



LAURENCE AND JACKIE LLEWELYN-BOWEN TURN FASHIONISTAS TO CELEBRATE HER FABULOUS NEW FIGURE



Interior designer and TV presenter Laurence chooses outfits to showcase wife Jackie's fabulous new slimline look. "Laurence has such a good eye and he likes to have an input," says Jackie. "I'll sometimes wear things he doesn't like, but if I want him to say nice things, there's no point."

"You need big, Katharine Hepburn sleeves with this," says Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, holding up a black pencil skirt while rifling through a dress rail. His wife Jackie has picked out an orange and brown patterned wraparound dress. "D for dowdy," he says with a dismissive wave of his hand. "You'd look like a geography teacher in that."

The pair are sorting through possible outfits for our photoshoot to celebrate Jackie's spectacular figure, the result of a rigorous diet in which she dropped from 16 to 11 stone in just five months. Her interior designer and TV presenter husband, looking characteristically dapper in a bespoke three-piece suit, is in charge of choosing the outfits for her fabulous new look, and is taking a keen interest in every detail from the tights to earrings.

"He's got such a good eye and he likes to have an input," says Jackie, slipping into a polka-dot dress. "I'll sometimes wear things he doesn't like but if I want him to say nice things, there's no point." A few minutes later the dress sits on the pile of rejects. "He says it's too cleaning lady," she says disconsolately.

Laurence appears to be the near-perfect husband. He clearly adores his wife of almost 20 years – who is also chief of his interior design company, Llewelyn-Bowen & Associates, and the mother of his daughters Cecile, 13, and Hermione, ten – and shows genuine enthusiasm for what she wears. You won't find him sitting outside the women's changing room with the comatose men. He'll be finding the top with the purple trim in a size 12.

FROM BAROQUE TO NEO-CLASSICAL

What's even more impressive is that the 44-year-old TV star loves his wife whatever shape or size she is. "I think what [the weight loss] has done for Jackie is given her an ability to be even more soignée than she was before," he says. "She has always been very elegant but before, she was incredibly curvy, very baroque, very opulent, and looked brilliant in things that were low cut with pattern and colour. Whereas now she has become a lot more architectural. She's gone from baroque to neo-classical, from Elizabethan to Georgian."

It's his job, of course, to consider everything in design terms, even his wife, but he enjoys the narcissistic element. "I'm afraid to say we're an incredibly superficial family," he admits. "We're not only vain for ourselves but vain for each other."

It may be true to a point but their lengthy relationship – they met as 19-year-old students – is based on stronger stuff than mere appearances. In fact, the former *Changing Rooms* presenter is rather blasé about Jackie's dramatic new shape. "I feel a bit guilty that I don't make enough fuss of her for having lost the weight," he says. "But there's a reticence about it because I don't want to disrespect the 25 years we've spent together. As far as I'm concerned, I've definitely got a completely different wife – the second Mrs Llewelyn-Bowen. But she's not better, just different. People have asked, 'Has it improved your sex life?' but we had a good sex life anyway, so why should it?"

"I've always been very fond of my body," adds Jackie. She's one of those rare breeds of women who refuses to have a hang-up about her body, whatever its size. "I'm not a radically altered person," she insists. "My silhouette is smaller and there are less wobbly bits, but I don't think I look that different."

It's a convincing argument – so why did she bother to lose the weight? The reasons were purely health-related, Jackie insists. As a 44-year-old woman classed "clinically obese", she didn't want to be vulnerable to diabetes or heart disease later. So

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After following a punishing, 500-calorie-a-day diet, Jackie dropped from 16st to 11st in just five months. "I'm not Laurence's dumpy wife now," the 44-year-old mother of two (top left, before she lost the weight) has said



(LEFT) DRESS: PHASE EIGHT; (RIGHT) DRESS: BETTY JACKSON BLACK AT DEBENHAMS. SHOES: LK BENNETT

'I've got a completely different wife. But she's not better, just different'

"She has a tongue on her and an ability to 'speak her mind'. But she wasn't in turmoil."

"Food's one of my greatest pleasures but I don't think I've been miserable," says Jackie, who's now eating a square meal a day. She has managed to change her attitude to food. She had a healthy diet but ate too much. "I love cooking but I think women have a complex relationship with food and mine started a long time ago when my mum put me on a diet when I was 11," she says. "She starved me, and my relationship with food from then on was dreadful. My mother came from a thin family and didn't understand weight – we're very close and have discussed it a lot over the years. But she didn't know what to do."

So when did things change? "When I met my lovely husband. He was always so positive about me from the very beginning. I'm married to a gorgeous man who loves me for everything I am, ever will be and ever was. So that's where my positive body image has come from."

One challenge in any long-term relationship is to maintain a level of attraction, but both deny her weight loss has fed into that. "It's funny because everyone assumes it must have changed everything. But why would it?" says Jackie. "Our regard for each other is so deep. If he went bald I'd probably tease him but he's the love of my life so it wouldn't change anything."

ICING ON THE CAKE

"We've grown up together," adds Laurence. "We've been rich, poor, students, we've done ridiculous jobs, I've had tabloid frenzies and stalkers. So in the context of our 25 years together – and that includes post-natal depression, all sorts of stuff – losing five stone is actually quite small. We've had bigger battles to fight, more fierce dragons to kill than this. This is just the icing on the cake."

This summer they celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary. So what's their secret? "The simple thing is we've worked very hard at our marriage," says Laurence. "I can think of years when we didn't get on. But in the context of a life together, that's nothing. You need to see a long-term relationship as a commitment for life and enjoy that commitment. I'm fine about the fact I've mated for life."

Meanwhile, the diet may not have changed Jackie's life but she must be happy with its result? "I'm delighted," she says, striding up to the photographer in a skirt with a dangerous split. "But happiness means you have to take a far more holistic approach to life than just what you look like. Now, where do you want me?"



Laurence, looking his usual dapper self (left), can't resist examining the detail on one of the dresses. "I'm afraid we are an incredibly superficial family," he says. "We're not only vain for ourselves but vain for each other." Their relationship, though, is based on more than appearances – they celebrate 20 years of marriage this summer

when a friend said she was going on the LighterLife diet, Jackie saw it as a chance to lose weight herself.

The diet is particularly brutal – and controversial. Meals are replaced with shakes and soups in a punishing 500-calorie-a-day regime which Jackie decided to embark on at the start of the summer holidays, when the family decamps from their main home in Gloucestershire to a house in Cornwall to spend long lazy days eating and drinking. She didn't feel deprived, she says, and, having given up alcohol (she and Laurence used to put away several bottles of gin a week), she felt far more clear-headed.

Was she difficult to live with? "Noooo," says Laurence carefully.

INTERVIEW: ROSALIND POWELL
PHOTOS: NICKY JOHNSTON

STYLING: BOO ATTWOOD AT JOY GOODMAN
HAIR & MAKE-UP: CLAIRE PORTMAN USING BOBBI BROWN & KERASTASE
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