

Silver stylistas

You call this invisible? Meet four inspiring women defying age—one truly fabulous outfit at a time

By Cecily-Anna Bennett Photography Nick Scott



“MY BODY IS A CANVAS FOR CREATIVE EXPRESSION”

Lesley Crawford, 60, DRESSES OTHER
PEOPLE FOR A LIVING. BUT IT'S HER OWN LOVE OF
FASHION THAT'S DELIVERED THE RICHEST REWARDS



I've always been interested in dressing as a creative art form. I don't restrict myself to one particular look. I really like to mix it up. With my job as a stylist for SBS, I'm out and about every day, looking at clothes, buying, borrowing jewellery and trying to get the best possible deals. I need to look professional and reflect the work I do, so in a way, I'm a bit of an ambassador. I know which shapes look best for my body. I love colour and prints but also adore monochrome. I guess you could describe my style as eclectic with a great love of accessories. One of my most prized possessions is a hat I bought online. It's a green straw top hat with white paint splashed on it. When I went to Paris on holiday for five weeks, it wouldn't fit in the suitcase so I wore it at the airport... in the plane queue. I had many magical moments in that hat—and met people that I never would have if I'd not been wearing it.

I'm very organised. In the morning, it's like my body is a 3D canvas. Because I live in a warehouse, I have quite a bit of space so I have everything on separate racks, for my coats, dresses, skirts, pants and tops. Everything's colour-coordinated. I have all of my accessories in a metal stationary cabinet, which my husband has lined with felt, and I have photographs on the outside so I can find things easily. To be honest, dressing up is my creative outlet.

I developed my passion for accessories while working for Rosie Nice in Paddington for eight years. She started the first accessories store there—Nice Things—and it was all very cutting-edge. There was constant inspiration and I was lucky to be involved in buying both locally and overseas. When I was younger, there was more peer pressure to conform, but you shed that as you get older. These days, I dress for myself but I also dress for other people. They get as much pleasure out of it as I do. In some ways you're like a mirror: if you feel good about yourself, then those feelings are reflected back at you.

I'm definitely a visual observer and need constant visual stimulation, so I love magazines, read a lot of fabulous art books, go to the movies and the art gallery regularly. Even on the street during an average day, my eyes are always open. I love native American jewellery, African prints and the way African women dress.

Of course, I sometimes have days when I think, “It's going to be a black day today,” but that's okay. You can't always be the peacock. Still, I really enjoy how clothes make me feel. It's about personal pride. If you put a bit of effort in, everything feels better—it's energising.

When I turned 60, it didn't bother me at all. We all live to be close to 100 now so it's not like 60 is the end of your life any more. I hope I'm still working when I'm 80. I work with a lot of younger people too and that keeps me youthful. Having a smile on your face and enjoying what you do makes a big difference as well. When it comes to dressing creatively though, anyone can do it. It's all about the colours and shapes that suit your body. You shouldn't hesitate, just make it fun. Say to yourself, “Hey, why can't I wear that?” You can. The key is to choose clothes that make you feel good. It really is that simple.

Want more? [instagram.com/lesleyhasmanyhats](https://www.instagram.com/lesleyhasmanyhats)



“I’VE ALWAYS HAD A REBELLIOUS STREAK”

Tutti Bennett, 64, PERSONIFIES LUST FOR LIFE. BUT WHEN DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER, SHE STEPPED UP HER STYLE A NOTCH, BECOMING EVEN MORE COLOURFUL AND VIBRANT

Looking at me now, you probably wouldn’t believe I used to be shy. I grew up in Bathurst, where we were the only Jewish family. My father, a holocaust survivor from Germany, and my mother, who was Russian, were nothing like the Aussies, so we were already considered ‘different’. It was a little mortifying not fitting in, but in retrospect, it turned me into the rebel I became. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve shed my concern with what people think of me, and have decided that life is too short to spend time with people who are vexatious to my spirit. For me, getting dressed every day is fun—an exercise in

creativity. It’s how I express myself and it relates to how bright and colourful I feel on the inside. I’ve never been swayed by faddish fashion. If it’s trending, my rebellious side baulks at wearing it until it isn’t ‘in’ any more.

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and during the 18 months I was having chemo and radiotherapy, I decided to step my style up a notch. I dealt with my illness by becoming even more colourful, crazy and vibrant. It wasn’t just for myself; it was a way of connecting with other patients and making them smile. Even going bald was an opportunity to tie ever more flamboyant headscarves—something I’ve been wearing for years. Some days, during chemo, I’d teach other women at the Chemo Cottage how to tie scarves themselves.

I’ve always loved headwear and over the years have amassed quite a collection. It doesn’t matter what sort of a hair day you’re having, you just pop on a hat or tie a scarf and off you go. It can immediately smarten up or add interest to an outfit. The big bow has become a main part of my look and I have to admit, I get stopped regularly in the street by people wanting to know how I tie my headscarf, or where I buy my clothes, or just to compliment me on my outfit or accessories.

I definitely know how to put clothes together, though I’ve never turned it into a career. For the last 35 years I’ve worked alongside my husband as the business manager of our graphic design business Bennett Creative Group. I don’t feel like I’ve ever really found my professional creative calling, so it gives me great pleasure to use my knowledge of fashion to help the people I love feel good.

I’m proud that I’ve been able to pass my sense of style down to my daughters Cecily-Anna, 33 [*Prevention’s* features editor] and Sonia, 29, who’s a fashion designer. I think they found it confronting growing up in Sydney with such flamboyant parents (my husband Paul matches me in the fashion stakes) but these days, I’m thrilled I could instill in them an appreciation for being unique.

I’ve never minded growing older. My plan is to continue getting more eccentric, colourful and vibrant each year. Every Monday and Friday I meet my friend Ayse who’s in her early 40s—we have coffee, do the crossword and shriek with laughter from beginning to end. I make sure I eat healthily (but don’t deny myself), and four times a week, I do aqua aerobics. After all, I’m only 64 so of course I don’t feel old. And I can’t imagine that I ever will.

Love Tutti’s style? Visit [instagram.com/tuttiifruitty1](https://www.instagram.com/tuttiifruitty1)



“YOU NEED NEVER BE INVISIBLE”

WHEN **Gene Sherman**, 67, DISCOVERED A LOVE FOR ALL THINGS SCULPTURAL, SHE HAD NO IDEA OF THE IMPACT IT WOULD HAVE. TODAY, SHE CURATES HER WARDROBE WITH THE SAME KIND OF DISCIPLINE AS SHE DOES HER ART GALLERY

Somebody once told me I live a curated life—and when I think about it, it’s true. I have a very structured approach to everything I do—from the books I read, to the food I eat, to the clothes I wear. Growing up in South Africa, I didn’t think about style in the way I do now. My grandmother made clothes and I used to have a basket of cutouts from magazines of items I wanted her to remake or alter—so my interest went back as far as I can remember. I never wore primary colours—rather off-purples, dusky greys or dark olive—they were always off the spectrum and more shadowy than they were bright. Then I came to Australia and I changed. It was a very specific kind of evolution.

For years I was a lecturer in French literature at Sydney University; I did my doctorate; I taught in a high school. After almost six years of teaching, I took a year off and with the time to finally explore the shops and galleries around me, two things meshed simultaneously. One, I became friendly with a rather eccentric woman called Celia Winter Irving, who ran a sculpture gallery in Glebe, and I realised sculptural forms resonated with me. I also discovered a shop run by another eccentric woman where I found the most interesting outfits by Japanese designers.

I started working with Celia two days a week and then I took over the gallery when she moved to Zimbabwe. I decided to focus on art from Australia, the Asia Pacific and the Middle East. In 1987 I went to Japan with two of the sculptors I’d introduced to the gallery. I’d ask people about the labels I’d bought in Sydney, “Have you heard of Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo (of Comme des Garçons)?” Of course they had, but were suprised I knew of them. Since that first trip, I’ve been to Japan 46 times. For 25 years I bought clothes only by these three artist designers in Japan and wore



them religiously. Now I buy work by other designers too, like Alistair Trung, but the sculptural aesthetic is similar.

I’ve developed a policy whereby I only have 35 hangers in my wardrobe. I don’t wear dresses and I don’t count basic black T-shirts or shoes; just 35 wearable items for summer and winter, night and day. When I acquire something, I retire something. I never allow myself to become emotionally attached. If something comes in and I have to get rid of something else, it takes me about 10 seconds to decide. Since 2009 I’ve donated 75 of my ‘retired’ pieces to the Powerhouse Museum. They put on an exhibition of my collection in 2010.

I’m a great believer in focus and discipline, although I’ve thankfully mellowed with the times. I’m much more easygoing with my six grandchildren than I ever was with my two children. I’m more relaxed in the way I approach life. I’m less demanding of others, though I’m only a tiny bit less demanding of myself—I’m a perfectionist, after all.

I’ve heard it said that women get to a certain age and are invisible, but I feel the opposite. As long as you develop a persona of your own, you need never become invisible. And because I keep up to date—not just with my clothes, but with my thinking, reading, art-going and film-going—young people are drawn to me. I have an educator’s mind and instincts and they see there’s wisdom there. I keep my ideas fresh, and my look fresh, which gives me an entrée into the contemporary world—which is where I want to be. I don’t want to be living in the past. I move with the times. It’s a very healthy thing to do as you get older.

For more Gene, go to [instagram.com/scaffgenesherman](https://www.instagram.com/scaffgenesherman)

31%

How many women felt compelled to slip on their favourite shoes when feeling happy, as opposed to low, in a US study. Proof fashion is powerful medicine!

JEWELLERY IS MY PASSION

Sarah Jane Adams, 59,
GREW UP IN POST-WAR ENGLAND. NOW
ANTIQUATE JEWELLERY ISN'T JUST A JOB, IT'S
BECOME A FORM OF SELF-EXPRESSION

From a young age I was drawn to fabulous textiles. I grew up in post-war England where the clothes were pretty drab. So I started going to jumble sales where I'd find things that were unbelievably fabulous. I've always had an eye for the unusual and it was such discoveries that inspired my career as an antique dealer because I loved unearthing exotic stuff.

I was much more of a peacock then than I am now. I had purple, green and pink hair, and was over the top, but my style hasn't changed that much over the years. It's still very London, very eclectic. My style can be quite punk, but it's not straightforward—I don't go out in tartan and chains with my hair glued up! I'm a bit of a chameleon, so I wear a lot of different looks, colours and textures, depending on my mood. Every morning I wake up, see what the weather's like, how I'm feeling and then pull it together.

I still wear clothes now that I had when I was 18. One of my favourite things is a 1920s silk jacket, which I've repaired numerous times over the years. I have photographs of myself wearing it aged 18, on my first big, brave trip away from England, staying in Paris for a week. When my children were little and their baby teeth fell out, I had them mounted in 18 carat gold so they look like little mushrooms. I still wear those a lot, too.

The funny thing is, I think I'm invisible sometimes. I don't have great eyesight, so I've never noticed if people are looking at me or not, and I don't really care. I've

never dressed for anybody but myself. I hope that as I've got older I've matured emotionally and become more responsible, but in my heart I'm still young. I'm not denying that I'm growing older—I'm embracing it and am taking more care of my body. I've started to practise yoga, I've stopped drinking alcohol, I don't smoke cigarettes and I try to go to bed at a sensible time. My main fault is that I work too hard in my antique jewellery business (saramai.com.au) because it's my passion.

Jewellery is such an important part of my life—not because of the value, but because of the symbolism. People who know me well will be able to tell how I'm feeling or what I'm up to just by the images of jewellery I post on my instagram page. It's a form of non-verbal communication, and it's been my vehicle to convey messages when I've found it hard to say things.

By the time I turn 60 in April, I plan to be a lot more free. I've had children, I've been a mum and I'm giving myself permission to be able to think about myself, because for the past 25 years I've had to think about others first. I've decided my last 30 years, or however long I've got, are going to be more about me and what I want to do. I've already done a lot of travelling—it's more about having the opportunity to travel internally; to sit and have some me time; to streamline my life.

There's so much pressure for people to look a certain way and be a certain way these days. When you look at other cultures, the elders are respected for who they are in their hearts and their heads, for what they can offer in terms of their personalities—their words and their wisdom—not what they look like. So in my opinion, if someone wants to go through life wearing beige, it's not a crime. If you want to be bland, go for it. I've met some beautiful tribal people from primitive cultures on my travels and the elders are graceful, poised, elegant and natural. It just goes to show that how you look on the surface—what you wear physically—is not what it's all about at all. The most important thing is attitude. **P**

 For a glimpse inside Sarah Jane's creative world follow [instagram.com/saramaijewels](https://www.instagram.com/saramaijewels)

Style icons
we love



LEE LIN CHIN

The much-loved SBS newsreader manages to walk an impressive line between utterly professional and unfailingly quirky—a fabulous combo!



JENNY KEE

This respected fashion designer is famous for her colourful botanical prints and bright clothes, as well as her chic bob and red specs.



ITA BUTTROSE

The impeccably dressed media trail blazer, Alzheimer's advocate and Australian icon, has a style that's sophisticated and timeless.

HAIR & MAKE-UP: ANNA LE AND KATIE GOERLACH. CLOTHING: MODEL'S OWN. PHOTOGRAPHY THIS PAGE: GETTY IMAGES (ITA BUTTROSE AND JENNY KEE), NEWSPIX (LEE LIN CHIN).



Inspired by these fabulous women? Head to preventionmag.com.au for more real-life makeovers, right now!