

EXCLUSIVELY INVITING US INTO HER KENSINGTON PALACE HOME

PRINCESS MICHAEL OF KENT

TALKS ABOUT THE EXCITING NEW CHAPTER IN HER LIFE AS SHE LOOKS FORWARD TO A FAMILY CHRISTMAS



It is a labour of love that began a decade ago, when Princess Michael of Kent started researching a historical trilogy set around the royal court of 15th-century France.

With the first two books proving to be hits and the third, *Quickstar*, just released, the Queen's cousin-in-law has marked the occasion by, for the first time ever, allowing cameras to photograph her in the private study in Kensington Palace where she brought her books to life.

The room is her little haven and even her husband Prince Michael is not allowed in.

"It is for me and my cats' use only," she tells HELLO!. "I have a sign on the door which reads, 'Do not enter on pain of my wrath.' I tend to write

late into the night, starting when my husband goes to bed at midnight, and will finish at 5 or 4am. It is the best time for me as there is no office and no husband to disturb.

"I no longer even play music on my iPad, which I used to do," she adds. "I find it disturbs and there is no other noise here in the middle of Kensington Palace but for the occasional boo-boo from an owl in early spring."

The completion of the trilogy was marked last week with a launch at London auction house Christie's, which, she says, could not have come at a better time as it frees her up to enjoy family time during the season of goodwill.

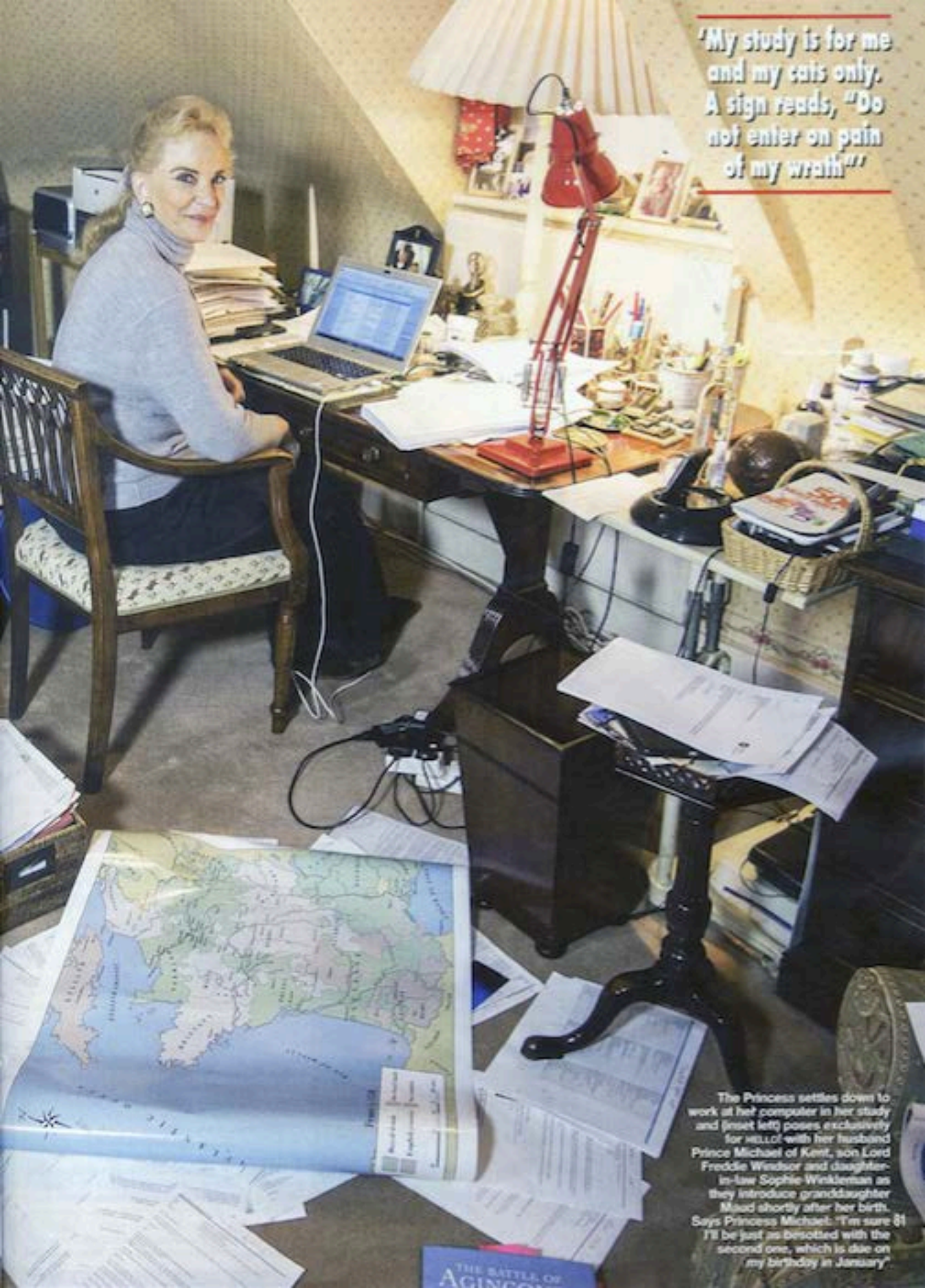
"My son and his wife [Lord Freddie Windsor

and Sophie Winkleman] have just come back to London from Los Angeles," she says.

"I'm so excited to have Christmas here. They couldn't come back last year as my son is a banker and had to work. Because of Thanksgiving, where they have a long holiday, they couldn't have a holiday week later so we went there and it was such a different experience in LA. We ended up going to the beach and it just didn't feel right. I would much rather have Christmas in London.

"My granddaughter [Freddie and Sophie's daughter Maud] was two in August and I can't wait to play with her. I'm besotted and there will be lots of games," she continues. "I'm sure I'll be just as besotted with the second one, which is due

'My study is for me and my cats only. A sign reads, "Do not enter on pain of my wrath!"'



The Princess settles down to work at her computer in her study and (inset left) poses exclusively for *HELLO!* with her husband Prince Michael of Kent, son Lord Freddie Windsor and daughter-in-law Sophie Winkleman as they introduce granddaughter Maud shortly after her birth. Says Princess Michael: "I'm sure I'll be just as binotted with the second one, which is due on my birthday in January"

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Seen for the first time in the study of her Kensington Palace home, Princess Michael looks over a map of France, the setting for her historical Anjou trilogy: *The Queen Of Four Kingdoms*, *Agnes Sorel: Mistress of Beauty* and her latest, *Quicksilver*



on my birthday in January. It already feels like I have one and a half grandchildren."

Finishing her book will also allow Princess Michael to take a two-month break at the beginning of the new year. "I always like to hibernate to warmer climes," she says. "I have arthritis in my hands and like to head to the Bahamas to stay in the guest cottage of a friend. I can go there and relax and see no one, but three times a week I play tennis with a pro so I can miss a little bit."

A ROOM OF HER OWN

The study in which Princess Michael carefully crafted the trilogy used to be the nursery of Freddie and his younger sister Lady Gabriella and includes framed photographs of the family along with a wonderful collection of teddy bears. On many of the cushions are stitchings of exotic animals, including cheetahs, which play such a pivotal part in the royal's book.

All three novels were written in her study following detailed research at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, a process that began back in 2005.

"Since all the characters I write about are well known in their own territories, there is no shortage of material," says Princess Michael. "There was also much to be found in private archives, which I delighted in exploring. As for the manner of research, when possible, my first pursuit is into the medical history of my subjects. It is astonishing

how much one can find out about a person's character if one knows what ailed them.

"This book comes on the 600th anniversary of Agincourt and I learnt only fairly recently that 62 of my direct ancestors took part in the battle: 57 killed and the rest taken prisoner for ransom — only one of them fighting for France," she adds.

The final volume of the Anjou trilogy focuses on merchant Jacques Coeur, a man of humble beginnings who became one of the richest and most powerful men in the country and a trusted confidante and champion of the royal family.

Speaking at Christie's, the Princess delighted the assembled guests with tales of how she "described the orgies in intricate detail", adding: "I spent a lot of time in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and read about orgies. I was so shocked. I said to my husband and son, 'No. This didn't happen. Men don't do this sort of thing,' and they said, 'Oh no, no' — so then I knew they did."

The Princess also asked her audience to remember the victims of the previous week's terrorist attack in Paris. "I extend all my sympathy to all the victims and their families," she said. "I spend a lot of time there as that is where these books are centred."

INTERVIEW: THOMAS WHISAKER
PHOTOS: DAVID HOGAN

Quicklinks, the final volume of Princess Michael of Kent's Anjou trilogy, is on sale now, published by Constable

