

Designer Wife Rory Tahari Wants to Be Your List Mistress

Selling neat little suits and throwing big parties with hubby is not enough to keep her busy!

BY IRINA ALEKSANDER

A decade ago, Rory Heather Green, a driven 26-year-old television producer from Atlanta with a broadcast journalism degree from Boston University, attended the 46th birthday party of Elie Tahari—a fashion designer known for his tailored lady suits, and a noted bachelor—and fell in love. But before she could marry Tahari the person, she had to agree to work for Tahari the brand.

“He said, ‘My business is my life and my life is my business. If it’s not going to be your life, then you won’t be happy,’” said Rory Tahari, now 37, speaking from Spain, where she was celebrating another birthday—that of her friend, documentary filmmaker Beth Murphy—last week. “There couldn’t have been a more honest thing he could have said to me. It was

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—Rory Tahari

very difficult because I didn’t want to give up my career. My mother was always giving me advice like, ‘Don’t ever give up your career!’ But I was in love and I wanted to get married.”

The first few years of the marriage she did a lot of sitting by Mr. Tahari’s side and learning the design process. Then she took on the branding and marketing of the company and became its vice chairman and creative director. In the past decade or so, she helped expand the fashion house from its stable of bankable career suits to a complete line of runway-trend-conscious, wearable clothing. Terry Richardson, the hip snapshot photographer, now shoots Tahari campaigns.

But having helped grow Tahari into one of Bergdorf Goodman’s top five labels, with sales up 10 percent in a dismal year of retail, Ms. Tahari is bringing the focus back to her own brand. This week, she will publish a book titled *Lists for Life: The Essential Guide to Getting Organized and Tackling Tough To Dos* (Simon Spotlight): a collection of tips about buying a house, getting married and parenting (the couple has two children: Jeremy, 8, and Zoe, 5). And

while she declined to reveal details, citing disclosure agreements, this is just the first in a series of listy lifestyle books that we can expect from Ms. Tahari.

“It’s a way of life for me. I’m a compulsive list maker,” she said. “My mother likes to tell the story when I was 12 years old where I listed every single piece of clothing I had in my closet and decided to see how many different combinations of outfits I can make. I think I came up with 112.”

Ms. Tahari created lists each time she went through major life changes, like getting married (Chapter 1, Wedding: 1. Figure out how many people you want to invite. 2. Pick a date. 3. Set a budget) and having children (Chapter 3, Nursery Must-Haves: 1. Air purifier. 2. Alcohol for cleaning belly button. 3. Baby calendar).

“Over the years, it got out that I had these lists,” said Ms. Tahari. “A friend would call me up and say, ‘Do you have a checklist for blah blah blah?’” The checklists most in demand were for pregnancy and parenting, topics which now occupy the third and fourth chapters of the book, after Wedding and Home. (Ms. Tahari covers life’s events chronologically; toward the end, readers will find the chapters Divorce and Death.)

During her conversation with *The Observer*, Ms. Tahari received an email; it was from the application department at Apple, reporting that it had approved her travel-packing list iPhone app, a spin-off of her personal packing list (Chapter 5, Travel). Over the next year, she plans to create additional apps. Perhaps a virtual social secretary?

Since their marriage, in 2000, the Taharis have not only inflated their company, but also their calendars. In the past year alone, they have hosted benefit parties for the Annual Winter Antiques Show at their Manhattan store and God’s Love We Deliver (guest list of 500) at their home in Sagaponack, as well as attending Mariah Carey and Nick Cannon’s private Hamptons party celebrating their nuptials. They often invite friends like chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Martha Stewart over for movie nights at the vast Soho triplex they bought from Rupert Murdoch in 2005 (Chapter 2, New Home To-Dos: 1. Run all water, turn on lights. 2. Have a practice fire drill. 3. Place flashlights around the house).

Last October, while the economy was in free fall and retailers needed smelling salts for each agoniz-



His kiss is on her list: Power couple Elie and Rory.

ing price cut, the Taharis welcomed the Council of Fashion Designers of America’s newest members with a cheerful party at their place on Prince Street. Ms. Stewart lingered in the kitchen, inspecting the catering. Actress Leighton Meester hung out on the bi-level roof outfitted with cream-colored banquettes, bottle service and a DJ station. It was four weeks before the end of the presidential race, and Ms. Tahari thoughtfully encouraged her guests to watch the debate scheduled that same evening in the screening room.

The hostess, who is slender and tall, with large, dark brown eyes, wore a high-waisted gray pencil skirt and snakeskin heels. After the party, she didn’t stick around to catch the end of the debates; she was running off to catch Madonna’s Sticky Sweet Tour at Madison Square Garden.

“I went last night, too, but I want to go again, and Elie is coming with me!” Ms. Tahari told *The Observer* that evening.

Madonna has several mentions in the book. In the introduction, where Ms. Tahari defends her “compulsive” list-making: “Some detractors might suggest the word obsessive, but I like

to think I am highly functional and efficient. Other list-obsessed women I’m aware of (Madonna) seem to back up my claim.” And in the alphabetized acknowledgements section: “Madonna—Thank you for telling me to get back on the horse.”

Was that a reference to reclaiming her career? No, turns out it was about an actual horse.

Two years ago, Ms. Tahari, who has been riding since she was 6 years old, fell off her steed at the Topping Riding Club in the Hamptons and broke her back. If she had fallen a little differently, the doctors said, she would have been paralyzed. After six months of wearing a back brace, Ms. Tahari wanted to ride again but developed a debilitating fear of another, worse accident. Calvin Klein, a friend who broke his back riding at that exact same stable, told her his biggest regret was never getting back on the horse. Still, Ms. Tahari was anxious. And then ... “I was at a charity event for Unicef, and Madonna was there. We started talking and I said to her, ‘Listen, I know you fell off your horse and broke your back.

Like, what did you do? How did you get back on?’” Madonna, who broke ribs back in 2005 after a fall from the saddle, looked at her and said, “You know, Rory, I just did it.”

“I just did it!” repeated Ms. Tahari. “It was four simple words, but it was suddenly so clear. There is nothing to think about, you just do it. And then obviously we had a conversation about physical therapy and she really basically got me back on the horse. I’ve been riding since!”

Speaking of accidents, the book has a chapter titled Emergencies, which include earthquakes, hurricanes, and, curiously, chemical or biological attacks and nuclear threats. “My son was born one month after 9/11,” Ms. Tahari explained. “Nothing happened to us, but I’m a New Yorker, and it was a major experience in my life. Then, during the blackout, I was stuck in the Grace Building and had to walk down 48 flights in my flip-flops and had no way to get in touch with my children. I had a friend turn to me and say, ‘Man, if this ever happened again, what’s your plan?’ I thought, ‘My God! You would have thought that after 9/11, it would have occurred to me.’ So she made more lists.

“People challenged me: ‘Why do you have this chapter in there; it’s not like if there’s an earthquake, you’re going to go grab a book.’ And my answer is simple: ‘Listen, the point of that chapter is not for you to get the book during the earthquake, it’s so that you think about it, and to give you some time to decide whether this is something you want to worry about and prepare for.’”

Ms. Tahari said she will not leave her post at her husband’s company to pursue the lifestyle-adviser tack taken by Martha and Gwynnie, but she alluded to this being an additional career path for her. Does her husband mind this time? “One can argue it’s another brand extension, but to be honest with you, I didn’t write anything about fashion because I didn’t want it to be a brand extension,” she said, trying to be tactful.

And then: “Listen, did he mind? Yeah. He didn’t like it when I was up till 3 o’clock in the morning and wouldn’t sleep and then would be tired at work the next day. It definitely took some of my attention away from certain things in the company, but I think I found a way to balance it. I think for every woman it’s important to maintain her own identity, and what was really exciting for me with this book was that it was something that was completely me and just totally Rory.”

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