





It's a New Age

To some women, fighting the signs of aging isn't a quality they look for in a night cream; it's the gospel by which they approach their entire existence. And lines—both the ones on their face and the ones in their life—are slowly being erased. By Lindsay Van Gelder

Here's to you, Mrs. R.! We want to salute your fabulous fortyish foxiness while we can, just in case your kind is going the way of the saber-toothed tiger fur coat. We raise our martini glasses to your tobacco-honed growl, your well-preserved figure in the suspension-bridge bra, your sexy laugh lines, your dragon-lady come-hitherness, and your no-fucks-left-to-give aura of having been around the block more than once. You made maturity sizzle.

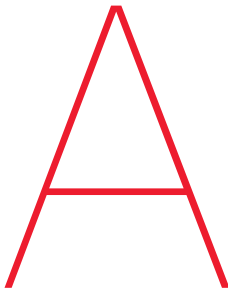
However, there seems to be a new temptress on the block. We've all seen her, of course—usually at Whole Foods stocking up on spirulina and hemp protein. And she doesn't look like a hot older woman at all, because she looks like...a teenager.

"Sometimes I come into an examining room and basically the only way I can tell who is the mother and who is the teenage daughter is that the daughter is the one with acne," jokes Miami dermatologist Jeremy Green, who also pokes fun at one of the most enduring and offensive cultural clichés: "Guys don't need to upgrade because your first wife is your second wife."

Then there was the selfie that went gonzo viral earlier this year showing 16-year-old Indianapolis twins and their 35-year-old mom, a.k.a. “Which one is the mom?” This is the new Madame Robinson—she basically skips a generation.

If you’re wondering why some women in their late 30s and 40s look they were born when Bill Clinton was president, the answer is simple: because they can.

Naturally, says Green, “a lot of it is good genes.” But this new breed of MILF, unlike her mother, grew up knowing not to bake her face with tinfoil, baby oil, and iodine, indeed never to go outdoors without sunscreen. She also works hard at defying the date on her driver’s license. She hits the gym every day for her cardio, augments it with Pilates or yoga, avoids stress (or at least goes to the Ashram to re-Zen every few months), gets eight hours of sleep, eats bushels of kale, and doesn’t touch carbs or gluten. Or dairy. Or sugar. Or anything processed.



And of course she has access to Ultherapy skin-tightening devices and other noninvasive tweaks “that weren’t on the radar of people in their 30s and 40s even ten years ago,” says Green, who also points to the ubiquitous use of retinoids and sunscreen as major factors. The new buzzword is “prejuvenation,” he adds, “and as long as it fits into the budget, it’s a beautiful thing.” Instead of waiting for your jaw or your brow to slacken and then overhauling it with a face-lift, you zap the first sign of a micro sag before anyone notices it but you—and the mirror, mirror on the wall.

This is an option that didn’t previously exist, and in some ways these lifelong Lolitas are almost a new species. But at the same time, their appearance is just a logical extension of the makeup, hair dye, and every other tool in the beauty arsenal that women routinely use to shear off years. If you can appear not just younger but jailbait-ishly young, what’s to stop you? Why should you allow a few fine lines around the eyes to stop the backward-traveling clock?

The look is not limited to American beauty-trend cocoons like New York City, Miami, and southern California. In Korea, the weirdly transglobal phrase “bagel girls” describes those who appear to be both baby-faced and glamorous. In Japan, the new Mrs. Robinson is called a *bimajo* (beautiful witch); thousands enter an annual *bimajo* beauty contest for those over 35.

The new Mrs. Robinson phenomenon “is a confluence of biology, culture, and technology,” notes Kjerstin Gruys, a sociologist and postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University’s Clayman Institute for Gender Research. Right now, the demographic consists of women who are both genetically blessed and able to afford high maintenance.

But in the not-distant future, technology could become cheaper and could improve to the point that biology will matter increasingly less. Cultural assumptions about class and gender could then change as well. It’s the democratization of a line-free face and toned biceps. “The example I like to draw is orthodontia,” says Gruys. “Straight teeth are no longer a marker of being rich. They’re a marker of not being poor, and everyone understands why parents make sacrifices so their kids can have straight teeth.”

Like the absence of gray hair at thirtieth high-school reunions, toddler-faced middle-aged people could start to seem perfectly normal. Of course, perpetual youth has traditionally disturbed society, going back to vampire lore and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In 1967, the filmmakers of *The Graduate* dressed the Ur-cougar, Anne Bancroft, in leopard-print hats, coats, and lingerie, telegraphing Mrs. Robinson’s predatory nature. There’s an underlying fear that if women can look adolescent, what’s to prevent them from acting that way?

The poster woman-child may be Rachel Lehnardt, a 35-year-old Georgia mother of five who was charged last year with contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Lehnardt’s arrest followed a party at her home where, according to the sheriff’s report, she allegedly played naked Twister with her 16-year-old daughter’s friends and ended up having sex with at least one of them. The full story is more sad than salacious—she temporarily lost custody of her children. But maybe most riveting of all is her forlorn mug shot, which was beamed out all over the world. Lehnardt looks like a high-school cheerleader who just found out her crappy SAT scores. Biological anthropologist Helen Fisher, the author of *Anatomy of Love* (W. W. Norton), believes “it’s a mistake” to drop decades. Human brains evolved over millennia to be able to put other people into categories, like gender, race, and age, and outliers disquiet us. If anything, Fisher adds, we’re evolving in a different direction from our ancestors whose Darwinian imperative involved a guy hunting down a nubile babe bursting with fresh eggs. “I’m not even convinced most men want a much younger woman anymore,” she says. “Children are expensive.” Fisher (who partners with match.com every year on a scientific survey of a representative sample of Americans per the U.S. Census) has found that 39 percent of men would make a long-term commitment to a woman who was a decade or more older than him. “Men want a woman who looks healthy and vibrant,” says Fisher. It may be a fact that separates humans from exactly zero other species, but unlike the rest of the animal kingdom, we have the means to lie to the world about our proximity to mortality. Whether or not we choose to use the tools at our disposal is between us and our gods.

Or at least our trainers.

“I’m not even convinced most men want

A Love Letter 20 Years in the Making

By Andrew Franklin

OK, I've never talked about this openly. But I like older women. I have always liked older women. I was into people's moms when I was a teenager. I'm not talking Ukrainian granny-porn fetishism. But it's a predilection.

When I was 17, I had an ongoing flirtation with Mrs. Kipp* at Birch Hill Country Club*, where I was a lifeguard. It was a flirtation that (at least I told myself) only just glancingly failed to be consummated. And I have never outlived that fantasy. Mrs. Kipp was knowing and sultry, smelled like figs and sunshine, and even had that Mrs. Robinson-y prematurely gray streak in her hair. (She actually looked an awful lot like Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate*—I wonder whether she didn't realize it and kind of steer into that curve.)

So it's with a certain nostalgia and sadness that I say this: In certain ZIP codes, the Mrs. Kipps of the world are an increasingly rare species. Mrs. Kipp aged beautifully; a whole subset of women today seem to have ceased aging altogether. It's a species I like to call Smartwater Women. They guzzle Smartwater as they leave SoulCycle six days a week. They guzzle Smartwater as they're on their way to get dermatological treatments. They guzzle Smartwater as they wait in line to buy more Smartwater.

I'm not talking about the gentle yoga moms who you can tell right away are moms. I'm talking about the women who wear size 0 spandex shorts and formfitting tank tops. Women with visible triceps and invisible laugh lines and hair the color of great wealth. They've out-Jennifer Aniston'd Jennifer Aniston herself. I'm talking about women who, from a distance, look like they are 26, 29 at the outside. But who, when you get closer, may be

closer to 40, or 50, or who even knows. Because you can't really tell up close, either. Because these ultra-Anistons remain unclassifiable, they've reached some kind of hard-won static Platonic ideal. They have reached, by dint of CrossFit, human growth hormones, sheer force of will, and rivers of Smartwater—the state of being (to borrow a phrase) Forever 21.

And it's confusing. When you're ogling a lady on the street (hopefully in a respectful and noncreepy manner), you want to know what kind of lady you're ogling. You kind of want to know what fantasy she fits into. So these ageless ladies in their stretch pants can short-circuit the system a little. Wait. Am I having a woman-of-a-certain-age fantasy or a woman-in-her-20s fantasy? Because they're different fantasies. (Though they're both pretty great. So there's that.)

But let's be completely superficial here: There's an attractiveness to a woman who looks like a great version of her age. I'm not saying the hottest thing in the world is a person who's totally acquiesced to her mortality. I'm not arguing against the miracles of regular exercise, good face creams, a diet high in antioxidants and low in sugars, or other things that are prescribed by the sensible people who run this magazine.

I'm saying there's something slightly terrifying about the Smartwater drinkers. On one hand, it's admirable—we should all possess such fortitude and work ethic. But there's a monomania there, a sense of brute determination in those eyes (and triceps!), that scares me.

And makes me wonder what Mrs. Kipp is up to these days.

*Details have been changed to protect the ogled.

a younger woman anymore.”