

# Amazing Grace



Today's actresses may come and go but for effortless elegance and style, **Grace Kelly** was the one who had it all. As a major new exhibition opens about Grace, we look back on her life and style. By Ian Lloyd.

**I**n January of this year 4000 British women took part in a questionnaire to name the world's most photogenic woman ever. Number 10 on their list was Her Serene Highness Princess Grace of Monaco, better known to film buffs as Grace Kelly.

Grace has been no stranger to the polls in recent years. In 2004 she was named the most elegant woman ever. A decade earlier a panel of experts named her the most beautiful woman ever.

The accolades keep coming, and later this month a major exhibition focusing on her style will open at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. It features dresses from some of her favourite designers, including Christian Dior, Balenciaga, Givenchy, Lanvin and Yves St Laurent, as well as the accessories she adored, from flowery hats to outsize sunglasses. The princess was a royal hoarder and nothing was thrown away, so the exhibition will be a veritable treasure trove of Princess Grace memorabilia, all of it chosen by her three children, Prince Albert and his sisters Caroline and Stephanie.

Grace Kelly was born in Philadelphia on November 12, 1929, the third of four children of John 'Jack' Kelly and his wife Margaret, and to please her grandmother she was named after Jack's youngest sister who had died as an infant. The family had already achieved fame thanks to Jack Kelly's rowing prowess, which won him three Olympic gold medals.

Grace is still best remembered in America as an actress, although her career was a short one. She made 11 films in just five years, but they are pretty memorable ones: *High Noon* with Gary Cooper, *High Society* with Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra and three films directed by the legendary Alfred Hitchcock: *Rear Window*, *Dial M For Murder* and *To Catch A Thief*. Dresses from all of these films will be in the display as well as the gown she wore to



attend the 1955 Academy Award Ceremony when she won an Oscar for her performance in *The Country Girl* (above).

## Brunettes led the glamour stakes

In the early '50s the brunettes led the glamour stakes and Hollywood was dominated by the likes of Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Russell, Ava Gardner and Audrey Hepburn. By the middle of the decade the blondes had arrived in the memorable shapes of Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe and, over in Britain, Diana Dors. While they became, and remain, great sex symbols, they all lacked what Grace had in abundance — style and class. She may have been christened Grace as a tribute to her aunt, but never has a name been more fitted to a personality.

Although she behaved like an ice maiden on screen, it has often been suggested (and without much foundation) that her private life was much steamier. Stories of affairs began almost as soon as her film career did and there were rumours of liaisons with many of her leading men. In later life she admitted off the record to journalist Gwen Robyns that she had enjoyed romances with William Holden, her co-star in *The Country Girl* and Ray Milland,

her co-star from *Dial M For Murder*, though she claimed both men had deceived her into thinking their marriages were over at the time.

When true love came, it was a real Hollywood romance with a dashing prince — Rainier III — and a fairytale castle in the tiny principality of Monaco on the French Riviera.



After a whirlwind courtship, Grace Kelly became Her Serene Highness on April 19, 1956, watched by 600 wedding guests including actors David Niven, Gloria Swanson and Ava Gardner, and a TV audience of over 30 million. Her ivory wedding dress consisted of dozens of yards of antique Brussels rose-point lace with a three-foot train and tulle veil, all studded with pearls.

## Grace treasured her clothes

The writer Somerset Maugham memorably called Monte Carlo 'a sunny place for shady people' and Grace brought much-needed respectability to the casino city (as well as a dowry of \$2 million paid by Jack Kelly). In a recent interview, Prince Albert, who succeeded his father as Sovereign Prince in 2005, said of his mother, "She helped promote Monaco and gave it the international prestige that it has today. She was an incredible ambassador for our little country. For us, though, she was our mum, always there for us and full of love."

As a princess, Grace remained consistently stylish, and always looked the part. Prince Albert recalls, "My mother treasured her clothes. Throughout her life she exuded effortless elegance, whether she was appearing at the most spectacular public occasion, or a simple family gathering."



She soon immersed herself in charity work as well as the cares of motherhood. Princess Caroline was born just nine months and three days after her parents' wedding. Prince Albert

arrived a year later, followed after a gap of seven years by Princess Stephanie in 1965. To hide her pregnancies Grace became adept at wielding an enormous Hermès bag on her every public appearance. And so the Kelly Bag was born as well as three babies, and a selection of these classic it-bags will be in the London exhibition.

There has been much speculation about the true state of Grace and Rainier's marriage and there has been talk of extramarital flings and a period of estrangement. These days Albert refutes such stories. "I know that my parents loved each other and understood one another. I never saw any fights or signs of crisis that affected our life as a family."

One bone of contention was Grace's possible return to the silver screen. Rainier banned the screening of her films in Monaco, and when in 1962 Alfred Hitchcock offered her the lead in his movie *Marnie*, there was a public outcry in the principality against her involvement in a film that would

portray her as a kleptomaniac.

Grace did, however, return to the arts in a different form by giving a series of poetry readings on stage. These were hugely popular in Britain and she performed for the Queen Mother on more than one occasion.

In April 1981 Grace and Rainier celebrated their Silver Wedding anniversary, little realising that the end of the fairy tale would soon be looming on the horizon.

On September 13, 1982, Grace was driving back to the royal palace with Stephanie, when her car appeared to lose control on a hairpin bend on a French mountain road called the Moyenne Corniche. As with the tragically similar death of Princess Diana 15 years later, there are still persistent rumours about what caused the crash, though it is generally thought Grace had suffered a minor stroke, leading to a blackout. In any other circumstances she is almost certain to have survived, but instead the car careered over a precipice and fell 120 ft,

fatally injuring Grace and seriously wounding her daughter.

With no hope of her survival, the next day Rainier made the decision to turn off Grace's life support machine. The people of Monaco were stunned by the tragic news and all around the world television and news stations interrupted their programmes to announce that Princess Grace was dead.

Rainier was inconsolable at her funeral and later recalled, "There is now a great void, a great and awful emptiness. We worked as a team and now the team was split up forever. Since then, it's never been the same."

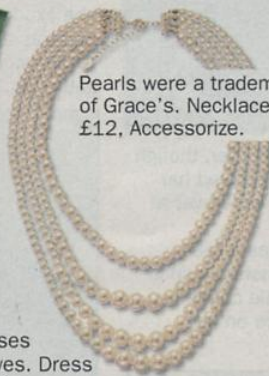
On the day of her funeral on a brilliantly sunny Saturday morning, one ordinary citizen's remark seemed to sum up the feelings of the thousands of local people who had taken her to their hearts. "Monaco was empty before she came," he said, "and now it's empty again."

# Grace's amazing style

The looks she favoured are classics, still around today.



Fit and flare dresses added to her curves. Dress £59, by Jasmine Guinness at [www.very.co.uk](http://www.very.co.uk)



Pearls were a trademark of Grace's. Necklace £12, Accessorize.



Sunglasses added to her air of mystery. Sunglasses £10, M&Co.

Grace made this style of bag so much a part of her look it's now known as the "Kelly" Bag. Bag £53, [www.ikandi4u.com](http://www.ikandi4u.com)



Neat cardigans and twin sets were a big part of Grace's wardrobe. Cardie £30, Bhs.



A matching dress plus jacket was a favourite style Grace returned to again and again. Dress and jacket from a selection at [www.veramont.co.uk](http://www.veramont.co.uk)



**Grace Kelly: Style Icon**  
Victoria and Albert  
Museum,  
April 17-September 26,  
2010.  
Admission £6 (£4  
concessions).  
For more details:  
[www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk) or call  
0844 2091770.