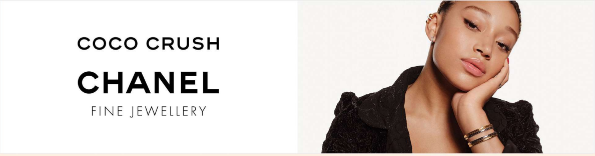
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The smashing Boulter siblings

Katie, one of Britain's top tennis players, and her talent agent brother James are the ultimate doubles act

James Boulter and Katie Boulter photographed for HTSI at Chelsea Barracks, London © Niall Hodson

Harriet Quick. Photography by Niall Hodson. Styling by Charley McEwen 33 MINUTES AGO

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Doing what you love is normally a solid foundation for excelling in what you do. For siblings James Boulter, a talent agent at United Talent Agency (UTA), and Katie Boulter, Britain's No 1 female tennis player, passion and perseverance are essential. "It's important that I love what I do as I know I'm going to put so much more energy into my everyday life," says Katie, 28, who at time of writing is ranked 23 in the world (a career high) and has three career titles; she first represented Great Britain aged eight, becoming the No 1 ranked junior in 2008.

"Both of us are cognisant that the work we do is a privilege," says 31-year-old James. "It's something that we get out of bed for, that we are excited and want to do, and I think that's a healthy obsession."

Boulter siblings Katie and James at the Chelsea Barracks residential complex © Niall Hodson

© Niall Hodson

Today, the siblings are relishing a rare afternoon together in the Chelsea Barracks residential complex, chosen as a location for its spectacular subterranean tennis court adjoined by a plush lounge-style viewing platform. Katie, dressed in an ivory white Stella McCartney suit, and James, in Paul Smith, are two peas in a pod: thoughtful, big-picture thinkers, nimble with quips. As James weighs up the highs and lows of 2024, Katie chips in: “Not spending enough time with me!”

Indeed, each spends an average of 40 weeks a year away from the UK, with Katie competing on the global WTA circuit, and James in LA for awards season from January to April, and then on the road to work with clients across the globe – his roster includes Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Nick Jonas, Joe Jonas, Jessica Alba, Cardi B, Paris Hilton, Patrick Dempsey, Catherine Zeta Jones, Cynthia Erivo and Karlie Kloss. Over his career, James has been responsible for securing over $200mn of commercial and endorsement opportunities for his clients, and expanding their commercial ventures by securing brand partnerships, negotiating equity deals, licensing and launching new ventures.

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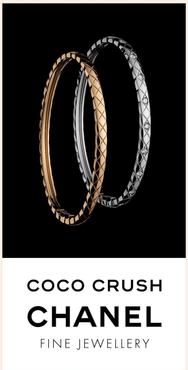
James wears Paul Smith wool The Brierley “A Suit To Travel In”, £1,050. Grenson leather shoes, £315. Shirt, stylist’s own. Katie wears Stella McCartney linen jacket, £1,450, linen balloon trousers, £890, and vegan-leather shoes, £650. With Nothing Underneath Tencel Alexander Chocolate Stripe x Felicity Kay shirt, £140. Pragnell gold Havana Miramar necklace, £9,400 © Niall Hodson

“Katie and I are both the products of the people that are around us and the support that we have. The support that I provide to my clients is very much the same. I’m a part of their mechanism,” says James. While his sister is in front of the camera, he works discreetly behind the scenes. “My highs are attached to my clients', such as landing a major film role or releasing a new album that performs incredibly well," he says. It often means "advising and supporting them on crafting strategy and carefully preparing for the next step".

Katie Boulter plays in the singles final of the San Diego Open in 2024 © Getty Images

Last year was a standout for Katie, who won a prestigious title at the San Diego Open and another one in Nottingham (she also won her first title there in 2023). "2024 has been a lot of what I dreamt about when I wanted to become a tennis player. I wanted to achieve multiple things. One of them was to get my ranking inside the top 50 and then see how far I could go with my potential. I always felt I had it, but I never managed to fully capitalise on it. A lot of people spend their whole career trying to get one title so, for me, two titles [in one year] was a massive achievement." Her next priority is to do well at the Slams – so far her best performances have been third rounds at Wimbledon and the US Open in 2023.

> *"We are good at sharing each other's little wins – but the big wins are pretty evident"*
>
> – JAMES BOULTER



She puts part of her success down to life-work balance, the support of her team, her fiancé Alex de Minaur (the Australian-born world No 18 player), family and her new fitness trainer, Matt Little. "My team pushes me through the tough moments and the good moments. They keep me motivated. It's never-ending tennis," she says. The player is appreciated by fans for her generous, smiley demeanour on and off the court. She and de Minaur are often seen at each other's games, cheering each other on. Most days, though, are intense: the training involves two to three hours of practice, plus two gym sessions and recovery time in physio and cryo bath. Downtime is spent exploring the cities they land in. For James, the most important thing is a rest from phone calls and emails. He restores his vintage cars and regularly plays tennis. "It is great for clearing the mind," he asserts. "What a terrible idea!" jokes Katie.

James Boulter wears Brunello Cucinelli linen pinstripe suit, £4,800. Oliver Spencer cotton Conduit shirt, £119. Boss leather belt, £79. John Lobb leather Mason boots, £2,000. Katie Boulter wears Ami paris back-slit loose shirt, £440, and cargo trousers, £540. Dear Frances Weston boots, £690. Pragnell gold Havana Miramar necklace, £9,400, and gold expandable diamond bangle, £7,425. Hair and make-up, Charley McEwen © Niall Hodson

The siblings' discipline and focus was instilled as children growing up in Leicestershire, in a family that rewarded both play and work. Tennis is in the blood. Their mother Susan, a teacher and tennis coach, played the game at county level, as did their maternal grandmother Gill Gartshore, while the siblings' businessman father David encouraged the duo to go for it and persevere. James was Katie's main tennis partner and they played regularly at the local court. "How many times did James get into a bad mood and storm off the court? I can tell you a few times!" laughs Katie, who was driven by the simple challenge of beating her older brother. "That's pretty much how I landed in tennis." James also followed the family tradition for a time, making it to county level for Leicestershire. "My mum or grandpa would often take us both to tournaments at the weekends around the country… however, as Katie would come back with trophy after trophy, it became clear she had something special, and by the age of eight she was already representing Great Britain," he says.

James's journey into the entertainment field was circuitous. "I don't think anybody, especially in the UK, tells you that you could be a Hollywood agent. It doesn't come up in career counselling," he says. He left school at 18 and first started a packaged-goods health-food business, before moving into management consultancy, overseeing brands and interacting with talent. He then took that knowledge into the entertainment world, setting up his own agency in London in 2019. Indian actress and producer Priyanka Chopra Jonas was one of his first signings, entrusted to him by her manager Anjula Acharia.

'Both of us are cognisant that the work we do is a privilege,' says James © Niall Hodson

'Our family chat is used for smaller wins and everything in between – the good, the bad, the ugly' © Niall Hodson

"I was representing a small set of talent and building their businesses across anything that's commercial –endorsements, joint ventures, equity deals – the full scope of anything that is outside of their role as either an actor or musician," he explains. It led to James joining UTA, one of the largest talent agencies in the world, spearheaded by his mentors, co-head of talent Chris Hart and CEO Jeremy Zimmer.

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From left: Priyanka Chopra Jonas, James Boulter and Dana Supnick Guidoni at the launch of Chopra Jonas's Bvlgari ambassadorship in Paris © Tiziano Da Silva

James and Katie's professional worlds are aligned and intertwined. Tennis is ever more popular, particularly women's tennis, while sport and fashion are increasingly converging. Katie benefits from hefty sponsorship deals with brands including Nike, Pragnell fine jewellery, Wilson and Lexus, while James masterminds such deals for his clients. He does not represent Katie, with both preferring to preserve their sister-brother relationship over business. "There is a greater convergence between each of those worlds," he agrees. "The responsibility is often greater now too: talent is global by nature and has to operate and resonate in different territories and still be authentic. We live in an attention economy driven by new platforms."

He cites a single post by Chopra Jonas for HSBC about the challenges of moving abroad as a southern Asian. "That one post was watched by around 668 million people, which is over five times the Super Bowl audience, so the responsibility to navigate one's smaller actions, which then inform everything else, is quite huge," says James. "Your reach across all platforms must be reaching half a million," he nods at Katie.

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The close dynamic between talent and the social media audience has its own drawbacks. For Katie, keeping grounded is fundamental, reminding herself of athletes like Jessica Ennis-Hill that she looked up to as a young girl. "I see myself as someone that kids want to look up to. I think every action that I make and the way that I hold myself on the court and off it is vital, because they always pick up on those little things. When I'm having a tough day and I want to crack a racket or scream at something, I always hold back. Being able to control myself and stay classy on court, it's so important."

Their mode of communication is, week to week, through a family WhatsApp group. "We are good at sharing each other's little wins as well as the big ones – but the big wins are pretty evident," says James. "For Katie, that's her performance at a Grand Slam or winning a title and, for me, it's a campaign that gets seen by billions of people worldwide. We know what each of us are doing, so our family chat is used for smaller wins and everything in between – the good, the bad, the ugly," he smiles.

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