

S BLS

Santa Barbara Life & Style Magazine

March/April 2023



THE REAL DEAL



THE

REAL DEAL

WRITTEN BY *Alexandra Lee* | PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Jared Fix* | ART DIRECTOR & PRODUCER *Johanna Smeds*
STYLIST *Lux Wright* | MODEL *Kyle Richards* | HAIR BY *Ja'Nice Ramos* | MAKEUP BY *Crystal Trottier*

Ivan Young trench dress
Lady Black Tie satin dress
Hunter boots
Anne Sisteron necklace, rings & bracelet
Ariel Taub earrings & bracelet
Bettina Javaheri bracelet
Sweet Wheel Farms flowers
50 MARCH/APRIL 2023

INTRODUCING THE KYLE RICHARDS YOU HAVEN'T MET. THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF BEVERLY HILLS STAR SPEAKS ON PRIORITIZING HERSELF, THE TRIALS OF MOTHERHOOD, AND THE ALL TOO "REAL" TRUTH OF LIVING A LIFE ON CAMERA.

The reality television mogul arrives on set in unassuming jeans and a teddy bear coat, in the midst of a treacherous downpour as flood warnings are issued throughout Santa Barbara County. Unfazed by the weather, Kyle Richards poses effortlessly in a sleeveless, leggy, cinched-waist dress, tipping a watering can in matching lilac hues as if the "housewife" designation has actually held true. As celebrity stylist Lux Wright fastens many a precious Anne Sisteron necklace around her impossibly high-cheekboned visage, she inquires about the price, as if she'd be honored to add it to her collection. She's mistaken—surely, it would be the necklace's honor. She pours out witty, candid comments and the team laughs back, a sparkling testament to the reality star's unequivocal presence. But when the cameras shut off and the Birkins are placed back on their shelves, what makes Kyle Richards *Kyle Richards*? The original Real Housewife of Beverly Hills shines light onto her daily behind-the-scenes—spoiler, it's not all soirées and sbagliatos. This off-camera Kyle is acutely self-aware, an avid reader, an introvert. She's

passionate about self development, she's a mother of four. And she's got a voice.

Amongst vapid tabloids commenting on her latest hair color and who shaded who at the most recent *RHOBH* social event (a quick Google search on the star presents over 24 million results), this real housewife is, well... real. She greets me with an air of charismatic nonchalance, in between workouts after dropping off her youngest, 15-year-old Portia, at school. I'm not curious to know what Kyle is wearing to the next red carpet, but rather what she's doing tonight, on a rare night off. "I am home reading a book," she says—reading is more or less her escape. "Maybe scheduling a massage." In between shoot days, she relies on meditation, exercise, and time in nature as her three pillars for sanity—and as the only remaining original cast member on *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*, she needs it. The burgeoning businesswoman, actress, and creative isn't afraid to speak her truth on reality television's striking downfalls, all the while demonstrating her talent of taking each opportunity as a learning lesson.



Akira dress
YSL heels
Anne Sisteron bracelet & rings
Ariel Taub bracelet
Bettina Javaheri bracelet
Kenneth Jay Lane earrings
Gärden Glory watering can

Zeena Zaki dress
Anne Sisteron earrings & rings



“The reality world is a completely different beast. And yes, I intentionally use the word *beast*,” she says, without a smidge of irony. When Kyle accepted the *Real Housewives* job just over 13 years ago, she never predicted it would be this. “I thought well, this could be an easy job for a few months, and I can do it with my children.” At the time, she was scraping by with small acting parts, like playing the nurse on medical drama *ER*, while living in an apartment with her husband, Mauricio Umansky, and first daughter Farrah, whom she had when she was only 19. “My husband and I didn’t have money at the time. It was paying our health insurance and I could, you know, breastfeed in my dressing room.”

A decade later, the *Real Housewives* franchise has swelled to an international sensation with locations in New York City, Atlanta, New Jersey, Miami, even Dubai. “In those 13 years, so much has happened and so much has changed,” she says, in part referring to raising her four daughters (who appear as an army of brunette, designer-clad mini-me’s), the launching of her husband’s real estate brokerage The Agency, and *lots* of on-screen catfights.

“I get embarrassed to say it’s a really difficult job,” she admits. “But nobody would ever imagine how challenging it is. It’s extremely anxiety provoking. It’s time consuming. It’s a year round job, which people don’t realize.” Believe it or not, she does view the show as “work” and not an endless stream of pampering and parties. When Kyle was first starting out in the reality world, she’d get asked why she wanted to open her life to the public. “I don’t know, why do I care?” she thought. “I don’t have skeletons. I’ve been acting my whole life, what’s the difference?” A quick learning curve proved that notion to be naive. “No, this is a completely different situation. People making up lies about you, people attacking you, people coming at you. You have to be so incredibly strong, which all four of my daughters are, incredibly strong and incredibly confident.”

13 years thrown to the wolves has certainly generated a thick skin, but Kyle is the first to admit she’s not immune to the constant inundation of cyber-hatred. “Everything I post turns into something,” she says, referring to a recent bikini photo in which a slew of her four million Instagram followers debated whether she’d gotten a tummy tuck. Teddi Mellancamp, a former *RHOBH* castmate, suggested that Kyle prove them wrong by showing she doesn’t have the scar on her stomach. “Am I getting to that point where I have to pull my underwear down that low for a bunch



Miss Circle pants & blazer
Lita tank
Schutz heels
Anne Sisteron jewelry

of strangers?!” she exclaims. This, in part, is what Kyle means when she refers to *the beast*. “Especially in reality television, they don’t want to give you credit for being an intelligent person, who is actually a decent human and has their act together. They assume the worst of the worst.”

Though by now, she’s a pro, and has an inspiring talent for letting thousands of malicious comments roll like water off her back. “Although, yesterday I think I told someone to go f*** themselves.” It was in response to a nasty comment made on her daughter’s birthday, and though Kyle knows she needn’t prove her family’s worth to irrelevant internet trolls, she says matter-of-factly, “Yeah, you’re not coming for my daughter.”

This conversation comes at an interesting time, as Season 12 of *RHOBH* was riddled with intensity over a falling out between Kyle and her older sister Kathy Hilton (mom to a certain Paris). “This past season was one of my most difficult and oddly, *oddly*, it was, because it shouldn’t have been.” A few moments that seemed like nothing, as predicted, blew up on screen, evoking charged reactions from both the housewives and their audience, who are hard-pressed to criticize. Kyle chooses to take these moments as introspective learning lessons. “When I do something with my actions...even if I know the whole story, and I know I’m a good person and it came off wrong, I still choose to learn.” She tells me that she’s always seeking to view the show

as the audience sees it, a noble feat considering “reality television” certainly leans heavily towards the latter.

With credit to her longevity on the show, Kyle constantly walks the tightrope between staying true to herself and embellishing to provide jaw-dropping entertainment, another notable facet of the so-called *beast*. “In reality television, you’re put in situations that push you and are challenging, and there’s a fine balance of being yourself, but also being good television,” she says. “You may think something and want to keep it to yourself, but in reality television, you wouldn’t do that. You have to speak up and say something that you may normally not, and that can obviously create a lot of problems.”

This drama is what keeps loyal *RHOBH* fans coming back season after season, though Kyle is deeply aware of how her persona is being spun by the show. “It’s not lost on me that there are a lot of ridiculous people on reality television, and that’s why they’re on reality television,” she says. “I can honestly say, and not feel embarrassed about it, that I’m not one of those people.” Comedians have told her she’s the hardest housewife to impersonate because she’s “normal,” not a caricature. In spite of her moments of doubt about a future on the show, expressing that she sometimes shakes her head at being a part of “all this,” she’s also quick to express her gratitude. “It’s brought a lot of great things to my life. A *lot* of great things.”

“This *off-camera* Kyle is acutely *self-aware*, an avid reader, an introvert. She’s *passionate* about self development, she’s a mother of four. And she’s got *a voice*.”



Akira dress
Sam Edelman heels
Anne Sisteron jewelry
Garden Glory hose

It's in these candid instances where Kyle's strong sense of self comes through. She'll readily denounce her own behavior in earlier seasons, admitting, "I don't know why I handled it like that, I wouldn't have handled it like that in my personal life. Those are the moments that I regret." Although it's a show designed to provide shocking entertainment, and Kyle understands the image that comes with that, she says, "We can all learn and grow from it. I certainly have."

Subtracting the show's opulence and unrealistic melodrama, you'll realize that Kyle is truly a full-time mom, with an expensive set of hobbies. Her two eldest daughters, Farrah and Alexia, are following in their mother's footsteps with the recently debuted Netflix reality series *Buying Beverly Hills*, which zooms in on Mauricio's real estate brokerage The Agency. "I was very

time during shooting. And some tears," she says. "But they're so much smarter than me, my girls, and they are so much more sure of who they are."

I ask Kyle how she navigated raising a squad of four impressionable young daughters under the constant press and scrutiny. "Keeping your everyday normal life is #1. We do normal things like normal people," she replies. "Having it be a constant conversation how fortunate we are, and how important it is to think of others who aren't." It sounds cliché, she adds, but it's significant. Giving back has always been a priority in the Richards-Umanksy family—every year, Kyle and Mauricio sponsor a family at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, where they are listed as a "First Family" for donating \$100,000 or more. "There would be things on their list like paper for school, socks, pencils. And I really wanted my kids to see that, because we live in a town where people take all that for granted."

"I'm very *grateful* that I'm still in this business and able to actually do it all: act, produce, and do reality television."

against it," says Kyle, admitting that her "mama bear" instincts made her extremely nervous about the project. Since the show's confirmation, she's been coaching her daughters on how to approach life in front of the camera, with advice she learned the hard way—namely, navigating tricky confrontations and staying true to herself. "It was a constant conversation the entire

Two main reasons denote Children's Hospital LA as Kyle's number one charity. "First of all, as a mom of four, I can't even imagine going through what some of these parents go through," especially with no financial help, she adds. "So for me, it's a no brainer." Reason two, Mauricio was born with neutropenia, a disease causing an abnormally low white blood cell count, and spent most of his childhood in and out of hospitals. It's a cause near and dear to her heart, as is donating to breast cancer research, as her mother devastatingly lost that battle 21 years ago.

While giving back should generally be a private matter, Kyle admits, it's critical to her that some aspect of *RHOBH* revolves around bringing awareness to causes in need. "It feels so vapid to just have these parties, and we're here to 'Everybody get drunk and fight!'" She laughs. "If I'm going to be spending the amount of money I've spent on these parties, it has to be for something that's important to me."

What's next on Kyle's radar, you may wonder? If, god forbid, the soul-satisfying drama of *Real Housewives* were to end? As a strong personality who already holds the title for longest-running Beverly Hills castmate, owns a clothing line, has produced a show, written a book, and appeared in movies since the age of five, Kyle continues to outdo herself. She's currently producing a one-hour scripted television drama, similar to her previous show *American Woman*, while another upcoming project is inspired by real life experiences growing up in LA in the 80s. How about a movie, I ask? One day. She has ideas, and a team she wants to do it with, but that's the most we'll get for now.

If it weren't for the incredible legacy of the *Housewives*, Kyle muses she'd be a full time actress. "That's my first love,"

she says. Remember *Little House on the Prairie*? A five-year-old Kyle debuted her acting career as little Alicia Edwards, pigtail braids and all. A few years later, she played Lindsey Wallace in the 1978 hit horror movie *Halloween*—you may have caught her return to the big screen 44 years later in the 2022 series finale *Halloween Ends*. "When I'm acting and doing my movies and television, I get a lot more respect," she says, in hopes of returning more seriously to those lanes. She credits her tumultuous path in the entertainment industry to her mom, Kathleen, for what she started all those years ago. "Sometimes I'll open the mail, and I'll see a residual check from a TV show I did when I was five, and I'll be like, 'Oh, thanks mom!'" She laughs. "The amount of money is so little, but it's significant to me because of the meaning behind it."

In very Kyle fashion—not reality show Kyle, but the authentic one—she ends on a note of gratitude. "I'm very grateful that I'm still in this business and able to actually do it all: act, produce, and do reality television." If I've gathered anything from a 30 minute conversation with the not-so-housewife, it's that she's astutely discerning, charming, introspective, and warm...and above all, one thing. *Real*. *



Jovani dress
Anne Sisteron bracelet