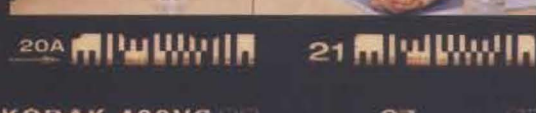
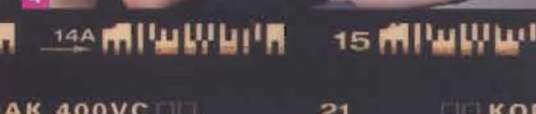


# Looking good:



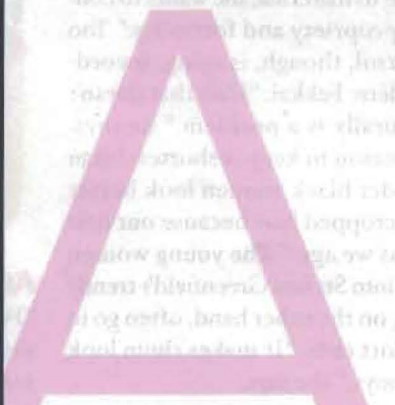
# What's age got to do with it?



Too old for jeans? Too young for couture? We asked 12 very opinionated style experts about what is—and isn't—appropriate when. KATHERINE WEISSMAN listened in.







A WOMAN WITH MASSES OF HAIR, A midhigh mini, and a well-worn face. A young girl in big-deal makeup and a frumpy sweater set. Although really egregious style crimes are pretty easy to spot, there's less clarity than ever before about what's "too young" or "too old." With women over 40 taking better care of their bodies and skin and feeling less trammled by convention, and younger ones looking eerily mature while they're still in high school, chronological categories shift and slip. Are there new rules about what's appropriate and what isn't? Are there perhaps no rules at all anymore? We threw some tough questions at our panel and got some surprisingly definitive answers.

### Can older women wear their hair long?

If you've worn the same style all your life and you're over 10, watch out. "When you're 50, it's weird to have hair flowing down your back," says Bethann Hardison. Why? It's ▶

1. Frédéric Fekkai, celebrated hairstylist and salon owner.
2. Iman, beauty entrepreneur and former supermodel.
3. Simon Doonan, creative director, Barneys New York, and author (*Wacky Chicks*).
4. Reed Krakoff, president and executive creative director, Coach.
5. Joan Kaner, senior vice president and fashion director, Neiman Marcus.
6. Julie Chaiken, founder and CEO, Chaiken clothing.
7. Dayle Haddon, author and model.
8. Valerie Steele, cultural historian and director, the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology.
9. Jeff Mahshie, Chaiken designer.
10. Bethann Hardison, founder of Bethann Management Co. and television producer.
11. Stefani Greenfield, co-owner and founder, Scoop clothing boutiques.
12. Bobbi Brown, makeup artist and founder, Bobbi Brown Cosmetics.



a sexual message, explains Valerie Steele: "Undone hair is associated with unbridled passion. As a woman passes from nubile to maternal, she wants to convey more propriety and formality." Too much control, though, is aging, according to Frédéric Fekkai. "Hair that doesn't move naturally is a problem," he says. Another reason to keep it shorter: Iman thinks "older black women look better with very cropped hair because our hair gets thin as we age." The young women who come into Stefani Greenfield's trendy boutiques, on the other hand, often go in for too-short cuts. "It makes them look like little boys," she says.

**Dying to look younger? Certain haircolors should be left to teens and pop icons, say the panelists.**



### And what about haircolor?

"People are always begging me to color my hair," says Bethann. "You'll take so many years off," they say. But I don't want to take years off. I'm a naturalist." If you do color, everyone agrees, softer is the way to go. Frédéric: "Very dark hair can look harsh." "Either color or don't, but *no roots*," insists Julie Chaiken. And no shades unknown to nature. "We should be through experimenting with blue hair by the time we're 50," says Dayle Haddon. Bethann: "Extreme-colored hair does not look good when you're older—unless you're an icon like Patricia Field or a mature woman on a punk kick, which I love." Being silver, it turns out, is a kind of beauty ideal. "I've been coloring my hair for 18 years," 30-something Stefani says, "but one day I hope to go all white."

### How much exposure is too much?

Great legs and opaque pantyhose notwithstanding, the panel isn't persuaded that thigh-high skirts are kosher for the older woman. "Just above the knee is okay, but real minis should be worn only through your 20s—28 at most," says Valerie, who sets the age limit on short shorts in public at 50. "You've lost tone, even if you have a good body." Joan Kaner offers some priceless advice: "If you lived through a trend when it first happened, you're too old to wear it the second time around." Iman, at 48, says, "The only thing I would never wear is hot pants," and Stefani suggests selective baring. "You can still show skin as you get older, but make it your back, shoulders, and collarbones" rather than overtly erogenous zones.

### Does our makeup *have* to be more toned down as we age?

"Red lipstick is horrific on older women," says Iman. "It's garish and hard." Bobbi Brown begs to differ. She hates bright red or pink on 25-year-olds ("It looks like their mother's lipstick") but thinks it can be terrific as we age. And going heavy on the lip gloss—is that strictly a youth thing? "I love it for myself," says Stefani, "but I can't see my mom glossing it up." Other makeup beefs: "black, smoky eyes" on women in their 20s, "blue shadow or liner" on women over 50 (Bobbi). "Blusher used as a contour" (Iman—but she thinks bronzer, discreetly applied, looks good on everyone). Bonus points if you're not into what Stefani calls "the sun look—deeply tanned women with blonde hair."

### Jeans after 50?

Denim, baseball caps, sneakers—some American institutions seem to transcend the generation gap...or do they? "Denim is so strongly associated with youth that it really doesn't look good on people in their 40s," Valerie says. Others on the panel are more permissive. "My grandmother, who's 86, wore jeans until a few years ago," Stefani says. "But no low-riders with the fringe and the holes, no distressed or torn denim." A chorus of agreement: "No hip-huggers with the butt crack showing!" (Iman); "I don't want to see anybody's belly button!" (Joan). Bobbi, now in her mid-40s, still wears jeans, but "I don't see my friends in their >



**Color code: Even your favorite lipstick might cause a red alert, depending on your age.**



**Would the cutaway style and mini work on sixties model Peggy Moffitt if she were over 40?**



60s and 70s wearing them.” Jean jackets, yes, but not matched up with jeans, says Stefani, because “that looks like a leisure suit.” Jeff Mahshie says, “Overalls? For babies only.”

### Leather or not?

Because it evokes skin, rebellion, even sexual perversion, is leather intrinsically kinky—and thus too tough to carry off for older women? It’s a taste issue, says the panel. “Beautiful, tailored leather is chic at any age,” says Reed Krakoff. Joan wears it for traveling; Dayle says her mother combines it beautifully with animal prints. “Maybe you wouldn’t wear a biker jacket as you get older,” says Valerie. “But why not honey-colored suede?”

### Who gets to wear sweats?

Exercise clothes, thanks to Juicy Couture and the persistence of hip-hop chic, are hot even among people who never enter a gym. Do they work out for older women? Oy, says Iman. Oh, joy, says Bethann: “Grandmothers were wearing them *first*.” Dayle likes the comfort of elastic waists. Stefani sells sweat suits—some in cashmere—to everyone. “They’re cozy. Just make sure they’re not too tight or too baggy.” Jeff’s one-liner: “If you’re still exercising at 80, you get to wear sweats.”



Not your grandmother's sweat suit: J.Lo helped make it chic at any age.

### Too-old dowdy or too-old sexy?

French twists? Long skirts? “A too-staid 20-year-old is almost more upsetting than a 50-year-old in shorts,” Jeff says. Joan isn’t so sure: “*Polished* and *finished* are not dirty words.” Stefani, who knows teenage girls—“they shop in packs”—also knows how age-inappropriate they can be. “There is too-old *dowdy* and too-old *sexy*,” she explains. “I see young girls dressing so seriously, in headbands, flat shoes, androgynous shirts and jackets.

They should try to look more sophisticated, not more mature.” Her thoughts on the Lolita faction: “There’s a difference between going to the Grammys and going to school. Girls’ clothes are getting too risqué.”

### Such bad trends

“In” things on women over 50 (or in some cases, on anyone at all) that make *O*’s panel cringe: crop tops, dragon lady nails, ditzy little handbags, huge jewels, poufy hair, eggplant-purple hair, baseball caps worn backward, ruffles, Peter Pan collars, and puffy sleeves (Iman: “Infantile things drive me nuts!” Simon Doonan: “They make older women look perverse”), jumpsuits (Simon: “On older people, they’re tragic”), anything see-through (Joan: “It’s like wearing a sign saying I’M AVAILABLE”), anything with writing



on it. Self-punitive stuff—piercing, tattoos—is clearly out. About fads, Jeff says, “If you haven’t done it by age 20, don’t!”

Some looks are universally relegated to the don’t-even-think-about-it category.

So here’s the deal: Rather than subscribing to absolute principles of style—which might crush our sense of adventure and condemn us to a lifetime of anxious glances in the mirror—let’s just rely on some bottom-line advice from our experts. “What makes women look appropriate,” says Reed, “is being comfortable with what they have on.” And from Frédéric: “Any kind of pretending is all wrong. Go with what you’ve got.” In other words: Life isn’t a masquerade, old chum. The heady thing about growing older is that it allows us to give less of a damn about what other people think. We can wear pants all the time (Katharine Hepburn did). We can forget the latest makeup, or any makeup. As long as we follow our own comfort and pleasure and sense of who we are, we will never look inappropriate. We will only look more and more gloriously ourselves. ●

## Age: The Real Tip-Offs

There are about 35 of us beauty editors at a presentation of a company’s new product. I’m new, too, new to the job of beauty editor, just learning the ropes. Most of the women are lovely, sparkling, and girlish; only a few of us have seen 40 (and fewer yet, like me, are peering fondly back).

A convivial young man standing at a wooden podium welcomes us. “Thank you all for coming,” he says, sparkling a little himself. “I have a question for you,” he says. He leans against the podium professorially: “Can anyone tell me, what are the four signs of aging?” I generally do well in classroom situations, and greenhorn though I am, I know the answer he’s looking for: fine lines, sagging skin,

excessive dryness, etc. But I’m reluctant to raise my hand. Because if I do, and I give him the answer I believe is true, I’m afraid I might put a blight on the magazine I love and now represent. What if the young man is offended because I’m not playing along? So I sit on my hands and regretting, regretting, bite my tongue. Today, however—two years of experience and a lifetime of

antiaging presentations later—is a different story. Ask the question again; in fact, I dare you to ask the question. Because now I am very sure there is only one right answer, and it is my happy responsibility to give it. What are the four signs of aging? They are Wisdom, Confidence, Character, and Strength. Look for them not with dismay, but with hope. —Valerie Monroe