

The girl most Lively

Actress and lifestyle guru BLAKE LIVELY is *Forbes* magazine's most powerful Hollywood star under 30, yet career success is not her number one priority. She tells *Elaine Lipworth* why family comes first ►

PHOTOGRAPHS *Guy Aroch*

AT 27, **BLAKE LIVELY** is one of the most successful actresses of her generation. Hailed as a style icon, she is a face of L'Oréal as well as of Gucci's Première fragrance. In addition she has become a lifestyle guru with her blog Preserve, which has nearly half a million Instagram followers.

Like Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop, Preserve is all about fashion, food and home décor, but Blake's blog focuses on handcrafted 'artisanal' (the current Hollywood buzzword) cake-mixes, candles and so on. As the name suggests, it is nostalgic – reflecting the actress's personal penchant for old-fashioned 'mom-and-pop' companies. Less than a year since she launched the site, it has already turned Blake into an influential trendsetter. She draws a younger audience than Goop, and there is apparently no rivalry between the beautiful, willowy blondes at the helm of these high-profile brands. 'It is such a shame any time people try to pit women against each other,' says Blake, 'because there's room for everyone; women should be celebrating each other.'

The Blake Lively brand has turned her into a role model for young women. A measure of her high profile is that she was recently named as Hollywood's most powerful star under 30 by the influential *Forbes* magazine. Ironically though, a career in front of the camera was the last thing she envisaged when she was growing up in Los Angeles. 'My whole family were actors and I thought I wouldn't do it because, number one: I was too shy, and, number two: everybody else did it,' says Blake, whose mother Elaine is an acting coach and talent manager and father Ernie is an actor and producer.

When she was 17, however, Blake's elder brother Eric cajoled her into auditioning for *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. She won the part in the young adult hit, in which her real father starred as her on-screen dad, and started to enjoy performing. In 2007 she was cast as Serena van der Woodsen in *Gossip Girl*, the addictive TV series about rich Manhattan teenagers that is still wildly popular.

Blake has risen rapidly to the A-list, falling for her heart-throb husband Ryan Reynolds, 38 (who was previously married to Scarlett Johansson), while they were filming the 2011 superhero flick *Green Lantern*. The couple live in New York with their three-month-old daughter James. Blake, who is the youngest of five children (she has a brother, a half-brother and two half-sisters who are all working character actors), once said she would like 30 children herself. 'If I could have 30, I would,' she laughs. 'I don't think that's on the cards, but I definitely want a big family.'

Despite insisting she has 'lost only half the baby



From left: Blake with husband Ryan Reynolds at the *Green Lantern* premiere, with parents Ernie and Elaine at the *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2* premiere and her blog Preserve

weight', Blake is super-slim and dazzling. She didn't look quite as glamorous when I met her on the Vancouver set of her intriguing new film, *The Age of Adaline*, in which she stars as a young widow and mother, born in 1908, who stops ageing at 29 after crashing her car into icy waters during a blizzard and being struck by lightning. On set for the key car-crash scene, Blake was covered with fake bruises and cuts, wearing a short blonde wig and a blood-splattered 1930s-era tweed skirt and jacket. I watched as she convincingly clawed her way up a hillside, looking freezing and distraught.

There is no attempt to explain Adaline's sudden immortality scientifically. 'It's caused by the freak storm...magical realism,' the producer tells me. Adaline doesn't realise what's happened until the 1950s, when she still looks 30. The police become suspicious when they pull her over for a driving offence, because her licence shows that she is 45. They want to interrogate her and, terrified, she disappears. Subsequently she uproots every decade, worried that the authorities will discover her secret.

When Adaline is 100 (but still looks youthful), a mysterious man from her past, William (Harrison Ford), comes back into her life. She also falls in love for the first time since her husband died with Ellis, played by Michiel Huisman (from *Game of Thrones*). In a tragic twist to the tale, Adaline is still youthful and energetic, while her own daughter (Ellen Burstyn) is in her 80s and about to die.

People want to look and feel young for ever.

What is really neat about the film is that it turns your perspective around and deals with the tragedy of staying young for ever. Adaline loses everyone she loves, and lives through so many wars. The film is poignant and makes you appreciate the way life progresses exactly the way it's supposed to.

The idea of your children dying before you is the worst thing that you could possibly think of.

The scenes that hit me hardest were the ones with Ellen Burstyn, who is about to pass away in the film. I imagined how painful it would be if I was young and that was my child. You wouldn't want to live.

There would be positives to staying young for ever, such as having vitality. Who wouldn't want to be able to run around and jump on a bike and feel terrific at any age? But the people you love would die. You would be stuck and very lonely.

I don't feel immortal, but it [death] does seem like a long way away. When you're younger, you feel as though you've got a long life to live, but also that life is moving so quickly. My sister [Robyn] played a John Mayer song for me today, 'Stop This Train', which evokes that feeling beautifully.

There's a lot of pressure when you're young because everyone asks you: what do you want to be? And by the time you're in high school, you feel you really need to know, but when you think about it, you are asking a 15- or 16-year-old what they want to do for the rest of their life. That's a tall order. I wanted to go to college and do something different.

Our costume designer Angus Strathie had me at hello! I am his number one fan. He worked on *Moulin Rouge!*, which had some of the best costumes in any movie. Gucci partnered us and provided a lot of Adaline's wardrobe, such as a 1940s gown. I also love the way the women dressed in the 1950s with their little gloves, pillbox hats, tiny waists and pouffy skirts. Come on, who doesn't want to wear petticoats with seamed tights? That was the most fun era of clothes to dress up in. But I don't know that the 1950s social structure is one I would have appreciated!

I made the mistake of watching all the *Indiana Jones* movies for the first time before working with Harrison Ford. So I was very geeked out by Dr Jones when he arrived on the set. It was



I hate the gym. Who doesn't? With a new baby, it's about eating well for her

incredibly exciting working with Harrison; he's such an icon. Standing in front of him is pretty intimidating, especially when he comes to work in a helicopter that he pilots himself. He's rescued people in that helicopter. He puts it to use a lot and he is a real life hero. [Blake and I meet before the actor survived crash-landing his Second-World-War-era plane on a golf course in Venice, California, in March and was hailed a hero for averting disaster by steering clear of a highly populated neighbourhood.]

My family did not grow up wealthy, but if you'd have asked me I'd have thought we inherited the crown jewels. We had everything we could ever want. That didn't mean my parents would spoil us, but we were never aware of money. There were times when they were doing well and we would go to the children's store Friends – that was a big deal at the time – and buy clothes. Then there were times when they were not making any money – we would still go shopping and try everything on, and then we would put it all on hold and never go back to buy the clothes. So we understood the highs and lows, but it didn't affect our experience or the fun we had.

We went to Hawaii once – that was the only family trip we ever took. I was six or seven. We would never go on holiday, so that was a big deal, to take five kids to Hawaii – though most were grown up, so they could pay for themselves. It is something we still talk about to this day; it was one of the most memorable holidays we have had.

We were loved and celebrated as children. Someone said to me that one of the most important things you can do as a parent is to be aware of your face when your child enters the room – if you're having a stressful day and you're wearing that stress on your face, your child can misinterpret it and think it's about them, instead of what you are going through. Whatever my parents were dealing with, it was always invisible to us. They made us feel safe.

Tradition is really important to me. I love craftspeople. I'm inspired by people who are doing the same things that their grandparents did, from food to fashion and design. The stories behind the objects are what make the objects special to me. So highlighting that on Preserve ►

◀ has been important to me, together with showing things you can do at home, whether that's cooking or doing fun projects.

I am geeked out by Heston Blumenthal because he creates art. He is epic! It's not only that his food tastes great, the presentation is beautiful. I got into baking because I love to decorate cakes. I love making art that I get to consume. I take a cooking course whenever I travel – in Thailand or India or France. I like to track down chefs from my favourite restaurants and cook with them. I don't follow recipes and I don't write any down. I make a corn soufflé-ish thing with whipped cream, which I turned into a dessert recently by adding a little sugar and basil ice cream. It sounds crazy, but it is really good.



From left: Blake (front) with the cast of *Gossip Girl* and in new film *The Age of Adaline*

I turned the pantry in our house into a bakery, painting the walls pink, and my husband Ryan called it the Blakery...oh boy! That was just one of his many quips. Will I ever open a Blakery? Maybe one day.

***Gossip Girl* is great escapism.** All the characters are caricatures; they are not people that you would actually know or meet. The show is very heightened, but that's fun. It's enjoyable to decompress and zone out of real life when you watch it. It was very wild and over the top in the same way as *Sex and the City*, with great costumes and bold personalities.

***Gossip Girl* has an unfair advantage being based in Manhattan.** Some of the most iconic movies are filmed there because it is its own world, a very special place. You think of the *Home Alone* movies and the iconic moment in *Sleepless in Seattle* [when Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan lock eyes at the top of the Empire State Building]. It has the most beautiful sights and sounds and smells and that comes through, even on TV.

I love *Sex and the City*. I was too young to watch it when it was at its height on TV, but now I love

looking at the clothes and hair and make-up and the familiar characters. What is kind of fun about both shows is that you really don't have to pay attention to them. You can just look at *Sex and the City* with no volume, because there are polka dots and stripes and pretty colours – it's very visual. It's neat to have it playing in the background or in the foreground, and it's the same with *Gossip Girl*.

Some days I look in the mirror and think, 'Oh my gosh. I look like a potato.' You think that I would never feel bad about myself? I'm a human being – everybody has their insecurities. Ask Gisele [Bündchen] or Beyoncé. They will tell you that some days, they don't feel good about themselves.



I hate the gym. Who doesn't? When I'm in the gym I feel like I am missing out. I would rather rent a bike or go for a hike. And I love to eat chocolate. Losing weight is not something I have spent much time focusing on. With a new baby, it's just about eating well for her, because everything I eat goes right into her system. Your body goes through a lot after pregnancy and birth, so small, gentle workouts feel better.

I don't have a stylist. By not having one, I've been able to become really good friends with lots of designers personally, whether it's Christian Louboutin or Lorraine Schwartz. Normally it's the stylist who goes into the designers' offices and their ateliers, but I've been the person to do that. Whenever I'm about to go to an event I'll send them pictures and say,

'Which dress shall I wear? Help me with the jewellery and shoes.'

I always think a woman is beautiful and elegant when it looks like she has aged gracefully. Or maybe she just has a better doctor than other people! But the lines in someone's face are their story, their journey. At 27, it's hard to pass judgment on what women are doing or not doing in their 60s, but I know that I really appreciate a person when you can see their life on their face.

If you could pick one word to define me, it's family, above and beyond anything career-wise. If that all went away tomorrow, which it could, family is all I will have. We are not The Brady Bunch all day every day – we go through our

ups and downs – but we all know how much we love each other and that we are each other's priority in life. I don't want to grow old and say, 'I forgot to enjoy the people around me because I was working so hard'.

I would love to say that we don't have a nanny or a night nurse, but we do have my mum and dad and they do the job of 30 nannies, so we are very lucky. They are not actually employed – that would imply payment – but in order to keep them around for the next 17 years or so, it may come to that!

Whenever I'm away from the baby, even for a few hours, I miss her. Not sleeping through the night is the one thing you dread leading up to giving birth. But the thing you're not told is that you miss your baby, or at least I do. Even when I wake up in the middle of the night and I'm tired, I see her and feel glad. I'm already mourning her going off to college and getting married!

Being a parent is both exhausting and all-consuming but it is the greatest gift in the world. I never feel as though I am giving up anything being a young mother – there's no sacrifice. I feel like I've won the lottery. The only thing I am giving up is sleep. ■

■ *The Age of Adaline will be in cinemas on 8 May*

BLAKE'S HEAVEN

DEFINE YOUR STYLE

I aspire to be someone who can't define her style because I hope that it will always evolve. My style reflects how I'm feeling, so it may be pink and princessy or ladylike. There are things I wore five years ago that I wouldn't wear now, and I hope I'll be saying the same thing in five years' time.

STYLE ICONS

My mother for sure, Katharine Hepburn and Grace Kelly. And I love the stylist Petra Flannery (who works with Emma Stone), Lupita Nyong'o's stylist Micaela Erlanger and British stylist Cher Coulter.

BEST WAY TO SPEND A SUNDAY

Cooking a creamy, cheesy pasta and watching a great movie by the fire.

READING

Babycenter.com

BEST QUALITY

To find the upside in everything, always.

MOTTO FOR LIFE

The beautiful George Bernard Shaw quote: 'We don't stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.'