

WATTEER

DECEMBER £3.50 2003

200
hottest
dates

The Little
Black Book

Beauty SOS:
quick fixes
to make you
gorgeous

Her most
intimate
confessions

Exclusive
Rushdie Jr
on living under
the fatwa

48
pages of
must-have
fashion

Miaow!
AA Gill bitches
for England

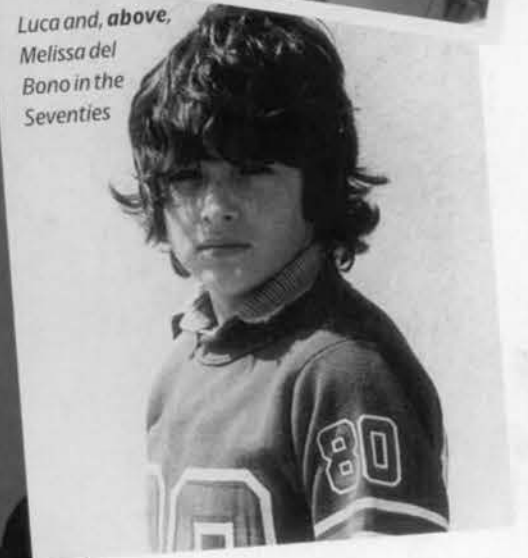


Madonna

Luca del Bono at his 30th-birthday party



Luca and, above, Melissa del Bono in the Seventies



Madonna wants some American herbal tea. Francesca Versace needs a walker for London Fashion Week.

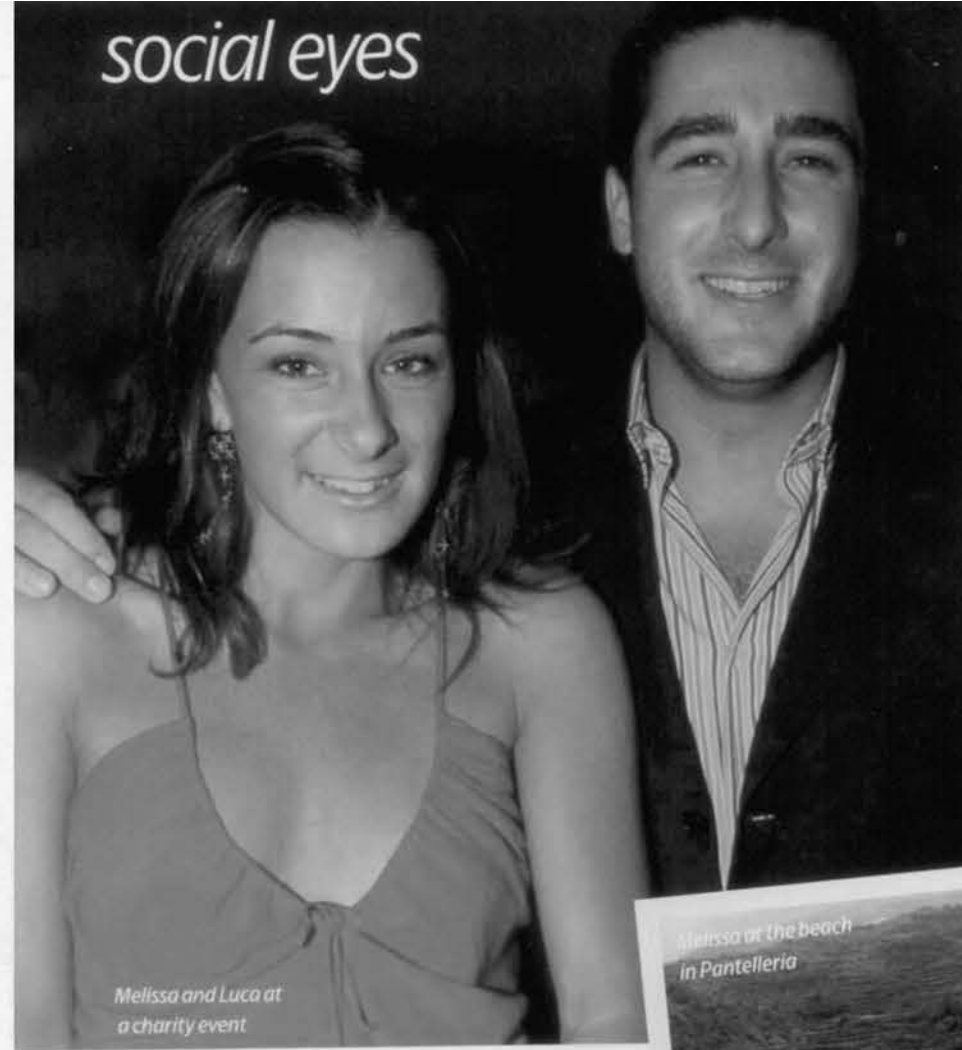
Who they gonna call? 'Nononononono,' says Luca del Bono, aka society's Passepartout, with an Italian flick of the wrist. Immaculately dressed, immediately endearing, he has a teddyish air that belies a steely determination. 'Really I am just a... a portal between here and Italy. Everything that comes between here and Italy I oversee.'

Half-Italian, half-English and wholly entertaining, Luca is a social eminence – indefatigable, indescribable, unpindownable. But unlike other social eminences, he really is everywhere and really does know everyone. Here he is hanging out with Jacquetta Wheeler at her father's giga-bash at Chilham Castle; there he is crocodile-hunting with Zac Goldsmith in Mexico; and there again, ushering at Tom Parker Bowles's wedding.

'Luca is totally indestructible,' says Tom, who met him a decade ago when he was dating Luca's cousin. 'He has the constitution of an ox and a passion for everything, especially when it comes to parties. Despite being five foot nine, he's got balls of steel and is a natural fighter.' David Tang, Luca's mentor in business and in life, concurs. 'Every other day there is a drama,' he says. 'He is full of passions. He tells me stories about seeing ghosts – he can't be in a house that he thinks might be haunted.' Officially, Luca is the figurehead of Beat Capital, an events-management company that will do everything from putting you >

WE KNOW A MAN WHO CAN

Luca del Bono always gets what he wants – for you. It's that Italian charm, says Camilla Long



Melissa and Luca at a charity event



Melissa at the beach in Pantelleria



Luca with friend Fabrizio Famularo and brother Alessandro



Luca's mother and father in the Sixties

< next to David Walliams at that table at Nobu to finding you the biggest pizza in W11. Unofficially, he is society's mascot, a man who thinks nothing of turning up to five parties a night and breezing into a breakfast meeting with Flavio Briatore the next morning. His inimitable Italian charm and perma-grin are as comforting as a Neapolitan ice-cream-seller's boater. Together with his 26-year-old sister Melissa, he makes one half of London's most invited brother-and-sister act. 'I just love putting people together,' he says, settling into another espresso at Claridge's, his second office. Too true – last time we had coffee here, he put Harvey Keitel and me together, brazenly pouncing on the actor as he had a quiet drink with a friend at the next table. Keanu Reeves – bearded, dishevelled and apparently somewhat disorientated – drifts through the foyer. Is Luca going to lunge and sort out his life? No, he's too far away and besides, Luca has the Sicilian government on the other end of his ever-brpiping phone. Next to him Melissa is glamorously attired in Italian-girl-about-town clothes – white jeans, statement belt, flappy top, great bag (natch). At least she has abandoned the astonishing bikinis that she was last spotted in at the flamboyant summer opening of the Rixos Hotel in Belek, Turkey, which caused everyone from Jamie Theakston to Darius Danesh to choke on

their beers. 'My dad buys them for me,' she squeals – oddly, she doesn't have an Italian accent, while Luca very much does – 'but he is Italian. He knows how to shop.'

In spite of their Mediterranean flava, the del Bonos are probably more English than Italian. Their English mother fell in love with their father, a hotel owner, on holiday in Italy and went to live with him in Lipari, a tiny, beautiful island among the volcanic Aeolians off the top of Sicily. Their childhood was all hedonistic, barefoot mischief. 'Ask Luca about all the things he got up to on the island with his friends,' chuckles Tom. 'blowing up mines and stuff.' Needless to say, the pair – there is also a younger brother, Alessandro – are both very, very Sicilian. 'He comes from Sicily so there's always a whiff of the Mafia with him,' says David Tang. 'But I've got the Triads behind me. Cantonese and Italian – they're very similar.'

While Luca thoroughly enjoyed school at the Oratory, Melissa's romance with Cheltenham Ladies' College, also her mother's school, was relatively shortlived. 'I hated it,' she says. 'I just missed Italy. I gave it a term and then I went back.' Not that it stopped her coming back for university – Oxford Brookes, the same as Luca. In Oxford, Luca met Tom Parker Bowles and a life-long friendship was forged. 'He would have huge pasta nights at college,' recalls

He brazenly pounced on Harvey Keitel as he had a quiet drink

Tom. 'The first time I met him he came busting in with a huge bag full of presents from Harvey Nichols. He was completely mortified that he hadn't got one for me – although I hadn't even met him.' After university, Luca pirouetted effortlessly into London nightlife, fronting Kabaret for another Oxford friend, Piers Adam. 'It was great,' remembers Luca. 'One night, Kate Moss came by. She wanted pizza, so I got it for her – and as I was delivering it, I heard her saying, "Hey, that boy's cute..." It was just the best thing.'

Together with Tom, Aaron Simpson and Ben Elliot, Luca went on to found Quintessentially and then his own company, Beat, two years ago.

As for Melissa, she is now swiftly gaining a reputation as the capital's kookiest accessories designer. Her Meli-Melo beach bags are de rigueur when it comes to St Bart's/St Tropez/St Bloody-Anywhere chic. 'I will simply die,' sighs a seasoned society girl, 'if I see yet another Meli-Melo bag on a beach. They are everywhere.' 'I can't believe it,' says

new and diverse bag designs. 'It's like, I see my bags in paparazzi shots now.' Meanwhile, Luca is on the phone: 'Private jets, 200 people, yes,' he spews. 'We can fly them all down on the Friday... whatever you want.'

Well – if you want anything from dancing monkeys to one-eyed Sicilian pirates and pizzas on legs – you now know who you gonna call. □