



# **Elsie De Wolfe: A Life in the High Style (The Elegant Life and Remarkable Career of Elsie de Wolfe, Lady Mendl)**

*Jane S. Smith*

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This is the first full-scale life of one of the most flamboyant and influential women of the late 19th and 20th century.

Actress, tastemaker, businesswoman, feminist, and hostess, Elsie de Wolfe, Lady Mendl, reigned supreme over turn-of-the-century New York, cafe-society Paris and wartime Hollywood. Her fabulous parties were 'de rigueur'; her skills as an interior decorator..which profession she virtually invented...revolutionized 20th century design; her advice on art and decoration helped build the collections of Fricks, Vanderbilts and Morgans; her derring-do....she flew lines during World War I ...earned her the French Legion of Honor. And the eccentricities of her personal life...most notably her 'bachelor' relationship with powerful impresario and politician Bessie Marbury, followed by her sudden marriage to the knight with the shadowy past, Sir Charles Mendl...kept gossip columns going for decades.

She marched down Fifth Ave for women's rights, taught Wallis Simpson how to make a home fit for a King, and helped transform a row of tenements on Manhattan's east side into Sutton Place. On Broadway, Ethel Barrymore understudied her. Around her swirled everyone from the richest families of Europe and America, to the great names of Hollywood, to such luminaries as Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde, Gertrude Stein, and Cecil Beaton.

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