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A Knightsbridge tale

Who's behind London's most expensive flats?

Spectator sport

Toby Young on a dirty magazine drama

Hot as Helena

Helena Christensen,
still the sexiest
supermodel

Meet Sam Cameron, the ultimate Tory wife PLUS Joaquin Cortes, Charles Dance & Claudia Schiffer



Helena wears dress by Stella Nova
and bracelet, both from a selection
at Butik (00 1 212 367 8014).
Shoes, £380, Gina (020 7409 7090)

Perfect Dane

Original supermodel Helena Christensen has turned shopkeeper. **Jeffrey Podolsky** rummages through her past to find out how she keeps her cool

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lena Christensen was always the most down-to-earth of the supermodels: relaxed, bohemian and nomadic. While the other girls travelled by chauffeur-driven limo, she had a green Sixties Morris Minor; when Linda Evangelista demanded £10,000 to get out of bed in the

morning, Helena said she only needed a plate of bacon and eggs. This earthiness compounded her appeal.

Today, sitting outside a French bistro in downtown New York, devouring a Danish chocolate while wearing a denim miniskirt and Urban Outfitter vest, she is, despite having officially retired from modelling in 1998, still one of the most photographed women in the world.

'My life feels really complete right now,' she says. She has just opened a new shop, Butik, in Lower Manhattan, a potpourri of vintage delights: capelets from Baum und Pferdgarten of Copenhagen, silk dresses from Camilla Staerk, and even a tropical arboretum curated by Christensen's partner, Leif Sigerson. She has a successful career as a photographer, her occasional modelling, and, most importantly, her five-year-old son, Mingus. 'When you have a child, it's such a mind-blowing thing,' says Helena. 'He is named after jazz musician Charlie Mingus. His second name is Lucian, after my favourite artist, Lucian Freud.' His mother obviously has high hopes for his creative potential.

Mingus's father is Helena's ex, actor Norman Reedus [*Mimic*, *Blade II*]. They met in a Japanese restaurant in LA in 1999 and Helena was soon pregnant. The couple split in 2002, and it was speculated that one of the reasons for the relationship's demise was that Reedus

was too caught up with work commitments. Helena gave birth in her home country of Denmark, and she and Mingus spent the first two years of his life in Copenhagen, close to her parents, Elsa (who is Peruvian) and Flemming (Danish), and her younger sister Anita. Helena and her son are now based in New York (although she also has homes in Monaco and a 'nest' in Denmark) and she says that she has a good relationship with the father of her son. 'He lives right next door and we're very cool,' she insists.

Helena has not been linked with anyone since the split, and she seems happy with the equilibrium that being single affords. Her four-year relationship with the INXS lead singer Michael Hutchence ended in 1995 after he was photographed on a clandestine weekend break in Kent with Paula Yates. Helena was in Milan at the shows at the time. She was 25, one of the most beautiful women in the world, whose flawless naked form could be seen everywhere on billboards for the Robert Altman film *Prêt-à-Porter*, and yet she was left for a woman 11 years her senior. Helena responded with her characteristic quiet dignity, subsuming whatever it was that she was feeling and turning up as normal for all her modelling jobs the next week. In the following years she was linked with everyone from the lead singer of American band The Smashing Pumpkins to Liam Gallagher. 'It's like you f*** one sheep and you've f***ed them all,' she says, banging her hand against the table. 'I've only dated one musician in my life, and then suddenly you've dated every one of them. I don't even like musicians,' Helena continues. 'Your private life loses its magic if everyone in the whole world knows about what you're doing.'

Further devastation came two years later when Hutchence was found dead in his hotel room. Helena said



She admits she suffers from a tendency to melancholy and that her face always looks a little sad

she spent many hours in darkened rooms drinking beer and considering his death. She admits she suffers from a tendency to melancholy; one thing she doesn't like about her face is that it always looks a little sad, and her fear of mortality has been sharpened by motherhood.

'There's so much responsibility. If you thought about everything you have to deal with, you'd just become completely paranoid,' she says quietly.

Helena's own childhood in Copenhagen was idyllic, if a little impoverished. She was a tall, skinny girl; her parents were creative (they now run a second-hand shop in Copenhagen called YoYo) and the family did a lot of travelling, which made Helena a perennial nomad. She won the Miss Denmark competition when she was 18 and went off to hitchhike around the world but needed money so fell into modelling. She was championed by Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld and photographer Peter Lindbergh. Soon she was appearing on magazine covers and in campaigns all over the world. An enduring gripe is that she never appeared alone on the cover of *American Vogue*, only in the group shot with her fellow 'supers' Christy Turlington, Naomi Campbell, Claudia Schiffer and Stephanie Seymour. She amassed an estimated £14 million fortune but gave up modelling full-time because it had become 'all about hotels'. Instead, she decided to take up photography professionally, a hobby that she had enjoyed since she was 17 (other hobbies include piano playing and opera singing).

The transition from one side of the camera to the other has been relatively easy. Helena has just photographed Sophie Dahl for Italian *Vogue* and her photos have also appeared in French *Vogue* and British *Elle*, while her portraits of such stars as Michael Stipe of REM, U2's Bono, Robbie Williams and Orlando Bloom showed at London's Proud Galleries. 'Her work is beautiful, with a haunting, ethereal quality,' said Alex Proud. She still models occasionally, she's a Marks & Spencer face and was the highlight of the Matthew Williamson London Fashion Week party when she

made a surprise appearance on the catwalk at Billingsgate Market. She has just finished shooting the Dom Pérignon campaign at the Chelsea Hotel with now super-svelte Karl Lagerfeld. 'He was definitely overweight and eating unhealthily before. He had an appreciation for food which was almost baroque. We would go crazy together, but then he realised he was going to have a heart attack by the time he was middle-aged. With Karl, it's everything or nothing.'

It seems unlikely, considering her perfect figure, but food is integral to Helena's sense of well-being. 'Food is the most important thing in life,' she says, explaining that her freakish metabolism and daily swim (she abandoned karate and yoga because of her bad knees) at New York's Chelsea Piers gym allow her to order 'two salads, two main courses, and dessert' when she is dining out. 'Food is in a whole, sensual, oral category by itself,' she says and chastises me for not knowing how to cook. 'For God's sake,' she says fiercely, 'even five-year-old Mingus takes cooking classes so that he can charm ladies with a great meal. It's really attractive when a man can cook incredible meals.'

She hangs out with Metallica's Lars Ulrich and actress Connie Nielsen (aka the Danish Mafia). Sometimes they cavort at Bungalow 8, but usually she is in bed early so that she can make Mingus's breakfast before sending him off to school downtown (he speaks three languages, including Danish; his mother is fluent in six).

Helena's phone rings. It's the baby-sitter. Mingus is en route home from Disney World with his father. She'd love to have another child (when she was with Hutchence, she said she wanted four, two from him, two orphans from Peru), though she confesses that giving birth 'is not a very pleasant experience' and wishes 'you could just lay a little egg'. Motherhood has fulfilled her in a way that modelling never could. 'You know, you appreciate that people find you beautiful,' she says. 'But at the end of the day, it's doesn't mean much.' Easy to say when you look like Helena Christensen.

Helena wears shrug, £164, Milla at Urban Outfitters (020 7761 1001). Camisole, £276, Derek Lam at Harvey Nichols (020 7235 5000). Skirt by Baum und Pferdgarten and necklace, both from a selection at Butik (00 1 212 367 8014). Hair by Italo Gregorio at Bryan Bantry. Make-up by Brigitte Reiss-Andersen for Sephora. Shot at Butik, 605 Hudson Street, New York. The ES fashion team's New York travel and accommodation were organised by lastminute.com, Europe's leading online travel and lifestyle company (0870 443 9902; www.lastminute.com)

bigpicturephoto.com. Getty Images



Above left: with Norman Reedus at Marc Jacobs' New York spring show in 2003. Above right: with their son Mingus at Luella Bartley's New York show in September 2003

