

Marie-Chantal's interview at Harper's Bazaar Greece

H.B.GR.: Why Manners Begin at Breakfast? What made this intimate, everyday moment the heart of your philosophy?

M.C.: I've always believed that sharing meals as a family is one of life's greatest anchors—it's where we connect, listen, and learn. Breakfast, in particular, feels like a fresh start. It's the beginning of the day and, for families, it can be a moment of calm before the whirlwind. In our fast-paced world, children often grab something on the go, and parents rush out the door. But childhood goes by in a flash. It doesn't take much—laying a table, sitting down, a few quiet minutes together. I did this for nearly 24 years, and I cherish every memory. I chose the title because breakfast offers us that daily opportunity to begin again - with intention, connection, and grace.

H.B.GR.: When did you first start thinking about manners not as rules but as values?

M.C.: It began in childhood. Growing up in Asia, our mornings were filled with warmth—my parents, my sisters, all around the breakfast table. My father, despite being incredibly busy and building his career, was always there. That consistency taught me something deeper than etiquette - it was about being present, considerate, engaged. Manners weren't just about sitting up straight or knowing where the fork goes. They were about listening, showing interest, caring how someone else feels. As a mother, I came to see how structure gives children security. In a world that feels increasingly chaotic, manners are a gentle framework for empathy and emotional intelligence.

H.B.GR.: You've lived between worlds - New York, London, Asia, and of course Greece. How has that multicultural upbringing influenced your ideas around etiquette, hospitality, and grace?

M.C.: It's been one of my greatest blessings. I grew up in Hong Kong and was immersed in the rituals and formalities of British and Chinese culture. At nine, I went to boarding school in Switzerland and had a Greek roommate who opened a new window into her world. Later, I lived in Paris where etiquette is almost an art form. Being exposed to so many cultures taught me adaptability and respect for different customs - but at the core, it always comes back to family, connection, and how we make others feel.

H.B.GR.: You write that “manners are not about appearances, but about empathy.”

M.C.: Manners cost nothing - I've always said that. They're not about performance; they're about presence. Empathy begins with small things: saying thank you, looking someone in the eye, holding a door open. These are gestures of awareness and appreciation. Especially today, when so much is mediated through screens, taking a moment to be kind is not only gracious - it's radical.

H.B.GR.: Did motherhood sharpen your understanding of what presence really means? In a world obsessed with multitasking and speed, how do you teach your children the value of attention?

M.C.: Absolutely. I learned that the real gift isn't the perfectly packed lunch or the tidy room - it's undivided attention. At our table, we try to have a no-phones rule. And now, the funny thing is, my children are the ones reminding Pavlos and me to put our phones away! So I suppose I did something right. Presence isn't perfection - it's about being there, fully. That's what children remember.

H.B.GR.: Many people think of etiquette as rigid or outdated. You present it as something fluid and emotionally intelligent. How can we reframe manners for a generation raised on screens and speed?

M.C.: We need to shift the focus from rules to emotional intelligence. EQ matters now more than ever. Children who learn empathy, resilience, and self-awareness grow up to become better friends, partners, colleagues. Manners should evolve - not disappear. They can be playful, flexible, and still rooted in values. Think of it less as correction, and more as connection.

H.B.GR.: One of the most striking parts of the book is about setting boundaries with technology - not in a punitive way, but as a gesture of presence. What are some rituals you practice at home to protect that space?

M.C.: I love seeing my grown-up children reading. It gives me hope. With so much noise online, I believe we must protect time for stillness and curiosity. When they were little we encouraged reading before bed, and we had moments where the Wi-Fi went off -quite literally. It's not about punishment; it's about preserving a space for real presence. And sometimes, the greatest luxury is silence.

H.B.GR.: As a mother of five, how did you navigate the challenges of raising children in the age of Instagram and constant distraction?

M.C.: Instagram came into our lives with the younger two. I was cautious at first, but also curious. I want to stay connected to how the world is changing. Social media can be wonderful when used as a tool - not a crutch. I use it to share what I care about, especially for my business and charity work. But I also remind myself: not everything needs to be said. I often want to shout from the rooftops when I see something unjust - but I pause. Silence, sometimes, is the loudest form of strength.

H.B.GR.: Could you share a memory of when a simple gesture created a lasting feeling of connection?

M.C.: When the children were little, we made meals fun - sometimes they'd cook, or we'd set the table in a playful way. With friends, I love adding a personal touch: a small handwritten note, a flower that reminds me of them, a gift that says, I see you. It's never about extravagance. It's about making someone feel truly welcome - and thought of.

H.B.GR.: What makes a home feel gracious to you?

M.C.: It's a feeling. Light, scent, music, yes - but most of all, how you're made to feel. A warm welcome, genuine conversation, laughter. People may forget what they ate or wore, but they'll never forget how you made them feel.

H.B.GR.: Has the way you entertain changed over the years - from grand gatherings to more intimate rituals?

M.C.: Yes and no. I still love a grand gathering - but equally, I cherish a quiet dinner with the children or the people I love the most. Even if it's just takeaway, I'll put it in bowls, light some candles, and set the table. Effort doesn't mean perfection. It means care.

H.B.GR.: You emphasize the importance of saying thank you - not as a rule, but as a practice of humility. Is there a thank-you note that has stayed with you?

M.C.: Yes. A few years ago, we had the Queen of England to dinner at home - an intimate gathering. All children came down to say hello. Aristides must have been three years old and he came down with No slippers. She looked at him and said with a smile, "What, No slippers?" I was mortified - but she was so gracious. A day or two later, a handwritten note arrived. It was beautiful and deeply personal. That she took the time out of her very busy schedule spoke volumes.

H.B.GR.: In a world that often rewards speed and spectacle, do you think there's still a place for subtlety and sincerity?

M.C.: Now more than ever. Life moves fast, but meaning lies in the quiet gestures. A handwritten note. A door held open. A pause before responding. In a world of spectacle, grace still matters.

H.B.GR.: You also mention that kindness is contagious. Have there been moments in your public life where you've seen that ripple effect in action?

M.C.: Yes. I always say: kindness is contagious. People underestimate its power. Being gracious isn't weakness - it's strength. And I tell my children: you never lose by being kind. It opens doors, hearts, and opportunities.

H.B.GR.: You carry a title that comes with history. How do you navigate that space between tradition and modern identity?

M.C.: By staying true to myself. Titles come with expectations, but I've always believed that respect, humility, and kindness transcend status. The family I married into shared those values. At the end of the day, it's not about ceremony - it's about integrity.

H.B.GR.: What do you think is the most misunderstood thing about being a princess today?

M.C.: That it's all pomp and privilege. The truth is, the role has evolved. We carry no political power, but we can use our voices to uplift, support, and serve.

H.B.GR.: Do you see your book as part of a larger legacy - not just for your children, but for how we live and treat each other in a complicated world?

M.C.: I hope so. I hope it gets passed down, revised, reread. Manners are timeless - and they matter. If this book helps even one family reconnect over a meal, or a child write a thank-you note, then I've done something worthwhile.

H.B.GR.: What's one small gesture - perhaps something your children do or your husband does - that, for you, represents true elegance?

M.C.: When my boys stand up for someone older or for a woman entering a room. It seems small, but to me it's everything. It signals respect. And if we lose our values, we lose our compass.

H.B.GR.: Finally, what do you hope people feel when they close your book - not as a manual, but as a companion?

M.C.: That it was a gentle reminder of things they already know deep down. That manners aren't about rigidity - they're about care. And that every day is an opportunity to be a little more thoughtful, more present, and more kind.

H.B.GR.: How would you describe Greece in five words and five images?

M.C.: Words: Gentle. Caring. Warm. Beautiful. Wise.

Images: The endless sea, golden sunlight, an old mountain village, pine forests in Epirus, and a centuries-old olive tree.