

## A LOOK FOR A

# *lifestyle*

Counsellor and author Keren Smedley is reclaiming confidence for women in their 50s. She was a school teacher until middle age brought a chance at a new career – and the opportunity for a big style rethink...

PHOTOGRAPHS CHRIS TUBBS

**AGEISM EXPERT KEREN SMEDLEY** is starting a revolution on behalf of 50-plus women everywhere. At 57, she believes her generation is neglected by society – and by themselves.

Keren began her working life as a secondary school biology teacher, but then, in her 40s, she decided to change careers and became a counsellor for 'mid-life muddles', as well as a personal and business coach and consultant. 'At the time, coaching of that kind was a new concept,' says Keren. 'It's all about focusing on goals so you can achieve what you want to.' As she was embarking on a new career, Keren felt she needed to rethink her style and adjust her wardrobe accordingly.

Keren's interest in age-related issues came at a point in her life when she was increasingly aware of her own age. 'I was working in large companies helping with employee relations when the Age Discrimination Act came into effect. As a result, I became involved in formulating their age policies. It's become even more relevant in the current economic climate as older people find themselves redundant or trying to re-enter the work force at a difficult time. In terms of employment, it's about making people aware that our many years of experience and transferable life skills make us very employable.'

It's not only the work environment that can be difficult for people mid-life, says Keren: 'Being in your 50s and 60s now is different from how it used to be. We're fitter, healthier and we're doing more – but we're a missed-out group. We're not sexy enough to be interesting to the world, but we're not old enough to need attention. The biggest problem, though, is that we play to that belief. We are the first group to have a high divorce rate, and we're sandwiched between looking after elderly parents and

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our children, many of whom need financial help in their 20s and even 30s. Society says we should be winding down, but we can't afford to retire – and actually we don't feel like taking it slow! 'There's no set blueprint for my generation, so I believe we need to change the way we think about ourselves – then society will follow suit. We should be embracing our age. There is such pressure to look young, but we need to take a stand and believe it's about looking as good as we can for our age. This is a much bigger issue for women – there's a level of acceptance of ageing [CONTINUED OVER PAGE]



