

## Gut instinct and trust in di

By JOHN HARKNESS

**N**EW YORK — Some actors either cannot or do not know how to enter a room. One of the rare actors possessed of every inch of height ascribed to her by publicists, Nicole Kidman sweeps into a room, an imposing combination of black velvet, movie star attitude and fashion model altitude, five eleven in flats, and yes, I checked her shoes.

We are in the Drake Hotel on Manhattan's fashionable East Side, where the community motto is "If you have to ask,

### FILM WHEN WHERE

**THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY**, directed by Jane Campion, written by Laura Jones, from the novel by Henry James, produced by Monty Montgomery and Steve Golin, with Nicole Kidman, John Malkovitch, Barbara Hershey, Martin Donovan and Richard E. Grant. 135 minutes. A Gramercy film. A Polygram release. For times and venues, see First-Run Movies, pages 54 and 55.

you can't afford it," in the middle of what many, but not I, call the junket from hell — six pictures are vying for media attention.

Kidman is at the Drake to promote *The Portrait Of A Lady*, Jane Campion's long-awaited follow-up to her Academy Award-winning *The Piano*. In the film, Kidman plays Isabel Archer, a young American woman of independent means who finds herself trapped in a disastrous marriage.

Of course, Mr. Kidman, Tom Cruise, is also in town, though he does not actually take part in the Jerry Maguire junket running concurrently around the corner at another overpriced hotel.

Somehow, I've wandered into the high-IQ interview room — nobody asks any Tom Cruise questions, except in reference to the couple's current project, co-starring in Stanley Kubrick's first film in a decade, *Eyes Wide Shut*.

All Kidman has to say about that film is, "It's about sexual obsession and jealousy and that's straight from Mr. Kubrick's mouth and that's about all I'm allowed to say."

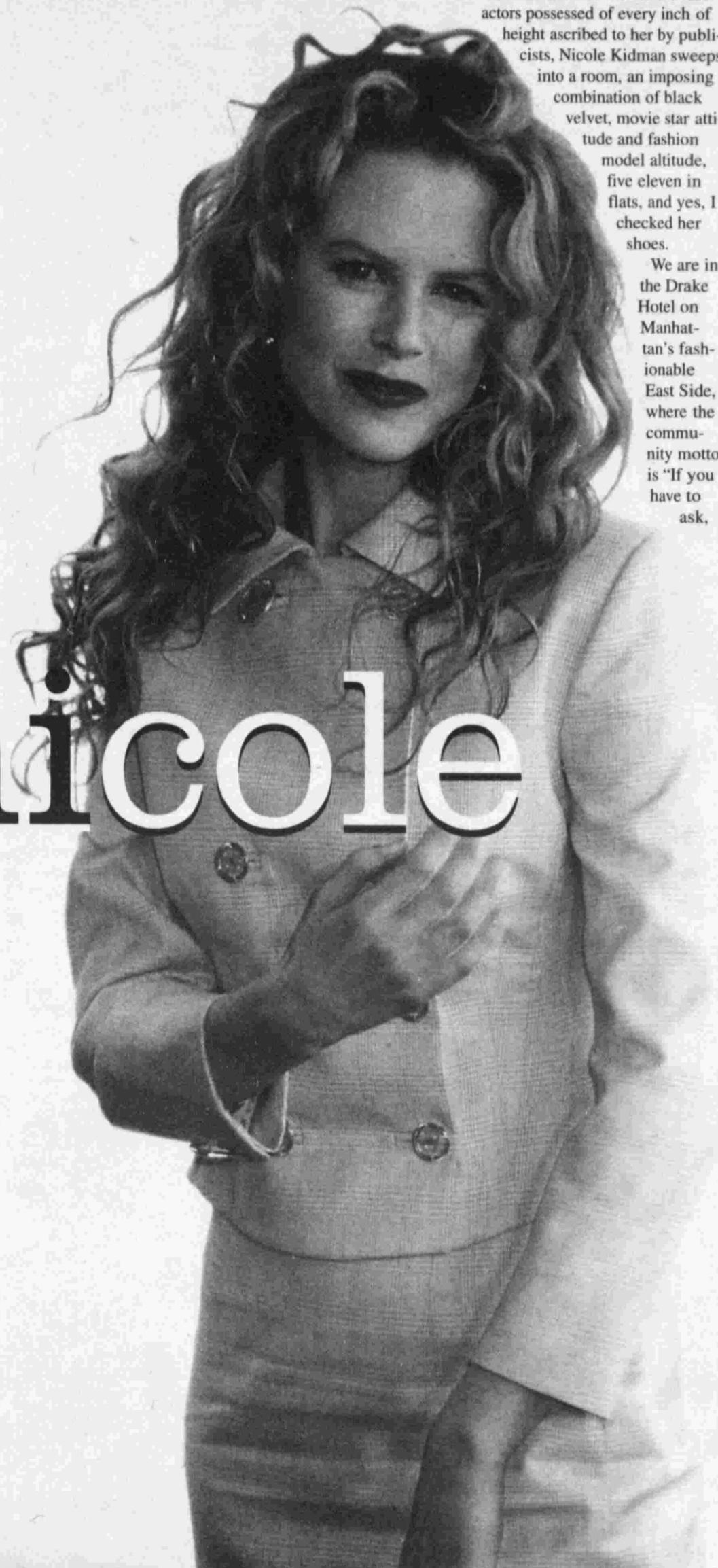
Fortunately, she is more forthcoming on *The Portrait Of A Lady*, a film that was delayed more than two years after the original starting date.

#### Desperate desire

"I wanted to work with Jane desperately because I've known her since I was 14 and saw her short, *Passionless Moments*, which is one of the great film-school films. You can see this film and you know the director's great, and you can almost see how her work will develop, and she's only in film school! If I had to wait five or six years to do *Portrait Of A Lady*, I would wait for her."

I suspect that willingness has a lot to do with Kidman's desire to be known as more than Tom Cruise's wife. A professional actor since her early teens in her native Australia, Kidman had leads in several films before and after her marriage. In fact, her two worst films are *Days Of Thunder* and *Far And Away*, in which she co-starred with Cruise.

Her best films, the Australian thriller *Dead Calm* and Gus Van Sant's witty black comedy, *To Die For*, reveal an unusual avoidance of the usual actor's great demand to be loved by audiences. Suzanne Stone in *To Die For* is not merely a cool, monstrous villain but she also has an authentically ugly wardrobe to over-



# nicole