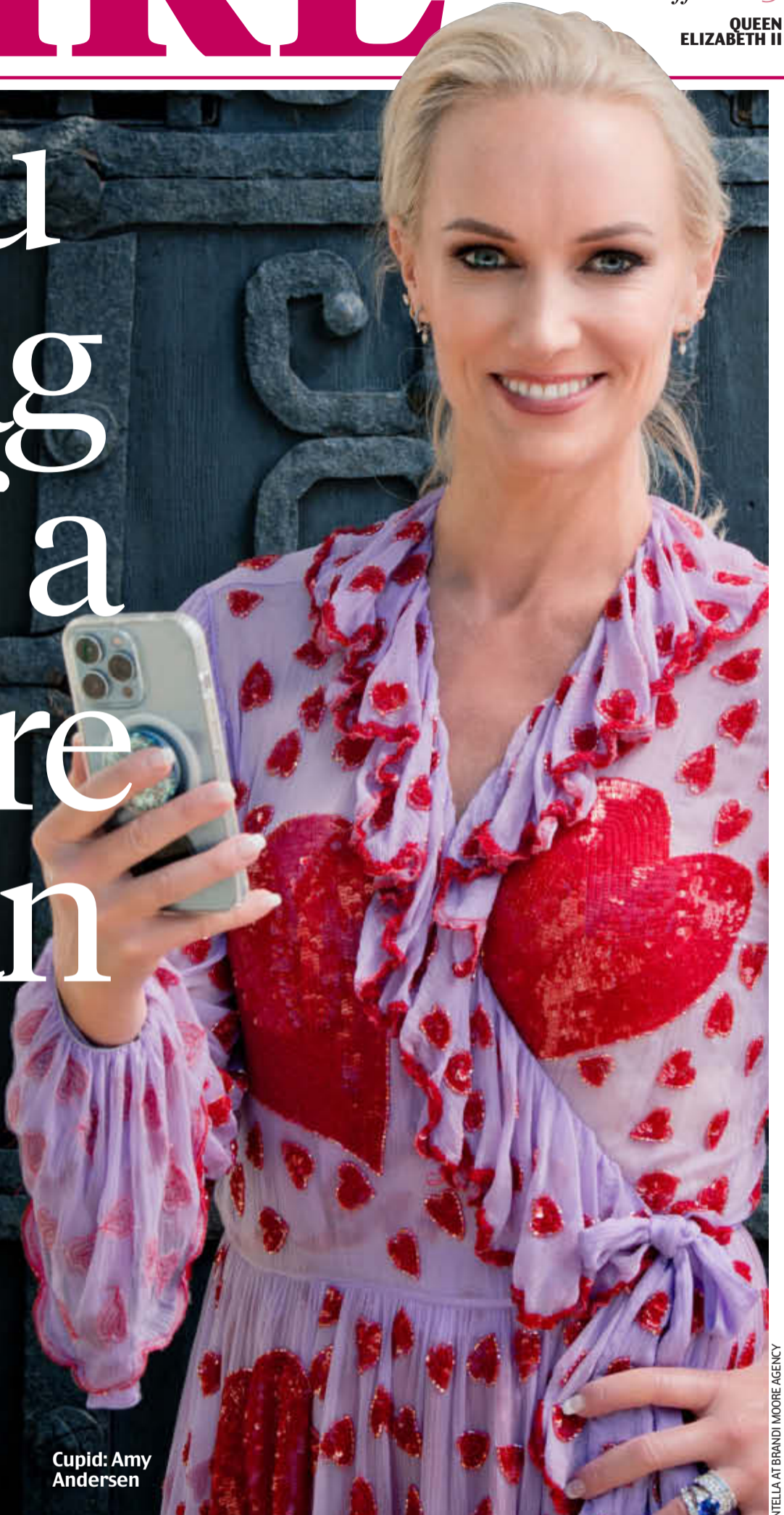
INSPIRE

It has always been easy to hate and destroy. To build and to cherish is much more difficult

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Yes, you CAN bag yourself a billionaire tech titan

...says Silicon Valley's leading matchmaker, who reveals in this hilarious interview she's now looking to recruit Britain's most eligible women



Cupid: Amy Andersen

by Lina Das

THE year was 2002 and Amy Andersen, a budding entrepreneur from California, was nervously pitching an idea to her boyfriend.

During parties with his tech friends from Silicon Valley, she had noticed that while they were CEOs and company founders — ‘all perfect on paper’ — they were all, oddly, single. ‘They would ask me, ‘Amy, where are all the great

women?’ At the same time, I was meeting a lot of impressive women who were struggling to find good men. That was my lightbulb moment. I thought, why don't I do something to bridge the gap?’

After noodling with the idea of setting up an old-school dating network, where Amy would connect these two lovelorn groups, she took the idea to her

boyfriend, ‘thinking he'd be so proud of me'. Instead, Amy recalls, he looked at her and announced: ‘You are not allowed to do that as long as we're together.’

‘He wasn't comfortable with me working with these eligible men,’ she says. He ended their relationship soon afterwards. But it's Amy who has had the last laugh. Her talent for finding true love for loaded-but-lonely tech gurus has become a multi-million-dollar global business called Linx Dating. Billionaires, CEOs and executives from companies including

Google, Amazon and Apple clamour for her services, and in the 20 years since she started the company she has been responsible for more than 50 marriages.

‘What's fascinating to me is that while a lot of these tech types are immersed in every aspect of technology,’ she says, ‘when it comes to matters of the heart, they want a human to help them.’

The Linx offices, nestled discreetly in the San Francisco Bay Area, are a world

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Picture: BARRY J HOLMES Hair and make-up: ELYSA QUINTELLA AT BRANDI MOORE AGENCY



As DFS launches a collaboration... Have our homes reached peak Cath Kidston?

by Claudia Connell

ENTER the home of any middle-class, middle-aged professional woman in the UK and there are several items you're pretty much guaranteed to find.

Jo Malone scented candles. Tick. Farrow & Ball paint. Tick. And a cutesy little mug, cake stand or cup and saucer from Cath Kidston. Big fat tick.

I have all of the above plus a Cath Kidston bedding set, a frilly pinny I intended to wear when baking all those cakes I never made, and, mock if you will, an ironing-board cover.

There was a time when the brand seemed to rule the world. There were shops, department store concessions and outlets at major airports. If you needed a last-minute gift then Cath Kidston would sort you out.

Then, 27 years after opening her first shop, Cath Kidston became another victim of the pandemic. Administrators were called in; all UK shops were closed and 903 people lost their jobs as the brand announced it would trade online only.

It seemed to be the end of a High Street era. Had people had their fill of vintage frills? Furniture retailer DFS doesn't think so. Known for its affordable and practical soft furnishings, this week the company launched a collaboration with Cath Kidston featuring sofas and footstools, beds and chaises longues. The products are already available online.

Cath Kidston isn't the first to exploit this market. In the 1970s, a book called *The Country Diary of An Edwardian Lady* became an unexpected publishing phenomenon.

The simple and uplifting notes and illustrations of the natural world, created

Ditsy: A Cath Kidston chair and, top, sofa



by art teacher Edith Holden, spawned an industry.

And let's not forget the wholesome whimsical appeal of Laura Ashley, which shut its doors at the same time as Cath Kidston.

Former curtain dealer Cath Kidston opened her first branch in 1993 in London's Notting Hill, where people might be more inclined to pay over the odds for pretty fripperies.

Stores quickly popped up across the UK as the range expanded to nightwear, bedding and crockery. Retail outlets followed in Japan, where citizens lapped up the quintessentially British items.

In 2010, having been awarded an MBE, Cath Kidston sold the majority stake in her business to U.S. private equity investors. By its 20th anniversary the brand was turning over £100 million and there were more than 200 stores.

In 2016, when the company was sold to a Hong Kong-based equity company, Kidston stepped down from her role as non-executive director, and by 2018 it was reporting losses.

Retail experts blamed the company's struggles on over-familiarity and a lack of rejuvenation. This brings us back to DFS, which clearly doesn't believe the brand has outlived its usefulness.

As I wandered the showroom at last week's launch, I was pleasantly surprised. I expected to be smacked with childlike and old-fashioned designs more suited to a maiden aunt's parlour.

The sophisticated offerings included a new

print called Strawberry Garden. And as for one called Kingdom Ditsy, it could easily grace a Lulu Lytle sofa in Carrie Johnson's home.

With its boxy design and clean lines, the Printmaker sofa is something I could see in my house in the coral velvet (from £1,199). Plain colours are available, as well as floral prints.

The Poise Wing Chair (from £749) looks far more expensive than it is and, in the catalogue, is pictured in a bold turquoise-green living room. The Stargazer Chaise Longue (from £849) wouldn't look out of place in my minimalist bedroom.

At the launch event there's a quiet confidence that Cath Kidston is going to do very well — especially as it's the store's first foray into printed fabrics.

When lockdown struck, people started to invest heavily in their homes. Spending more time than ever indoors, they decorated like never before.

It's a trend that DFS expects to continue during the cost-of-living crisis, the prediction being that people will eschew meals out, holidays and day trips and, instead, keep spending on bolder interior decoration.

KELLIE WYLES, DFS head of upholstery, tells me: "There was a huge shift during lockdown with people wanting colour and life in their homes. We saw a move away from grey and beige towards deep blues, moss greens and then yellows."

DFS is helped further by the fact that it's nearly always the woman in the home who chooses soft furnishings. It remains to be seen if people will consider loosening the purse strings for a Cath Kidston sofa or armchair.

Appearing on *Desert Island Discs* in 2011, even Cath herself recognised that you can have too much of a good thing.

"People either love it and want a little bit of it very much, or want to stab us," she told Kirsty Young.

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away from the surrounding high-tech complexes, with Amy, 45 — glamorous, blonde and immaculately put-together — the perfect figurehead for her business.

Her database contains captains of industry and stay-at-home mothers, doctors, actresses and lawyers, many of whom are from the UK and are 'willing to take a gamble and maybe relocate to the States' if a match works out.

"I had one British woman in investment banking who was matched with a guy who worked for a software company in San Francisco," says Amy. "Both were in their 30s and he flew her out to the States to spend time with her."

"That happens a lot. Many of the male clients will fly their date out and put her up in a hotel while they see if that connection is there."

Certainly, Amy would encourage any British woman looking for love to consider aiming her gaze over the Atlantic. "I think British women have a great personalised sense of style that some American women just don't have," she says. "A lot of American men also find the Brits very appealing because they're hip and cultured and have that great sense of humour. To guys whose lives are all about investments and hard work, that's really appealing."

But if matchmaking billionaires for a living sounds like fun, it brings with it its own peculiar set of problems. Weeding out the gold-diggers and chancers can be tricky; dealing with ultra-demanding CEOs and socially unsophisticated techies even more so.

Women pitching up in Silicon Valley might do well to heed the region's oft-quoted maxim.

"The odds are good," it proclaims, "but the goods are odd."

"You definitely get guys in Silicon Valley who are nerdy and have no game with women at all," says Amy. "These are the geeks on steroids — the introverted types who live on their gadgets and have no idea how to have a conversation with women. But there are also the tech types who start the next Google or Airbnb and all of a sudden have the money to have anything they want."

"They're a tricky bunch to deal with because they're not looking for a relationship — they still want to party. So there's a lot of vetting."

Amy's own experiences of dating in Silicon Valley have helped inform her business. As a twentysomething on a date in Harry's Bar with her then boyfriend, a venture capitalist, she was curious as to why he kept looking over her shoulder, only to be informed that he was scoping out the area for the 'BBD' — the 'Bigger, Better Deal'.

"He was looking for someone taller, skinnier, prettier than me... while I was sitting right next to him," she recalls. "On the one hand, I thought: good for you that you're so direct. But on the other hand, it was a real punch in the gut."

"That's what helps me empathise with the women who find themselves on the hamster wheel of dating."

Searching for the BBD is a phenomenon common to the successful Silicon Valley CEO, as is what Amy terms 'hunting for the unicorn' — the impossibly unattainable supermodel-slash-astro-physicist. One of her clients, a young billionaire, is looking for a beautiful and supremely intelligent woman, "and if she didn't go to MIT or Stanford [two of America's most elite universities], then he's probably going to want to see her IQ scores."

Another wants a woman who is 'incredibly beautiful, has been educated abroad and speaks multiple languages, because he speaks five'. In addition, he wants someone who is 'with him for the right reasons' — as a billionaire, that's always tricky — and a woman, says Amy, 'who he can geek out with and be himself. He has a couple of tattoos and is looking for someone with an edge' — basically, a young Angelina Jolie.

Amy informs her clients that such lofty demands will inevitably remove around 99.9 per cent of the global female population, "which is why the men are still single," she explains. Occasionally the demands listed by Amy's clients can be baffling. "Everybody comes with a checklist of what they want," she says, "with some lists running to 20 pages. I had one client who was very particular about their bedding and was asking for somebody who'd be comfortable with their 2,000 thread-count sheets."

Some of the more eco-conscious individuals won't even entertain a match who drives a gas-guzzler. "A lot of times I'll have to narrow the list down to the essentials. I'll say to the client, "Yes, it would be lovely if your match plays pickleball or eats vegan food, but are those really your most important criteria? Isn't it better to look for someone loyal or funny or smart?"

The women on Amy's books have their own sets of criteria too, which essentially boil down to: please can he not be a jerk? "These women have been dating in the wild," she says, "and the men they meet will google them and realise they're the Number Two of a company and will use that to advance their own careers."

"Some women have told me they've gone on a first date and the guy will say: "By the way, I was trying to submit my resume to your company but nobody is responding. Could you pass this up the chain?"

On the other side of the scale there are the many divorcees Amy deals with — "women who married their husbands at business school and gave up their own successful careers to raise the kids" — only to be tossed aside once the husband has achieved success.

"And while the plus side is that she'll walk away with a lot of money, the sad side is that these beautiful, accomplished women now feel they have no purpose or value. The dating world can be brutal and it's my job to help build up their confidence

'Some are nerds on steroids with no idea how to talk to women'

One client, who's looking for a young Angelina Jolie, has offered me a \$1 million finder's fee



HOW TO LAND YOURSELF A RICH GEEK

BE SOCIAL-MEDIA SAVVY

'MAKE sure your social media profiles are top-notch,' says Amy. 'Posing while dripping in diamonds may look fun, but my clients will immediately think: gold-digger. No photos of exes, either. But do be true to who you are. If you love reading, post an image of you with your nerdy reading glasses on. That will cater to the right sort of guy.'

BECOME A BRIGHT SPARK

'BRUSH up on world events. My clients want a woman who is intelligent. When you're matched

with a guy, he'll want to see you're interesting and interested.'

SEND THE RIGHT SIGNALS

'BE SURE to give signals if you're interested. Lean in, be flirtatious and yes, bat your eyelashes. He won't ask you out on a second date unless he's getting a signal.'

'Be open to the endless possibilities of an international match. A lot of the British women I come across are smart, have great jobs and are beautiful — why not have it all? Keep a foot in the UK by all means, but be open to taking a gamble on finding your Prince Charming overseas.'

or a chef who'll come to their home to prepare an amazing date meal.

"I had one client who was feeling sick before a date, so I instructed him to get certain vitamins. Sometimes I'm like their mum."

Like any good mum, Amy will also counsel male clients on etiquette, especially if the years spent hunched over their computers have led to rusty manners.

"I have a guide that I give to the guys to tell them the basics, such as opening doors for the woman and making sure they pay for dinner," she says. "I'm a big believer that if you ask the woman out on a date, then you're paying — but at a certain point, if she wants to pay, then that's great."

And if you think that might be slightly quaint, Amy also encourages female clients not to sleep with their matches 'until there has been a discussion about whether the relationship is monogamous'.

Bearing in mind that some of the dates have involved wine-tasting

weekends in Napa Valley, complete with five-star accommodation, isn't abstinence too much to hope for? "Well, I always tell the man to book separate rooms and the woman always appreciates the chivalry."

Certainly, it seems to work. One of her clients, Mona, 48, a former Hollywood actress who had dated 'a lot of narcissists', found the chaste approach refreshing.

Her match, a recognisable name in tech, courted her for three months before they even kissed. "It was very old-fashioned," she says. "He wasn't a smooth operator in any way and I appreciated that because I got a sense immediately that he was truly looking for someone to share his life with."

The couple eloped last month. And for the ultra-ultra-rich? There's VIP membership, which can cost between \$150,000 and \$500,000 (up to £433,000) and features a bespoke campaign with unlimited introductions, not solely limited to Amy's database. Her

recruitment team scours the globe to find 'individuals who could be interesting matches for clients'.

Do strangers mind being approached out of the blue? "They're actually flattered," says Amy. "They'll say: "Yes, I'm single — tell me more." It's like they've won the lottery."

One client, with bases in Aspen, Colorado and Cabo, Mexico, 'is looking for a beautiful, smart woman who can hold her own,' says Amy, 'and because his lifestyle is a global one, we'll definitely be reaching out to women in the UK.'

Though one might assume that Amy would target model agencies in her search for attractive clients, "we actually reach out a lot to grad students at Oxford and Cambridge, especially if they have academic achievements in their profiles."

Instagram models, on the other hand, 'may look good but their images can often be so filtered'.

But while some Ultra-High-Net-Worthers will go to inordinate

expense to secure their mate — the client after a pre-Brad Pitt Angelina Jolie has included the promise of a \$1 million finder's fee to his already substantial VIP membership — Amy has a more affordable level of service in what she calls the 'passive' membership. There is no guarantee of matches, but still the option of meeting clients, even the VIPs.

"They don't pay up front, so it's a little-to-no-risk programme," says Amy, though to qualify, the applicants have to be 'quality, dynamic people, capable of holding their own when meeting my clients.'

"If money's an issue, I'd rather they not pay me a penny and invite me to the wedding instead."

Amy has thousands of passive members on her database ('including a handful of British men, although I'd love more'). The screening process for premium clients is rigorous. The initial meet-and-greet with Amy, which can take from 90 minutes to four hours, costs \$5,000 (£4,300), with successful applicants signing contracts and non-disclosure agreements.

Clients also have to keep photos and information pertaining to the dates off social media. The process is designed not just to discover the client's needs but also to weed out those with unscrupulous intent: "I'll ask the women if there's a net worth of the man they're looking for and if they put a number out there, that's an immediate red flag."

Moreover, Amy will turn away anyone who isn't serious about settling down — even billionaires.

"If they're partying on yachts and taking selfies with models, then chances are they're not looking for something serious and I'll turn them away. They're surprised, but the women I work with have to be able to trust me. They don't want men looking for hookups."

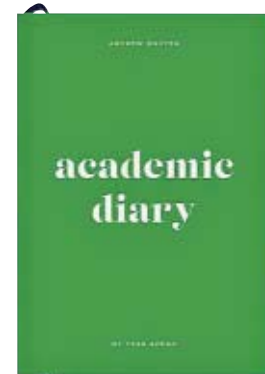
And if they need proof that Amy's methods work, she married her own 'quintessential Silicon Valley geek' 14 years ago and they have an eight-year-old son.

And what of the boyfriend who mocked Amy's matchmaking plans? "He got married." She smiles. "Actually, the woman he ended up marrying used to be on my database."

Linxdating.com
Instagram: ms.linxdating



Rainbow, £33.50, amazon.co.uk



13 months, £25, papier.com



Zebra, £20.99, twentytwokisses.com

Life's LITTLE luxuries SEPTEMBER PLANNERS



Gingham, £25, papier.com



Bargain, £7.95, matildamyres.com



Humorous, £27.96, temptatongifts.com



Checkerboard, £16.95, ohhdeer.com

Styling: FRANCESCA DALE