

social eyes

Lucy O'Donnell.
Right, at home with
children Columbus,
Archie and Angelica



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Lady who crunches

Everyone's joining the granola breakfast club, thanks to Lucy O'Donnell, says Katie Rox

When Lucy O'Donnell, award-winning granola queen, walks into a cocktail party, many things come to mind: glamorous, posh, high maintenance, cheeky, strong-willed. She is not the sort of person you imagine toiling away in the kitchen for weeks on end getting her immaculately manicured hands dirty in order to perfect a cereal recipe.

If you didn't know her, you could be forgiven for thinking that this beautiful Knightsbridge blonde has someone to do the kitchen stuff for her. And until her husband, the dashing Italo-American financier Carletto (a man with megabucks on one side of the family via his uncle, the A&P supermarket heir Huntington Hartford, and titles from here to Naples on the other – he is directly related to three popes) suggested moving with their three children from their elegant Eaton Place townhouse to Hampshire, even she would have admitted that your assumption would have been 100 per cent accurate. At heart Lucy is a gutsy jolly-hockey-sticks kind of

girl, brought up in the country with her siblings by her formidable mother, the politico novelist Lady Hanham, who was once leader of Kensington and Chelsea Council. (Lucy's father is a

cousin of Lord Snowdon's.) So, like all good English girls, she put on her wellies, walked the dogs and tried to figure out what she should do next. But it wasn't until she went on a family skiing holiday that she had her epiphany after discovering the granola at the breakfast buffet.

'I thought, "Ohmigod, that is so good – why don't we have it at home?"' she recalls. 'So I got to work. Friends would come for the weekend and say, "What is this amazing stuff? Where do you buy it?" and when I told them, they'd ask, "Can you make some for me?"' And so Lovedean granola was born.

Sitting in her rose-filled country garden, drinking cups of lapsang and eating homemade chocolate cake, she continues her story. She first drafted in an army of Czech au pairs to help with the cooking and had the oven on, as she says, 'all day, every day, 24/7', perfecting her recipe while she looked for a manufacturer. No easy task, particularly as no one in the industry was interested in making something in bulk that contained no additives. 'They said to me, "No we couldn't possibly do this," and clonk, they'd put the phone down. Or they'd say: "We have to have a five-tonne minimum

order." Clonk again.' Finally, she persuaded a company of lab-coated cereal makers in the Midlands to do it her way.

Rupert Hambro came on board as chairman and Mark Birley was one of Lovedean's first fans, sending his driver to collect a weekly consignment. 'He thought it was so wonderful that he put it in George and the Bath & Racquets Club.' The Balfours buy it in bulk and Princess Michael of Kent swears by it, as do an army of friends from India Hicks (Carletto is related to the Mountbattens through his father) to model-of-the-moment Daisy Lowe. Batches are regularly sent out to Lyford Cay in the Bahamas, where Carletto's mother lives. Itsu, Julian Metcalfe's Japanese take-out chain, uses it as a topping on its new frozen yoghurt and Lady Bamford (the high priestess of upmarket food patronage) has taken it for her Daylesford stores. But Lucy's real triumph has been getting it sold by mainstream supermarkets such as Whole Foods and Waitrose, where no new cereal has ever sold as fast. Getting a slice of shelf real estate here, particularly as an unheard-of newcomer, is almost impossible.

Next to go into production is a Lovedean porridge and what she calls a 'snacky biscuity cereal thing'. She smuggles samples of her latest creations into Ludgrove, where her eldest son Columbus is at school. 'He sends me messages saying, "Mummy, Arthur Lonsdale wants more, and so does my maths teacher.' Lovedean, which is super-healthy and addictively delicious (no bad fats, salt or sugar, only honey) comes in handbag-size mini-pots too: 'To go in the Prada – all my friends have them.'

My friends all carry mini-pots in their handbags

When we first spoke on the phone, she ended the call with: 'Bye-bye, lots of love.' There was a pause, then an embarrassed giggle. 'Oh sorry, I didn't mean that – I'm all over the place at the moment.' If not lots of love, then definitely lots of Lovedean. □