

# DOUCE



SINCE 1996

## Fashion and Philanthropy: The Balanced Life of **SUZANNE ROGERS**

### THE INFECTIOUS ZEN OF **RAJ KOTHARI**

### MIKHAEL KALE THE PRINCE OF CANADIAN WOMENSWEAR

**+** The return of  
the Acura NSX,  
the second act for  
Sotto Sotto and  
the serenity of  
Echo House

SPRING 2015  
US / CDN \$10.00  
DISPLAY IN FASHION / LIFESTYLE  
UNTIL JUNE 18



Suzanne Rogers takes a seat in her Forest Hill home. She wears a top and skirt by Simone Rocha



Raising millions for children's charities by combining fashion with philanthropy, Suzanne Rogers invites us to her home in Toronto for a rare one-on-one interview

## THE OTHER SIDE

# *of the coin*

WRITTEN BY SIMONA PANETTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EVAAN KHERAJ

**E**arly afternoon at the Rogers residence in Toronto finds Suzanne Rogers sipping on homemade iced tea on an ornate chair in her family's opulent dining room. On the table before us, a decadent spread of European pastries and egg-salad tea sandwiches, which she ignores, and next to her, a sun-filled bay window that sends a wash of natural light around the room. She's wearing diamond stud earrings and a snug black bobble-fabric Emilia Wickstead dress with short sleeves and a mock neck, her yellow-butter hair worn long and pulled away from her face, falling in loose waves down her narrow shoulders. The edgy-chic look is a refreshing departure from the diaphanous gowns she's often photographed in, the ones we all wish we could slip into, even just for one night. Around us, blue and white porcelain wares among crystal-decked picture frames of a style-subscribed Suzanne smiling next to close friends, family and international designers — all treasured memories now woven into the fabric of the woman she is today. "It's all connected," says the philanthropist, a thankful smile spreading across her face. "It's somehow all connected from your roots to where you are now."

There are cream-coloured floors and gilded chandeliers; there are fresh flowers on almost every glass surface. There are scented Christian Dior candles, and fashion history books, and floral settees along French-inspired walls. When I first arrive, Suzanne is upstairs slipping into the first of four



Dress, Emilia Wickstead;  
diamond studs, Mark Lash;  
bangles, Alexis Bittar

wardrobe changes — a voluminous Rubin Singer ball gown, all dreamy-white and strapless with vivid black floral detail. As she glides down the dark wood staircase of her home, a photographer animatedly snapping away and praising her natural ability to pose, the former model's husband, deputy chairman of Rogers Communications Edward Rogers, rounds the corner. "Wow. Nice dress. Are we going to a party?" he teases, following her down the hall. "Let me see!" says their nine-year-old son Edward IV in a burst of excitement before racing off and hurrying back with an iPad. No stranger to the spotlight, Suzanne maintains her composure — straight back, bright smile, eyes popped — she plays for keeps. "As a mother your answer will always be your children," says the political science grad of her greatest accomplishment. "And having a wonderful husband. He supports me in everything I do. He doesn't get the fashion thing," she laughs, "but he gets how — he loves how — I've taken that passion and brought awareness to children's charities. And he's very supportive of all of that." The two first met when they were teenagers and later married in 2006.

**A**s a fixture on the fashion and philanthropy scene in Toronto, Suzanne has championed the rights of vulnerable and abused children for years. Often seen in the most dizzying array of couture garments, almost always in various shades of pink, Suzanne's commitment to haute couture and upcoming designers has helped raise millions for causes close to her heart, right here in the city. "Suzanne is always impeccable. She has a very clear sense of her own style and she isn't afraid to make a statement with the clothing she wears," says American fashion-designer-turned-friend Zac Posen in an email during New York Fashion Week. Last year, the two collaborated on Posen's first Canadian runway show for the third instalment of Suzanne Rogers Presents, a series of exclusive fundraising events that bring international designers and their collections to the fingertips of couture-minded Toronto women.

SRP is arguably the city's most glamorous charity gala, culminating in spectacular runway shows from designers who share Suzanne's vision of combining fashion with philanthropy. In 2010, none other than the late, great Oscar de la Renta — who took a chance on Suzanne's fashion-fuelled philanthropic work after a meeting in his New York City office — established a precedent for what was to come from SRP as the event's inaugural designer. "He was the most warm, welcoming, kindest man," she says fondly of the fashion legend, her crystal-blue eyes holding down a blink. A year later, Suzanne joined forces with Georgina Chapman and Keren Craig of Marchesa, who brought their first runway show in years to Toronto. Since its inception, SRP has collectively raised a whopping \$2.5 million for low-profile charities.

"There are projects that come to me that don't suit me or suit what I like to promote, but once in a while one comes across my desk and it's like, 'wow.'" Since 2011, Suzanne has dedicated herself to Boost Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention, an inconspicuous community-based organization that provides services to children, youth and their families

who have experienced abuse or violence. Offering prevention programs in schools and the community, and teaching children skills to reduce their vulnerability, Boost turned out to be that "wow" charity she was waiting for. She began attending the non-profit's annual fundraising gala and subsequently became a major sponsor and honorary chair of the Butterfly Ball, her high profile helping to increase attendance and donor dollars. Boost, along with Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto, are the major beneficiaries of SRP. Others include HealthyKids International, the Herbie Fund and the Children's Aid Foundation.

**A**lways one to root for the underdog, Suzanne was the first private donor to step up and offer critical funding that in 2013 led to the opening of Boost's Child & Youth Advocacy Centre, a much-needed place where children, youth and their families could find refuge from abusive environments. It would be the first centre of its kind in the city. "I'll never forget Suzanne calling me from Hungary to tell me

“TO BE ABLE TO SUPPORT CHARITIES WITH CHILDREN WHO ARE IN NEED, ABUSED, WITHOUT SHELTER, NEEDING FOOD — TO ME THAT’S A CALLING, TO ME THAT’S A RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP”

— Suzanne Rogers

that she had been successful at getting a \$250,000 donation for the Advocacy Centre through the Rogers family," says Boost executive director Karyn Kennedy. From the moment they met, Suzanne showed genuine interest by asking about the charity's operations and hands-on opportunities that would make a difference. She leapt at the chance to visit schools and work with children alongside Boost's preventative staff for the better part of a year. "She's so sincere and genuine in her passion for the work that we do. Recently she helped direct us to someone who was willing to help out with LED lighting in the building because some of our clients suffer from migraines. She doesn't just write cheques — she really puts her heart and soul in it."

Apart from her deep commitment to Boost, Suzanne is also a committee member of the annual fundraising event Scrubs in the City (which has, to date, raised over \$3 million for the Hospital for Sick Children), an honorary chair of the House of Forward Foundation, which has supported Oolagen Youth Mental Health for the past two years, and a board director of the OneXOne Foundation. "I'm very focused on children's charities because I have three children [Chloé, 17; Edward IV, 9; Jack, 7], and they are very fortunate in life. They are going to the best schools in the city; they are very well taken care of by us. To be able to support charities with children who are in need, abused, without shelter, needing food — to me that's a calling, to me that's a responsibility to help," says Suzanne, who

is currently in the process of organizing her model-daughter's move to the U.K. for university in September.

Those that know Suzanne personally or through her support of fashion and the arts, those that consider her a friend and a champion of children's charities, know that everything she does is done with heart and reach-for-the-sky determination. Her energy for philanthropy especially merits a particular kind of admiration for defying the stereotypes associated with the deep-pocketed and well-dressed. "Every time I turn around she's lending her name to significant philanthropic causes, and she really gets behind them, she doesn't just say it, she gets involved," says Venture Communications CEO Arlene Dickinson. In 2012, Suzanne swapped her impeccable garbs for a sleeping bag to join Dickinson and other business leaders as they slept on the streets of Toronto in support of Covenant House, Canada's largest homeless youth agency providing a 24-7 crisis shelter for at-risk and homeless youth. It was Dickinson who had tapped Suzanne on the shoulder and asked her to help bring awareness to street youth on that chilly

## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH SUZANNE ROGERS

### HIDDEN TALENT

I used to play the violin. When I was growing up in London, Ontario, the elementary school I went to for a few years was a performing arts school. So I played the violin for many years.

### MOST AWKWARD MOMENT

My husband and I were travelling through Italy and headed to Lake Como when Edward said, "Oh, we'll stop in Milan and go into some shops." I was wearing the tackiest purple velour track suit. So I said, "I can't be wearing this for Milan." And he said, "Forget it, don't worry about it." And I said, "You don't understand, they won't serve me." So he said, "Even better." Once we stopped and went into Pucci, not one person came up to me; not one person served me. And then I walked to the next store. I think it was Alexander McQueen. Not one person served me; not one person talked to me. I remember vividly sitting in the car, cringing. "This is Italy, this is Milan, people dress up!" So that definitely stands out in my mind: a horrible purple track suit I wore while going through Milan to Lake Como. And my husband still teases me to this day. Whenever I travel, he says, "Make sure you bring that purple track suit."

### DESIGNER DISH

I was at the Dolce & Gabbana couture show in Capri last year as a guest of theirs. The after-party started at midnight, in a little tavern, and they're dancing on the stage, singing amazing Italian songs, and having the best time! I loved seeing them in a comfortable social setting and enjoying everything — just imagine the stress they go through, day in, day out, collection after collection. They like to unwind just like everybody else does, right?

family would embark on summer trips to Europe to visit her grandmother, who lived in Budapest. While attending finishing school in Austria, a weekend for 17-year-old Suzanne meant exploring and shopping in Paris, Vienna and Munich. "My girlfriend and I would get on a train, put our pennies together, and share a dessert or something, but for us it was more the thrill of the experience. Of course, this was the '80s, and the fashion you would see in Hungary was four years behind. But countries like France were always ahead. So I picked up a little bit of things here and there, and when I'd go back to Hungary with all my clothes, people would be like, 'Oh my God, that's not even in stores yet, we've only seen it in a magazine.'"

Like a revolving door to Bergdorf's, life has a way of coming full circle. Today, she and her sidekick interior designer Glenn Dixon are often spotted together at the city's top fundraisers and front row at the world's Big 4 fashion weeks, where

Former lieutenant-governor of Ontario Hilary Weston, Edward Rogers, Suzanne Rogers and Oscar de la Renta enjoy a fashion show at Suzanne Rogers Presents: Oscar de la Renta



PHOTO BY PETER BREIGG PHOTOGRAPHY

November night, knowing full well that Suzanne, although apprehensive at first, would eventually pick up the challenge with zest and help collect funds. According to Covenant House, the sleep-out raised more than \$500,000 that year, with Suzanne amassing over \$47,000 — the most money raised by an individual participant that year. Describing her as "super down-to-earth and very friendly," the former *Dragons' Den* star recalls their first tête-à-tête as an intelligent, respectful exchange of words that had Suzanne listening attentively — a rare quality for a person who has so many people hovering around and vying for her attention. "We both came from really humble beginnings and without a lot of money. It does make me think about how she gets it, how she doesn't forget where she came from. It can be hard when the trappings of privilege and wealth surround you but at the end of day, it's really about who you are, not what you have. I would say that's definitely something we share in common."

When you ask Suzanne how she fell into fashion, she responds that there was no tumble or serendipitous encounter; it's just been something she's loved from her days of travelling as a child. From the age of six, she and her



Dress, Mary Katrantzou;  
metallic pumps, Christian Dior;  
earrings and pink bracelets,  
vintage pieces from Paris

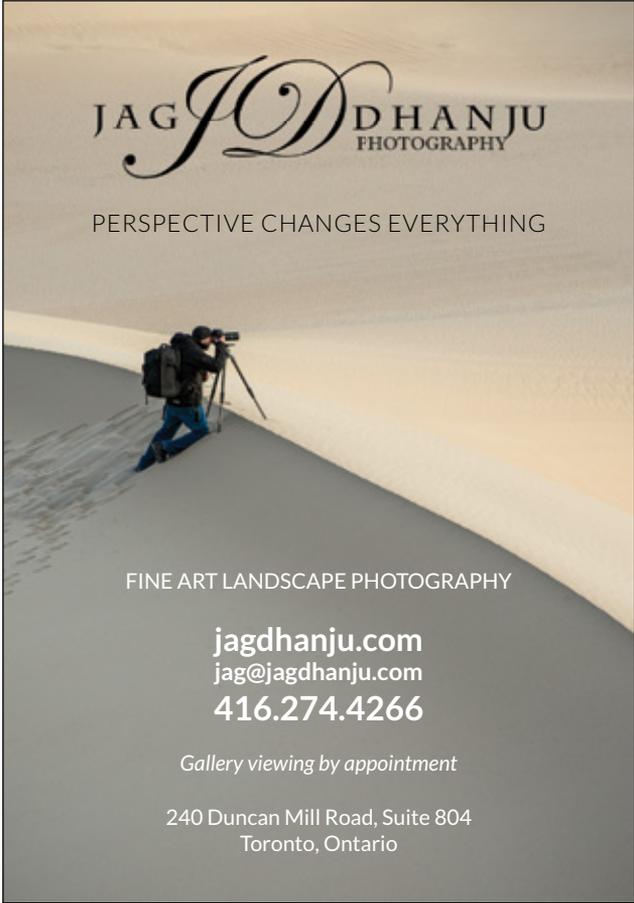


Ball gown, Rubin Singer;  
earrings, Balmain

once, at the Ritz in Paris, Karl Lagerfeld wondered aloud to Dixon just “who is that *fabulous* woman you are with?” On the surface, Suzanne is the emblem of glamorous, receiving Christmas cards from Victoria Beckham, accepting invites from Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana when they debuted their Alta Moda collection on the island of Capri last year. “Being Suzanne’s friend, you get to do some pretty crazy, fun stuff, and her love of fashion has brought us all over the world,” says Dixon. “But it’s a big, real passion of hers to support kids. She’s definitely taught me a thing or two about giving back. She does it better than anyone I know.” Beneath the folds of her silk faille dresses is a whip-smart, confident and spontaneously funny woman; a mother and wife adamant about Sunday family dinners; a successful benefactress acutely aware of and thankful for her surroundings. “I never grew up like this,” says Suzanne, who was born to Hungarian parents in a small mining town in northern Ontario. “My mother was proud that she could even afford to buy me a new pair of shoes — Buster Brown shoes, my first fashion label,” she reminisces.

**A**s I politely wander around the Rogers household, it’s clear that Suzanne’s sartorial taste extends well beyond her curated closet, spilling throughout her home in cascading florals, whispers of pink and pops of eclectic art. “I love looking for black and white fashion photography, I have a big interest in that, and I’ve collected quite a few pieces throughout the years,” says the proud owner of Lillian Bassman’s *Blowing Kiss*, one of only four produced in the world, and two Melvin Sokolsky portraits with model Simone D’Aillencourt floating in bubbles over Paris. The recently appointed honorary chair of the 2015 Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards Gala National Committee nods her head toward *Nobody Else But You*, an André Monet portrait of a pensive Marilyn Monroe, which hangs impressively on a stark wall above a modern divan near the main foyer. The Montreal-born artist’s striking collage and mosaic technique also caught the eye of the Opera Gallery in London, which commissioned him to create a portrait of Prince William and Kate Middleton for their royal wedding in 2011. It wouldn’t be the first time Suzanne shared an eye for the talent of a rising Canadian artist. She funds the annual \$25,000 prize for Most Promising New Label as part of the Toronto Fashion Incubator competition, and is also on the judging panel for the annual Canadian Arts & Fashion Awards.

Outside, the frigid January day is sending its icy breath along the snow-dusted streets of Forest Hill, a stark contrast to the refuge I found within the first few steps inside the house of Rogers. Wondering how she does it all, how she found the key to balance in life, Suzanne replies that it’s all rooted in her upbringing. “I wore clothes from Goodwill until I was 10 years old, so when people ask me, ‘Well, what’s it like to be a Rogers?’ I say, ‘I’ve been my maiden name far longer than I’ve been a Rogers.’ This has always been me. And to have that balance, to really see both sides of the coin, really helps to have a different perspective on life.” Suzanne explains how important it is for her children to hear and be influenced by the dichotomy between their bloodlines: a maternal grandmother standing in line for bread for hours while growing up in communist Hungary, later losing her 24-year-old husband, Suzanne’s father, in a mining accident; and a paternal grandmother whose father was a British MP and governor of Bermuda, and a grandfather, Canadian icon Ted Rogers, who built a billion-dollar communications empire. “We’ve given that balance to our kids. And for me, it’s been a wonderful experience, it’s been a wonderful life to have both influences.”



**JAG DHANJU**  
PHOTOGRAPHY

PERSPECTIVE CHANGES EVERYTHING

FINE ART LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

[jagdhanju.com](http://jagdhanju.com)  
[jag@jagdhanju.com](mailto:jag@jagdhanju.com)  
416.274.4266

Gallery viewing by appointment

240 Duncan Mill Road, Suite 804  
Toronto, Ontario



DOLCE MEDIA GROUP PRESENTS

**VIDEO BROCHURE CANADA**

- 8 1/4" x 11 1/4" Video Brochure
- 7-inch LCD Screen
- 5 Buttons
- Built-in Dual Stereo Speakers
- Built-in 1GB Memory
- Inside Pocket for Print Inserts
- Magnetic Closure
- High-quality Graphics with Soft-touch Print Finish
- USB 2.0 Charge & Data Load by USB

[www.videobrochurecanada.ca](http://www.videobrochurecanada.ca)

**DOLCE MEDIA GROUP**

[www.dolcemediacanada.ca](http://www.dolcemediacanada.ca) | 905.264.6789