

The style diary

STYLIST AND MUM-OF-TWO KAYLA GEX WEAVES ELEMENTS OF HER HERITAGE AND NATURAL CREATIVITY INTO HER ENSEMBLES.

WORDS RACHEL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT



Along with styling, Kayla enjoys painting and creating at her home on the NSW South Coast. **FACING PAGE** Kayla with her sons Laurence and Leo.



CALIFORNIAN-BORN STYLIST and artist Kayla Gex never imagined she'd be settled in a sleepy town on the NSW South Coast, "but life had a different plan," she muses. Everything changed six years ago when Kayla and her husband, Byron, found themselves expecting their first child and priced out of the Sydney housing market. "We wanted to buy a home but could only afford something down the coast in Byron's home town," recalls Kayla, 37. "I was very hesitant at first; I didn't think I could cope with the quiet life of Manyana."

The soon-to-be parents decided to take the risk. They bought a besser-block cottage near the beach, signing on the dotted line just days before son Leo, now six, was born. They expected to stay only as long as it took to renovate the cottage, which they planned to list on Airbnb, but their plans were thwarted. "Covid happened a few months after we bought our house, so we couldn't leave," explains Kayla. "Then I slowly fell in love with our home and community." (We featured their home in our Christmas 2025 issue.)

Now parents to a second son, three-year-old Laurence, the couple are immersed in Manyana. "I feel so lucky that

I get to take my boys on adventures every day; they explore rock pools and climb on sand dunes," says Kayla. "Moving to the country has been a huge adjustment, but it was just what I needed." Leaning into the slower pace, Kayla has more time for her passions, which were always on the back burner when they lived in the city. "I've been drawing and painting since I can remember, but once I started styling, I barely picked up a paintbrush," she admits. "Now I am exploring, painting, and creating more than I could imagine."

As life has become more countrified and creative, Kayla's wardrobe has followed suit. "When we lived in Sydney, I got dressed up more and I wore a lot of black," she says. Now, her 'uniform' is a simple ensemble of jeans, a vintage tee, and a crew-neck jumper. "Add a beaded necklace and my St. Agni leather sandals, and I'm good to go," she adds. And while balancing work and motherhood is a juggle, Kayla believes in making time to get dressed purposefully each day. "It's so important to not lose yourself in motherhood, amazing as it is," she says. "I know I'm a mum now, but I still want to have my own distinct style, and I hope I never lose it." >

FROM LEFT Vintage garments draw Kayla's eye; Kayla makes gorgeous papier-mâché boats and sells them on her Etsy store. FACING PAGE Leo and Laurence enjoy experimenting with her studio materials.

KAYLA GEX

INTERIOR STYLIST AND ARTIST, 37

Kayla lives in Manyana, NSW, with her husband Byron, 38, and sons, Leo, six, and Laurence, three.

How would you describe your style? Smart-casual, but more on the casual side now that I'm a mum.

Are you interested in fashion? I love fashion! I don't follow trends or big designers, but I genuinely love to get dressed for my day-to-day life, and especially for a special event.

Who are your style influences? My mum was so stylish growing up (and still is!) – she taught me about fashion. Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen will always be my style icons.

What's the best style advice you've ever received? "Be yourself." The older I get, the more I lean into this phrase. I stick to colours that complement my skin tone, and I find tailored pieces that work well with my height (I'm 155cm). I also really enjoy wearing pieces that embrace my Latina and Native American heritage.

What are your wardrobe essentials? A comfortable pair of jeans, a vintage T-shirt and leather sandals.

What are your favourite clothing labels? Levi's and St. Agni, and shirts from J. Crew. On my wish list is anything from Jesse Kamm, a sustainable brand from California.

What are your essential beauty products? I wear Ilia Super Serum Skin Tint SPF40 every day and bronzer on my cheeks. I love the Kora Organics Turmeric Brightening & Exfoliating Scrub & Mask, and I use Naked Tallow Sleepytime Tallow Cream at night. I got my friends hooked on Unite 7 Seconds Leave-in Detangler – it's life-changing.

Do you have a favourite fragrance? I'm very sensitive to fragrance, but sometimes I'll wear a small spray of Wild Bluebell Cologne by Jo Malone, or Amuse Air by Hetkinen.

Do you have any favourite accessories? I wear a gold and red bracelet on my wrist every day. If I go out for dinner, I love a fun beaded necklace and gold earrings.

What helps you keep a balanced life? Making time for myself. It could be anything from painting in my studio, having coffee at a cafe, or driving to the nearest Spotlight shop with a girlfriend.

What are you reading/listening to/watching? Royel Otis and Olivia Dean are on repeat. When I'm painting, I put on an instrumental Spanish guitar mix. Byron and I just finished watching the TV series *Little Fires Everywhere* and we really liked it.

What do you never leave home without? My Alaffia handwoven basket bag – it holds everything I need.

Where are your favourite spots to eat? Milk Haus in Woodstock or Pilgrims in Milton. For dinner, Cupitt's Estate in Ulladulla or GWYLO at Mollymook Beach.

Where are your favourite spots to shop for homewares? I buy from Facebook Marketplace, Nikki B's and Toka Ceramics in Milton, Ulladulla 2Hand, and Few and Far in Huskisson. *CG*

Follow Kayla on Instagram @kayla_gex



IN THE RHYTHM FIND STAPLES AND ACCESSORIES THAT ADD PERSONAL FLAIR.

PRODUCED BY JUDIE SIU

- 1 Lace-up front blouse sleeve blouse in Fabric of Time, \$895, from Camilla.
- 2 Jordi halter wrap top, \$289.95, from Mos the Label.
- 3 Hetkinen Amuse Air eau de parfum, \$79 (30ml), from Few and Far.
- 4 Huntress bag in Canvas, \$389, from Nikki Williams.
- 5 Teodora lace blouse, \$249, from Spell.
- 6 Alicia maxi skirt in Nutshell, \$289.95, from Mos the Label.
- 7 Buddha Stones White Bodhi seed mala protection bracelet, \$61.45, from Buddha Stones.
- 8 Jo Malone London Wild Bluebell cologne, \$260 (100ml), from David Jones.
- 9 Large round Bolga basket, \$147.20, from Black Rhythm on Etsy.
- 10 Arizona rivet suede leather sandal in Ochre, \$288, from Birkenstock.
- 11 Wide-leg trouser with front pockets in Faith, Luck & Justice, \$595, from Camilla.
- 12 Stevie relaxed jean in Brad Blue, \$179.95, from Rolla's.
- 13 Elsa Peretti Open Heart bracelet in Yellow Gold on a Red Silk Cord, \$2850, from Tiffany & Co.
- 14 Agna Luna sweater in New Mint, \$189, from Elk.

