



"I don't want my career to be the only thing. That's not what I'm living for"

Motherhood is just around the corner for model Elyse Knowles, who tells *Stellar* she wants her child to have a simple upbringing. Which means more socialising than social media, always "keeping it real" – and asking Dad for help with the spelling homework

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Styling LEIGH WILLIAMS
Interview KARLIE RUTHERFORD

Elyse Knowles doesn't have a birth plan and only enrolled in a weekend birth course because she figured it would provide some laughs for her and partner Josh Barker. She has yet to read any books about baby sleep techniques or what to do in the fourth trimester, that 12-week period after a woman gives birth. She also doesn't know the sex of her baby, which is due imminently.

But there's one thing she can say with assurance: this child, and those she hopes will follow as she and Barker build their family, is going to be encouraged to grow up as far away from screens as possible. "I don't want technology in their faces all the time. That annoys me a lot," Knowles tells *Stellar*. "That's how we're going to bring up our kids, I know it. We want them to be outside because that's how we were brought up."

So strong is Knowles's aversion that she's still tossing up how much her child will appear on her own social-media accounts once it's born. "It's a conversation Josh and I have all the time," the 28-year-old says. It may seem ironic that, having built on her burgeoning celebrity primarily through her online presence, Knowles is down for limited screen time. On the other hand, that's precisely why she's so passionate about the matter. "We're very aware how everyone thinks they can own you because of social



media," she says. "I want to separate family life from work life. But it's hard. Because social media is a business platform and how I generate good clients is by keeping it real. And I can only do that by posting things I do in a more unrefined way."

It's that ability to keep it "real" that catapulted Knowles from being known predominantly as a bikini model into one of the most in-demand personalities in Australia. With hundreds of thousands of followers on Instagram, she's what you would call a bona fide influencer – albeit the kind who's always shown off her bad hair days just as much as she has the good ones. When she appeared on (and won) *The Block* alongside builder partner Barker in 2017, she proved that aside from being a pretty face, she could also laugh at herself. Even though some suggested doing the show would potentially scare off prestige clients, her down-to-earth nature won over the likes of Tag Heuer, Range Rover, Myer and Seafolly, which have all signed her on as an ambassador.

So she's admittedly confused as to why one particular post of hers recently caused such a stir. It was actually one she shared six months ago, but it went unnoticed at the time. The photo, an innocuous selfie of Knowles that she captioned "Wallah" (a misspelling of the French word *voilà*), sent online trolls into overdrive and made global headlines after a popular US satire account shared it in December.

Speaking about the flap for the first time, Knowles tells *Stellar*, "I make mistakes all the time [on social media]. It's who I am. I haven't been deeply affected by it at all because I spell things wrong all the time. I don't know. I can't spell for sh*! ▶

ELYSE WEARS
(this page) Worn Store
top, wornstore.com.au;
Matteau skirt,
matteau-store.com;
Two Hills rings
(worn throughout),
twohills.com.au;
(opposite) Matin dress,
matinstudio.com; Seafolly
bikini (worn underneath),
seafolly.com/au;
her own anklet



AND THEN THERE WERE THREE
 (from top) Elyse Knowles and her partner Josh Barker announced their pregnancy in an Instagram post last September; walking the Myer runway in 2018.

I know that, and I'm OK with that. I still don't know [how to spell it]. But there's a global pandemic and the whole of the Australian media is reporting on one word. I'm still getting notifications every day that people are writing about it. But if it gave someone a laugh, then... whatever. I chuckled over it, too."

Her mum? Not so much. She thought the outsized attention – thousands of people left "Wallah" in the comment sections of her posts for days on end – crossed a line. "She thought it was bullying," Knowles explains.

In any case, the experience hasn't changed the way she approaches social media, although she jokes that when it comes to her baby, "Josh will teach it how to spell *voilà!*"

Speaking of that baby, Knowles says she's giddy about its impending arrival, pointing out that starting a family has always been her top priority. "I don't want my career to be the only or the best thing that's happened to me. That's not what I'm living for. And I didn't want to get any older before I started trying, because you never know how long it will take to conceive."

The first half of her pregnancy, Knowles says, was tough – she vomited daily. And watching her get through it only left Barker, her partner of eight years, more in awe of her strength. "It's crazy to see what women go through and how they create a little human being," he tells *Stellar*. "But Elyse doesn't complain about much. I could have had a real princess." Adds Knowles, "It makes our love stronger, even though you didn't know it can happen. It's been very special."

A large part of the reason the couple left Melbourne behind for Byron Bay in 2019 is that they believe the coastal town is the right place to raise a family. "I love Melbourne, it's where my mum and dad live, but Byron Bay suits me. No-one cares what they look like here," says Knowles, adding that since moving she has given away all her heels, barely wears make-up when she isn't working and is more at peace with herself than ever.

"I'm inspired to see older women with wrinkles on their faces and who have huge smile lines. They have four kids and are so happy and natural, and don't care if they have knots in their hair. That's what I'm attached to in a woman. I'm not attracted to the opposite anymore.

"I finally feel content in my career, my life, myself," she says. "I've still got things I want to achieve, but I just do it at a different pace now." ★

OTHER PHOTOGRAPHY: INSTAGRAM/@ELYSEKNOWLES; TOBY ZERNA. HAIR & MAKE-UP: ANGIE BARTON



"This pregnancy makes our love stronger, even though you didn't know it can happen. It's been very special"

ELYSE WEARS (this page) Christopher Esber dress, christopheresber.com.au; Flash earrings and anklet (gold), flashjewellery.com; Sun And The Universe anklet (bead), instagram.com/sunandtheuniverse; (opposite) Lee Mathews shirt, leemathews.com.au; Seafolly bikini, seafolly.com.au; Flash earrings, as before