

The oldest surf chick in town

I have a penchant for the surf chick look, confesses Lexie Williamson

feature

My wardrobe is heaving with flip-flops, chunky trainers, low-slung baggy jeans, hippy beads and midriff-baring Billabong T-shirts. In my mind's eye I'm backpacking around Australia with a golden tan and no commitments, man. In everyone else's eyes, I'm another 34 year-old mother of two in drizzly London. The only real bit is the scraggy blond hair which is still pretty authentic, thanks to the six-weekly highlighting talents of Vince, my mobile hairdresser.

My problem is that I don't know what a 34 year-old mother of two is supposed to wear. Pushing a buggy along the street in my surf kit I can sense the 16 year-olds having a sly snigger but what's the alternative? I, like every woman over 30, receive the Boden catalogue but, though the clothes are nice...well, I suppose that's it; they are just too nice.

I would probably look effortlessly chic in a pair of slinky black trousers but I'm just not ready yet to be so sensible. Besides, snot-splattered slinky doesn't quite have the same style impact. Fat Face or White Stuff, however, say 'we know the nearest you'll ever get to the Big Blue is a Clapham Holmes Place swimming pool full of screaming five-year-olds, but you are still a hippy chick at heart.' And I buy the dream, in every colour.

It's not just me who is having an age/image crisis. Top Shop is full of 30 and 40 year-olds milling around self-consciously, half expecting to bump into the teenage girl from next door who baby-sits.

The clothes look OK on the rails – you can spot these 30-somethings reasoning with themselves 'yep, I can pull off Victoriana' but in the changing room their age begins to show. The puffy sleeves are just silly, everything is a size 8 and frankly not made for ladies with post-baby wobbly bits and, damn it, just not very well made. And off they head to Jigsaw.

There are some age/style rules that few women of 30-plus break. For example, miniskirts are outlawed everywhere aside from the 200-yard amble from hotel room to sun lounger before exposing swimsuit or 'tankini' (a splendid invention for those unable to relinquish the bikini but unwilling to expose the jelly belly).

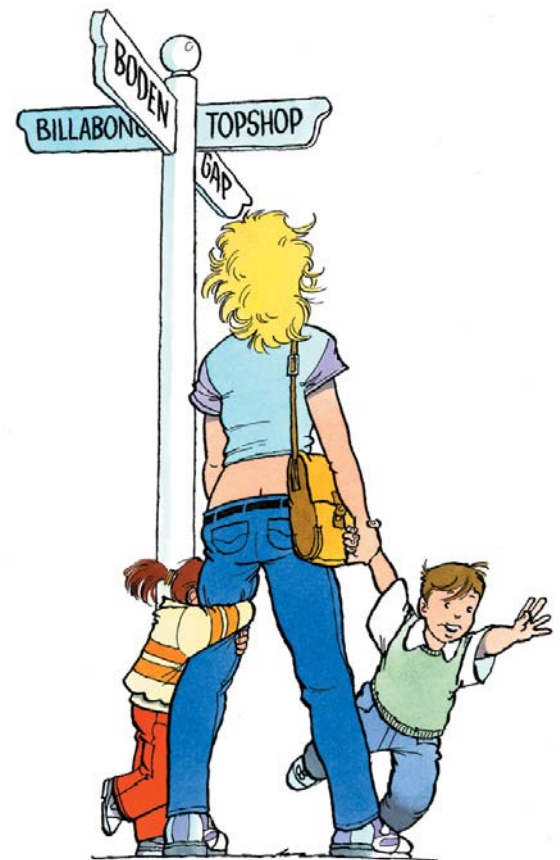
Even miniskirts with thick tights and big winter boots will mutton-dressed-as-lamb make. Sleeveless tops should also be treated cautiously unless you have the Astanga-forged biceps of Madonna. But every year there are a few trends which catch me out and in 2005 it was skinny jeans.

On paper – or more specifically in the pages of the women's magazines – skinny jeans seemed an acceptable purchase for a 34 year-old keen to show she still has a little edge. Every time I opened a glossy mag, Kate or Sienna were sporting them and Kate's a 30-something.

Ordinary mortals in the high street were also striding confidently along in knee-high boots pulled over a pair of skinnies snapped up from that old faithful Gap. So I went for it, ushered into my changing room by an early 20-something sales assistant who told me to 'go for it' and then probably went off to the staff room to share a snigger.

But as I hauled them over my thighs I got that familiar 'Top Shop Changing Room' moment and the ugly truth was staring me in the mirror: I was too old for skinny jeans. Half of it was mental: they reminded me of my early 80's drainpipes with the red piping up the side and secretly sipping a can of Tennant's Extra at the school disco with a spotty boy called Barry.

But it was mostly because my normally quite boney arse had miraculously ballooned to a size 18. Bootcut are a lot more flattering, I reasoned, and gave it six months before Kate and Sienna were back in their flares. It wasn't such a disastrous shopping trip; on the way back to the



car park I found a surf dude shop and bought an Animal T-shirt to wear with my bootcut jeans.

So skinny jeans weren't for me but it won't stop me being captivated by the next fashion trend; the very same one being dissected long into the night by my 13 year-old niece and her sleepover buddies. This is probably because although my niece sees me as ancient – just as I would have done at that age – I still feel like a mere slip of a girl at 34.

In our mother's day I'd probably have cut off my long locks and had a head full of curlers in by now instead of sitting cross-legged in front of the mirror trying to tame my mop with a pair of ceramic straighteners. And if curls come back, I'll buy some gadget to do that too.

Trinny and Susanna would, no doubt, wag a perfectly manicured finger and shove me towards flowing knee-length skirts, floral shirts, wide belts and blazers in flattering pastel colours. I would probably look very smart as well as looking my age but my husband – 43 year-old doctor by week, die-hard surf dude by weekend – wouldn't recognise me. Maybe one day I will chuck out those flip-flops but, for now, here's to being the oldest surf chick in town.