

OUVERTURE

AGING WITH ATTITUDE



Last summer, my boyfriend in Provence—he is a handsome, dynamic, whirlwind of a three-and-a-half-year-old gamin, half French, half Indian—said to me, “You’re old.” “Yes, I am,” I said. What else could I say? Of course, to a child someone forty is old. His father was shocked and apologized, but having reached my sixties, I’ve looked in the mirror. I now buy senior citizen tickets on France’s TGV train. But I still travel fast.

The thing is, though, inside my head I don’t feel old. I don’t really think about age, though I feel it sometimes . . . and see it. In my mind, I am sort of ageless or at least the age in which I place myself in memory’s pictures. Indeed, looking at old photos, I am a time traveler, fooling time and living inside those photos in the present tense.

Traveling on the TGV, though, I realize that I am as happy as I’ve ever been. And that’s a surprise. People dread getting old or feeling old, but old today is ninety, not sixty or even seventy. But again, I am not alone in discovering that there

are a lot of positives about aging. Here I am like the French women of my birth. As a class we are the happiest between sixty-five and seventy. Go figure. Works for me. Experts explain that it has to do with our maturity, which helps us make the choices that are good for us or satisfy us with what we have, whether we are women or men. Certainly at that age we are far less about becoming than being. We are not aspiring for a different professional position or career, our social set is well established, and we have come to accept our likes and limitations. And we don't have to deal with periods and PMS.

In America, I live in a youth-obsessed culture and a results-oriented culture. So old age is often cast in a negative light. We're less proficient at multitasking and don't look as good doing it. Is that a negative? I have a ninety-four-year-old friend who sometimes says to me, "Getting old stinks." Ah, but some people say that about being a teenager. I am always motivated by the very old to think about *what I can do* now to be better prepared to enjoy the next stages of my life. Economists to sociologists to psychologists try to determine the factors of being *satisfaits*, a milder form of "happy" the French prefer to show. I was surprised to learn that studies reveal we are the least happy between twenty and fifty, with possibly those forty-five to fifty hitting the least happy period and then increasing our *satisfaits* into our seventies. So be sure to celebrate your fiftieth birthday. It marks a new beginning to happiness.

When I was in my thirties and forties, I did not think about getting or being old. I mostly lived in the present, being busy and trying to live life to the fullest. I did, however, pay

attention to living a healthy lifestyle. And in my four books on the subject, three with an emphasis on developing a good relationship with food and with yourself, I shared some of the lessons I had learned along the way. But they are only a part of the *art and joie de vivre*.

I have the genes to live a great many years, and I want to know how to attack aging so to enjoy it to the fullest. And I know I am not alone. My friend never dreamed she would live to age ninety-four and never prepared for the later stages in life the way I will. I am not thinking so much about living long, but rather about looking good and feeling healthy in the decades ahead.

Our world is graying: Europe is aging, America is aging, China and other nations are aging. I am a baby boomer, and a reality is that every day more than seven thousand Americans turn sixty-five. By 2030, 18 percent of Americans will be senior citizens, up from 12 percent today. That trend is true for the majority of nations. By 2025, one-third of all Japanese will be sixty-five or older.

Because of the reception of my lifestyle books and perhaps because I was born French, I am often asked to share my tips on “aging gracefully,” an expression I don’t like. “Aging with attitude” is what I believe in.

As someone with a foot in two countries, my native France and adopted America, as well as continuing stops all over the globe, I can sometimes see the advantages (and follies) of each culture sharply and share what seems to work well—and not so well—with other women. Take facelifts and other cosmetic surgery.

Cosmetic surgery all over the world is becoming almost a religion, and many people worship at the doctor's office till they are stretched like a too-tight blouse and bear frozen smiles. France, a country devoted to female beauty and where women of a certain age are models of desire, elegance, and seductiveness, is not a land of facelifts, like South Korea or America, for instance. French women seek a more natural look and feel, opting for creams and scrubs and, okay, perhaps a few partake in a little Botox or another filler, and look to what they eat and wear before the surgeon's scalpel. And when they seek a little medical magic, it tends to be liposuction.

Cosmetic surgery is not going away, of course; it is going to increase, and I am not going to fight windmills. Statistics show that Asians, for just one group, are in love with it. Just the way once we've learned to live with air-conditioning (87 percent of US households have it) and don't look to the off switch but to more efficiency and a wiser use of climate controls, the people of the world are not going to turn off cosmetic surgery, something that is more than four thousand years old. But it is not going to make us younger or prolong our lives. It is a part of the holistic picture for some people. I prefer to paint first from the inside out, not from the outside in, as a means for aging with attitude.

As one looks at the second half of one's life, it's good to have a plan, a strategy based on "knowing thyself," common sense, and a zest for life. For me, it is about being *bien dans sa peau* (comfortable in one's skin) through all episodes and stages in life. You and I don't have the same genetics, we don't

live in the same places, we don't have the same resources, but we can have the same basic attitude: being comfortable in our skin. *Our own skin*. We are all unique, so no plan fits all sizes. Creating your own plan is vital, so you'll have to do some homework nobody can do for you. And a plan is a mental approach, an attitude.

The images touted in today's media, often of celebrities and then globalized, have made things worse. Yes, we live longer, but the cult of youth has made women more and more self-conscious and obsessed with looking younger than we are. Too often giving up seems like the easy way out. Too many women forty and up *se laissent aller*, let themselves go. Look around: fat is becoming scarily acceptable; so is dressing down, poorly, and distastefully (sometimes under the so-called umbrella of "comfort"). Then there are the quick fixes promoted on talk shows; in women's magazines and blogs; and with celebrities' recipes, tricks, and tips, invented by all sorts of "experts." American women tend, it seems to me, to behave in extremes; they are "all or nothing" in their approach to dieting, for instance, which I believe parallels how some women approach aging. They want and like to see themselves as young and perfect, but then they cannot ignore the slippery slope to getting old. Once they feel old, many give up. Why is that? It is attitude. The psychological and emotional impact of state of mind has a huge impact on our "exteriors."

It seems like every week a new recipe, diet, or product is born to keep you young, skinny, or beautiful. Believable? For the most part, no. Develop a system with some rituals,

some fun and spontaneity, some fine-tuning and reinvention as years go by—nothing drastic or painful; and the earlier you start the better, but let age forty be your latest start date. It's nature's starting signal for sure. If you are past forty, no worries, but hurry up and hop aboard.

What follows is a multifaceted approach to attacking aging from forty onward so you will appreciate life to its fullest through your second set of decades. Age fifty? Certainly time to tune in. In fact, it's never too late to learn and share these secrets. What's helpful and positive is emphasized throughout, and the volume is rich with information and new tips and tricks to achieve a personal winning formula. As is my style, I have included stories and anecdotes from my life that I hope you will enjoy and that will communicate meaningful advice. The fountain of youth cannot fit between the covers of a book, nor can the levels of detail on any rich subject searchable on the Internet. However, an attitude and categorical approach can. This book is designed to assist the readers—women but broadly applicable to men as well—to devise their own formula for life that enhances their looks, health, and pleasures, and helps them be comfortable in their skin at any age. This is a call to take up arms against the onslaught of aging. It provides the keys to taking off ten years from your body and mind.

Now, as we say in French, *attaquons*.

## ASSESSING GRAVITY



My husband has had a blond mustache his entire adult life. Except one day not too long ago he came to me and said, “You know, my mustache is all white.” It is, and was, probably for about three years before he noticed.

I don’t know what a fly thinks—if it thinks at all—when it sees itself in the mirror. But I know if we are going to manage our aging, when we grow older and look in the mirror we need to see ourselves as we truly are on the inside and the outside. A lot of us are kidding ourselves. We are not seeing the *now* us. We often are seeing who we *were*. Or we are blinded by who we want to be or who we think we are.

Truly knowing thyself is integral to aging well, being comfortable in your skin, and possessing a healthy, nondelusional, and uplifting attitude toward your own aging.

An essential element in aging with attitude is taking periodic hard looks at yourself in the mirror.

## FRENCH WOMEN DON'T GET FACELIFTS

What should you look for? You cannot pick up a book or magazine or watch or listen to a program about aging without recognizing topics containing the “usual suspects”: health, appearance, exercise, nutrition, lifestyle, medical miracles (a subcategory of which is supposedly cosmetic surgery), and relationships.

To which I want to add as a general category for self-assessment and eventually some self-modification:

- attitude

Some of the specific questions you might ask yourself when looking in the mirror will come later. However, let's recognize from the start the power of attitude. It is a magic pill. And people have searched for magic anti-aging potions probably as long as there have been people.

## FRENCH WOMEN'S ATTITUDE

Gravity works just the same in France as in the rest of the world, especially when you hit your sixties and seventies, if not sooner. But French women approach aging with a different mind-set than women from most cultures. With respect to growing old, the biggest difference between French women and most others is not grooming or clothing or nutrition or face and skin care; it is attitude. For starters, French women have a different definition of what constitutes being old. In a recent multinational survey, the French proved to be the least



concerned about aging, and a cool third believed “old” starts *after* eighty.

Certainly in France, a woman in her forties and fifties is still alluring and seen as an object of desire and acts the part. She feels it and acts it, but doesn't pretend she is ageless. She is comfortable in herself. She takes care of herself and for the most part watches her weight and external presence, but she doesn't attempt to look like her twenty-year-old self. America and many other cultures are youth cultures. France is not. Name the top French actresses who come to mind. They probably all exude an air of grace and alluring beauty that is not picture-perfect or reflective of them in their teens or twenties. Juliette Binoche? Born in 1964. The still-iconic Catherine Deneuve? Born 1943. Even those in their late thirties, like Marion Cotillard, come across as “mature,” exuding an alluring package of wholeness and experience.

There are a lot of young women in French films, but they are not endless Charlie's Angels, either. Consider good-hearted, flat-chested Amélie (Audrey Tautou). Women in their fifties and beyond are often shown as likely as not to have a lover, sometimes younger. While French women in movies and life may be petty bureaucrats in the office (a characteristic of the French) or objects of discrete desires, in their personal lives outside the silver screen, they revere being “intellectuals,” both little and big. French women are able to quote the Rousseau and Descartes from their high school days and are ready to discuss and debate anything and everything, from the food on their plates to the merits of the latest political scandal. Being an adult is being grown up. And being grown

up means losing some of life's insecurities, like worrying too much about gravity. There is much living in the moment for French women of a certain age, defiantly so.

You've heard the one that age fifty is the new forty. I have written that fifty-nine is sometimes the new sixty. Alas, there was a cartoon in the *New Yorker* that suggested, "Seventy-five isn't the new anything." Perhaps not, but it does suggest not holding back in your seventies...for what? Or even in your sixties and fifties *à la française*. *Carpe diem*.

### FEELING GROOVY

How often have you heard the maxims "It's mind over matter," or "Stop thinking about it or it will make you sick," or "She lost her will to live"? They surely fall into the nothing-new-under-the-sun category.

What's new, however—if you consider fifty years still new—is we now have the scientific evidence that the magic not only works but is human science. The field even has a fancy name: psychoneuroimmunology. Belief is powerful medicine.

Remember the placebo effect? It's the fact that in many cases, the more a person believes in a treatment or drug, the more likely they will experience improved health or behavior. Placebos have helped reduce anxiety, pain, depression, and a host of disorders. A few decades ago it was scientifically proven that the immune system is connected to the brain, that

there are complex communications among hormones and neurotransmitters.

Though hardly an all-in-one anti-aging pill, conscious belief and subliminal conditioning can control bodily processes, such as immune responses and the release of hormones. Put a Band-Aid on a child and somehow the child is soothed and feels better for no clear medical reason. We know a strong social network helps people survive cancer. Perhaps not a strict placebo but clear evidence of the brain's role in physical health and, obviously, associated mental health. Meditation, of course, is a mental means of ridding our minds of delusions and stress toward achieving a form of inner peace. Methods of meditation have enabled people to reduce blood pressure, alleviate pain, and effect changes in various brain and other bodily functions.

The point is, we have the power of making ourselves feel better. Let that sink in. It is a pretty amazing ability.

Realistically projecting, assessing the options, then shaping what we can and should be doing during the various later stages of life's road is the powerful mental medicine that can cure some of our ills and enhance our pleasures through life. Feeling groovy? Well, I do sometimes.

## **MEET EIGHTY-PLUS YVETTE**

Growing up in eastern France, in Lorraine, I had a babysitter who over time practically became part of the family. In the summers, for example, I used to be packed off to my grandmother's

country farmhouse in Alsace for a month or two, and Yvette did the packing and unpacking and ran daily interference for me with my stern grandmother...year after year. Yvette eventually married and had her own son and daughter to look after, and I left home for high school near Boston and college in Paris and a husband in New York, so we kept in touch mostly through my mother and an occasional cup of coffee. Despite that, we stayed close mentally. Eventually when my mother "retired" to the South of France, it was Yvette who could be counted on to check in on her and give reliable reports. And after her husband passed, she, too, "retired" to the South of France, in her case to the city of Toulon on the Riviera (home of the Airbus). It seems she found a wonderful companion and is living life in her eighties to the fullest with him. They even have a deluxe mobile home to go "camping" at a trailer park perhaps a half hour from their apartment. Every year now, they make a trip in summer up to my home in Provence for a much-anticipated visit.

Last summer, her delightful companion and her son, Claude, who lives in the extreme north of France, accompanied her. While we were having coffee with a piece of Tropicienne, the to-die-for cake named by Brigitte Bardot (yes, Yvette and I are both still very *gourmandes*, but now in moderation), the conversation led to New York as her son had come with his three daughters a few years ago and they had all fallen in love with the United States. Yvette said, "You know, Mireille, I am also here to talk about New York, as I really would love to come and visit you there to see the way

you live.” Then she added emphatically, “But I would like to do it *avant de vieillir* [before I age].” Now that was a statement from someone who is aging with attitude.

Right then and there we settled on the first week of November for a weeklong visit, displaying a live-life-with-pleasure-and-in-the-present-tense approach that comes with age. After she left, a thirty-two-year-old woman who was another houseguest said Yvette did not look her age but, more important, did not act her age. And it’s true. Yvette has a pleasant way of meeting and looking at you, and her eyes alone project a light and conspiratorial twinkle that tell immediately that she loves life and is enjoying every second of it.

A few months later, I e-mailed her son to get some information in order to organize a visit she would love, and her son confirmed that she is indeed in very good shape, full of life and pep and curiosity, and maintains a good sense of humor. She eats everything, just in smaller portions than she once did, and while she could perhaps lose a few pounds, she is comfortable and healthy in her skin. What did she want to do besides see how I live? See a musical and an opera, he shared. Then a few weeks later she added a professional basketball game to her list. Perhaps there is something to the claim that Madison Square Garden is the world’s most famous arena (and here I thought it was the Roman Colosseum). Physical limitations? I asked. She can walk fine, I was told, and the only thing she has problems with are stairs. *Hallelujah*. I reminded him that we have an elevator that goes to the fifteenth floor!

## MEET JACK

Jack beat cancer. And he liked to fight gravity. I met Jack early in my public relations career in New York. He was our outside printer and would visit twice a week to work with me on various projects. I never asked his age, but he surely was in his seventies at the time, and acting forty. One day as he was telling me about his love of France, I felt comfortable asking what his “recipe” was for his optimism, energy, and vitality, not to mention his constant nice disposition and sense of humor. I learned then that he had a bout of cancer in his fifties that was life-changing. Things were not going well with his treatments in New York, and he journeyed into alternative medicine and medical treatments outside the United States. I remember Mexico was one of the stops. But what he found was a lifestyle and mental attitude that embraced yoga and holistic healthy eating. It was a long journey for this mostly bald, elfish man from his upbringing in Brooklyn.

What was his recipe? His reply was simple: “I do yoga every morning and particularly a headstand for twenty minutes . . . and I eat healthy.” He saw my puzzled look, and before I knew it he was doing a headstand in my office to my open-jawed amazement. “Since my mid-fifties,” he explained once he was right side up, “I eat less. I eat meat and fish once a week, and eat mostly grains, eggs, fruits and veggies, good bread, which I make every Saturday” (no Wonder Bread for Jack). “Baking relaxes me, and the most important is that I eat a lot of soups with lots of spices and herbs and yogurt” (the

French woman's staple par excellence), and which he made himself as he wouldn't buy the supermarket "crap" (his word). Granted, this was before some natural and well-made yogurts we have today. That said, we now have hundreds of yogurts that Jack and I would put in the junk-food category because they contain too much sugar, including in some dreadful corn syrup, often jammy sweet fruit, and preservatives.

I said to him that he was either Buddhist or French in his other life. He claimed a mix of both and claimed that since he had reached his mid-fifties and his cancer did not recur, he had never felt better. I often have the image of him in his business suit and tie doing his headstand, and I imagine what would have happened had someone walked into my office, and I crack up. I loved Jack and always looked forward to his visits.

Placebo effect for Jack? In part probably, but it works, and he had the will, the attitude, to live. And, of course, he hit upon yoga and a healthy diet, both of which were soon to be scientifically proven to facilitate a long life, which he enjoyed.

## MEET DENISE

Admit it: we all know someone who we secretly wonder if they see what they really look like when they look in the mirror.

I have an old school chum, Denise, with whom I spent a lot of time in my twenties and early thirties. Now I see her perhaps once a year. And each time I am troubled and concerned by her

appearance. Denise really needs to look objectively in the mirror. Don't we all? When it is not Halloween and we look like we are dressed in our Halloween costume, ah, well, it is time to ring the wake-up bell.

Sometimes I wonder: Should I make a recommendation to her about her hair or makeup? We have lots we can do to challenge our aging bodies and minds toward a healthier and happier march to the inevitable. I'd just have to figure out how to make a suggestion or two to her nicely. Or maybe she's actually happy with her appearance?

But alas, she does not seem happy. In fact, she seems to have "given up" for no reason I can discern.

Perhaps you've seen the signs of what I mean about "giving up." She wears only black, or very dark-colored, frumpy clothes. She has given up the discreet lipstick and eye shadow that were her accent lights. Her hairstyle is dated and not flattering. Seeing her conjures up an image in my mind of an old lady out of some European photo from the 1940s. I don't want to think that way, but I can't help it. And she is not old in the sense that she has decades of life left based upon her family history and genetics.

With each passing year I am saddened that the gulf between our "attitudes" is widening. I choose to approach aging with a positive attitude, with a sense of purpose and self-appreciation. Her attitude seems to be more along the lines of aging with apathy.

Am I being critical? Sure, yet realistic, to illustrate a bad case of not seeing oneself and not aging well with attitude. I've worked hard to create a positive mental approach



to aging, and I want to protect that. When the women (and men) we surround ourselves with give up, it's depressing to be with them!

Can my old friend be shaken out of her lethargy? Just a few suggestions taken from chapters of this book would produce miraculous results. Maybe she will learn some secrets. But that would require her to see herself, and sometimes it is difficult for some women to face what's in the mirror.

Our female friendships are essential throughout our lives, but as we get older it's even more imperative to surround ourselves with positive people—people who have a similar outlook on life. Remember that old adage “You're only as old as you feel”? Surround yourself with people who are young at heart and take care of themselves, both body and mind . . . and watch what happens. I promise you'll like the results!

## FORGET THE SPHINX

How do we help organize our thoughts and actions for aging with attitude? I say, forget the Riddle of the Sphinx, forget crawling, forget walking with a cane, forget classifying old age as the third age of man; it can be depressing and diverting. For the purposes of this book, here is the classification and organizational trilogy around which I approach aging with attitude from inside out: **mental**, **physical**, and **external** (*appearance* is one of those atypical nouns without an adjective form in English, but here I am thinking externally about the *persona*, the mask, we put on—the face we put on for the faces

## FRENCH WOMEN DON'T GET FACELIFTS

we meet). How do we look, appear to ourselves and others? How do we feel physically, our health scan and beyond? How do we think and feel mentally?

Naturally, the physical, mental, and exterior appearance elements of aging do not proceed in discrete linear fashion like infancy leading to adulthood. Often, they cannot be separated. Taking care of your skin yields a healthy skin and glow and a look that makes you feel good about yourself. Certainly being healthy affects your appearance and attitude and vice versa.

There are many questions we need to ask ourselves when we look in the mirror as we assess ourselves as we age . . . from the general to the specific.

At the most general, ask yourself, *Do I like my appearance?* Are there things you can do to improve it? Do you want to? Some things like gravity are hard to change, though the effects can be tempered. How's your health? Are there things you can do to improve it? Do you want to? Read on. How's your attitude about yourself and aging? Are there things you can do to improve? Read on. There comes a time when you need to retire your bikini. Is it now? And how about those high heels? How about sex?

## NEW YEAR, NEW YOU

Every year, as true as the sun rises in the east, comes January and major "New Year, New You" marketing campaigns for self-help programs. Health clubs offer special memberships and

oversubscribe them because most people won't take advantage of the classes and machines in a couple of months. Miracle diet plans abound in magazines, books, and videos. Back-to-school, career-move ads and advice abound.

Certainly, the first of the year is a convenient and conventional time to make New Year's resolutions (of course, today or tomorrow is just as good for you to start your own twelve-month plan). The reality of resolutions made with the best intentions is that they are easily abandoned because the underlying plans are unrealistic and unsustainable. The yo-yo dieting that goes on each January, May to June (before the outdoor season), and the month before a big social event like a wedding is lamentable. Yes, it is possible and not that hard to lose five or even ten pounds in a month. Yo-yo... how likely is it that those pounds will stay off at the end of a year? Not very likely, which is why there is a new flavor of miracle diet promoted each January.

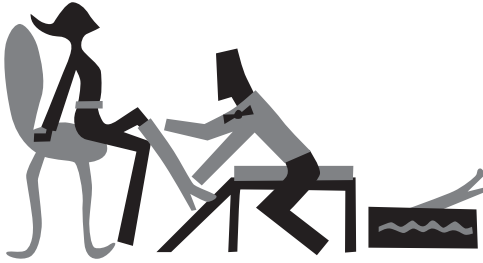
And that is why I believe wholeheartedly in *peu à peu* as the key to transformations. Changes that are drastic often don't stick. Taking things little by little means you arrive at your destination gradually, and if you fall off the path, it is easy to return to it. It's not failure but a slight delay. I also believe in taking an approach that emphasizes the positive, emphasizing what you can do, not what you cannot. Yes, you can eat chocolate and enjoy a glass of wine and not get fat.

A positive attitude adds good years to your life, but a positive attitude is not a plan for the second half of your life. Aging with attitude means an individualized plan for some mental, physical, and appearance adjustments for the upcoming year

and with an eye on an extended horizon. While reading the rest of this book, if you can find even a half dozen ideas you can embrace and sustain for the coming year, you will succeed in adding good years to your life and hopefully more years as well. Okay, you might handle a few more, but don't pick too many to try all at once, or you will lose focus and fail more than you succeed. Hopefully some appealing ideas, both big and small, will just leap off the page at you. If you are like me and keep forgetting some items on the mental lists you keep, you might make a few written notes along the way. It is a beginning. Your first set of lifestyle changes will surely put you in a different healthy and holistic place in your anti-aging program, your aging with attitude program, a year from now and ready for the next look in the mirror and plan to defy gravity. Go for it.

## 2

# DRESSING WITH STYLE AND ATTITUDE



*Quelle coquette!* That's a nice compliment a woman can get from a man or a woman. It's a hard one to translate, as often in French the intonation can say a lot, but basically it signifies someone who is concerned about her appearance, a good thing, *bien sûr*; someone who has a knack for fashion, but who also desires to gain admiration, to please, play, flirt, or seduce, or all of the above depending upon the circumstances. When it's done a certain way—and to me it takes a woman at ease with herself and knowing herself—it shows. And forcing it also shows. Balzac said it best, “La coquetterie ne va bien qu'à une femme heureuse” (Being coquette suits only a happy woman).

Style, I have come to realize, is the manifestation of an attitude, and a personal style is a gestalt of many things, all

of them about your attitude toward yourself and your surroundings.

Style goes with being *coquette* if we dress to impress. In France, the operative word is *seduction*, as social interactions for the entire nation have been and are built upon the art of seduction. And being *coquette* is part of the game. The French dress to seduce but not in the sense of attempting to lure one to bed (okay, not always in that sense). Plus it is something that French women would not think of abandoning in their advanced years, as it breathes life into them . . . into what they wear, what they say, what they think, and what they are. Look in the mirror. If you are not looking *coquette*, ask yourself why. Some of my friends would say, “Live, don’t die.”

At a point in my corporate career I had to make in-person, semiannual business result-and-forecast reports to Bernard Arnault, chairman of LVMH and now the richest person in France (some years the second richest). I vividly remember meeting him for the first time for one of these presentations.

He is quiet and reserved, though he can be cuttingly direct, and is known for his combination of engineering process and precision with his keen intelligence and heightened aesthetic sense, especially as relates to art, music, and style. He is also a French man.

When he greeted me for the first time, like a French man, he unabashedly looked me over in slow motion from the head down to the floor and from the floor back up to my head. It felt endless. “Il m’a déshabillée” (He undressed me) is the

common French expression. *What is he thinking?*, I wondered. I'll never know, but I remember some of my silly insecurities coming to mind. *I am not wearing a Dior outfit*, I remember thinking (he owns Dior). I also was carrying a Bottega Veneta portfolio and not one from Louis Vuitton. Ouch. He shook my hand and said, "Bonjour, Madame Guiliano." *C'est tout*. That was all for the moment.

There is little question we judge people by their looks. Our looks make a powerful argument to a person about who we are. Clearly, Monsieur Arnault knew some things about me before our first meeting, certainly that my team was producing excellent results, but he did not know *me*.

What did my appearance say to him? What does it say to people I meet today on airplanes, in the market, at a party? What does your appearance say? It depends, of course, on how you present yourself in terms of what you wear and what your face and body project. And those are things you and I can control. It is all a matter of style.

## OUR BIGGEST FEAR?

As we women grow older, arguably our biggest fear is losing our attractiveness, our very presence. We become concerned about our wrinkles, jiggly derrière, thinning hair, thickening waist, and, oh, sagging breasts. And it doesn't get better. Hearing aids are a cross to bear (though happily they are shrinking to invisibility), but we are shrinking an inch or two

as well . . . and our posture becomes the dreaded crooked posture of an old lady. In short, we fear being seen as old.

The French attitude toward this fear is something like, “I see myself in the mirror for what I am. I accept that, and I am at peace with that; but I will do whatever is in my control to manage the message I send. And then I won’t worry what people think. I will take care of myself and cultivate an image that is me at my current best and stay engaged in the world.” That is at the core of French style and aging. It’s an inbred attitude toward feeling good about how you look and looking like an individual set apart—that is, a person with a clear inner-and-outer style that is both comfortable to “wear” and distinguishing. And French women, if they are anything, are individualistic in how they present themselves. Their outer package is infused with inner style and beauty and an “I don’t give a damn” posture (which half the time they don’t, but they still dress to buy the morning’s baguette).

Curiously, what I take to be an American attitude gone global is either a form of delusion—seeming to see the “old them” in the mirror—or an overly critical assessment of looking in the mirror and seeing every flaw. Some women tend to sit around and talk about nothing but how much they hate their thighs, their crow’s-feet, their chins, their clothes, and how they are all wrong. It’s almost a competition for who can be the harshest on themselves and point out the most flaws. Why is there nothing in the middle? We tend to lose acceptance for ourselves and revert either to lying to ourselves about how we really look or to self-deprecation. French women don’t give a fig about perfection (and that applies not



only to mix and match in their clothing but to many other aspects of their lives).

## THE TELLS

When I was getting Monsieur Arnault's X-ray-like going-over, there is little doubt in my mind the two biggest "tells" of my "identity" were my hair and shoes. Did your mother teach you that, like mine did?

A great haircut goes a long way in making you look healthier, perhaps younger, and certainly more attractive. And dress however stylishly you think you are—upscale or not—and your shoes will still say it all. Expensive clothes with inappropriate or inexpensive shoes may send an unflattering message. (Less expensive clothes with good shoes, however, could pass as a style statement.)

In looking at your style and brand positioning as you age, shoes and hair are a good place to begin. Hair is about grooming, which will come later, but shoes...shoes. Shoes are key style signifiers. What is your style? What signifies your style? What sort of shoes do you wear? Birkenstocks? American tourists of a certain age can be spotted anywhere. Got an image? What's on their feet? I am all for comfort, but does comfort mean loss of attractiveness or identity? No, no, no. We have control over that and can achieve comfort and attractiveness and individual style.

Aren't high-heeled shoes sexy, seductive, sensual? They are in life and art. Are they for women of all ages? Let us

consider the stiletto, epitome of seduction and sex. My friend Aurélie calls them “soft porn.”

### STYLE AND THE STILETTO

Certainly four-inch stiletto heels, made famous in Italian movies of the early 1950s (and now five-inch heels), make one feel and look taller and one's foot appear smaller. They are symbols of eroticism. People have fetishes for them. The wearer's posture is erect, bosom projected, calf muscles flexed, hips more prominent, and then there's the resulting walk.

But our bodies are not built for high heels. When should we elect to retire our heels? Our highest heels? Partly it depends on our balance and muscle tone, which we lose decade by decade. No point risking a fall (a fear as we age and lose balance and muscles and muscle tone). But let us not despair. My dance teacher friend Juju refers to stilettos as shoes women should wear *only* for sit-down dinners. The most stiletto-addicted woman I know can face the brave new world in them because she goes around by taxi or limo! Sitting down is the best revenge. Forget running down the street or dancing in them at any age. Wear them at parties that don't last through the night. Did you ever notice how we women of any age at parties and special events cannot wait to take high-heeled shoes off afterward or during? (Ever slipped yours off under the dining room table?) But we wear them nevertheless.

They make us feel young and sexy and pretty and different,

I suppose. Loulou, my stylish friend who just turned seventy and wears high heels to work daily, says she has worn high heels her entire adult life, so her feet have settled into them in a way that she is physically not comfortable in shoes without heels. Certainly she is not mentally comfortable without heels, they have become such a part of her brand and identity. What are your style signatures, and how do you retain and adapt them to passing years?

The shoes industry knows that too many of us can't resist shoes and works to provide us with a steady stream of designs that are fun and appealing. They feed the many friends I have around the globe who would be clinically defined as shoe addicts. Surely we all buy shoes we don't need; shoes that hurt our feet, backs, and posture, and sometimes break the bank.

We make many mistakes over and over, buying the wrong shoes for all sorts of reasons—feeding the fantasy of what we want to be, perhaps satisfying some psychological need or itch, satisfying an impulse (surely some of those *farfelu* impulse shoes send a message about who you are . . . the wrong message). We often don't think about which outfit we are going to wear the shoes with or even if we have something to wear them with. More often than not, the shoes are an end in themselves as opposed to what they should be: an accessory, a complement to what we wear, a personal-style definer, and, of course, a protective covering.

The key word for shoes, no matter if flats, pumps, or heels approaching stiletto, is *comfort*. (You might think “good luck” for the latter.) For me, wearing high heels is the exception, not

the rule. I still have two pairs of three-and-a-half-inch high heels reserved for black-tie events or super-dressy parties, and although I've made plenty of mistakes buying shoes in my life, those two pairs were good investments and continue to serve me well and look new and trendy decades later. I have even danced in them without wobbling. One is Yves Saint Laurent and one is Bottega Veneta, both made in Italy and well made at that, which for me is rule #1. My feet apparently were born in Italy. (Indulge me . . . forget dollar signs for a moment.) These days my most comfortable ones are my black suede Ferragamo pumps, which feel like slippers and are my walking shoes in the city, on the plane, and more often than not at evening events. A few years ago in Amsterdam, I discovered United Nude, a less expensive brand (not inexpensive, though, *c'est dommage*) whose shoes are ultrastylish and ultracomfortable, including in what for me are high heels.

I appreciate that I have just mentioned some high-end, expensive brands, but they illustrate the French attitude toward a viable wardrobe: less is more. French men and women are culturally inclined to have fewer clothes "closets," but to fill them with quality and classics that serve them in many combinations over a considerable period of time. Adding a pair of shoes or one quality outfit is close to a zero-sum game. Something new comes in when something old is worn or styled out. Sure, over many years a French man or woman acquires and retains a "developed" wardrobe that has grown in size from the previous decade, but not all that much. Wearing out things and weeding out things not worn is part of the less-is-more approach.

Apropos, cheap and/or trendy shoes usually do look cheap and feel cheap. Invest wisely. Your shoes don't have to be high-priced Italian shoes. We all know a well-made shoe when we see it and wear it, and there are brands or off-brands or shoes on sale that measure up. I hear good things about a brand called Söfft and (who knew?) that J.Crew has a nice range of not-too-expensive women's shoes, including many manufactured in Italy. Then there are L. K. Bennett, Ecco, and Clarks for some good brands that are widely available at competitive prices. But whether cheap, moderately priced, or high-end, it all comes down to fit and comfort, regardless of how stylish. And if it were up to me, a class in learning to shop for shoes would be taught in school to avoid the trial and error of finding out what a "good fit" is.

I learned about "fit" after a reflexology session years ago that made my feet feel so good that I wanted to learn to do reflexology, so I bought a book and discovered that our feet can't be separated from body and mind. Call them the lower brain if you wish. If your feet hurt... (Hint, hint: just notice your tortured look when wearing the wrong heels.) It's similar to what the corset (nowadays the slimming shapewear) does to us when we want to squeeze into that dress (watch the red carpet at the Oscars to see the women who suffer... I would not want to be with them at midnight). Not the best options to look radiant.

What are we looking for in shoes besides the tempting design, especially after forty when physical changes reduce some tolerances? Try the following recipe: a mix of balance with good support and mobility. Plenty of seductive shoes

offer just that when made by designers who understand anatomy, but let the final judge be you. And here's the checklist you did not get in school for deciding on investing in a tempting pair:

- Try both shoes, as our left and right feet were not created equal. (I've seen a countless number of women in a hurry just trying one foot.)
- Stand on a hard floor (versus carpet), and take a few steps to make sure the shoes are wide enough (always buy your shoes in the afternoon when you've retained a bit of fluid). The best test for a correct fitting is actually walking up and down a few stairs.
- Be aware that perfect sizing is impossible, as shoes are made from hardwood molds or plastic models, not your foot. I predict, though, that custom-made shoes fit to your feet will become more common in coming years. A sizing tip, though, is if the front line on the top of the shoe is higher up your foot, you will have stronger support for correct positioning.
- Look at yourself in a full-length mirror to check if you appear balanced, and make sure the weight of your body is equally distributed across the length of the shoe so that both the balls and heels are engaged for support.
- Don't let anybody tell you that a shoe needs to be broken in. Sure, a crease here and a spread there will add to comfort, but the wrong size will always be the wrong size.

## MEET CATHERINE DENEUVE

If we look at photos of Coco Chanel, her clothes, shoes, and makeup all differed in subtle ways throughout the various stages of her life. I am reminded that we all need to “update” whenever I run across Catherine Deneuve in my Paris neighborhood, whether she’s eating discreetly with a friend at a nontrendy bistro or walking down along the Jardin du Luxembourg or shopping in one of the small boutiques. She no longer wears stilettos or sharp red lipstick, and her clothes have changed, too, and so has her hair—shorter, freer, and her style is still elegant but more self-assured and timeless. Mind you, I used to see her and admired her already way back when I was a student and she was young and dating Marcello Mastroianni, who was living in the area. I’d see them walking hand in hand or sitting at the small but still-famous Café de la Mairie attended mostly by students and the area’s intellectuals, and the picture was quite different: longer hair, thinner body, more makeup, higher heels, elegant style but very trendy, often in YSL. Today when you see Catherine Deneuve, you still can’t help but go “Wow.” She is a little rounder and not afraid to show her neck, which betrays more or less her age, but she seems to be saying comfortably, “Who cares? I am the whole package, not an aging neck.” Part of her routine is a daily 5 p.m. *citron pressé*. She is an example of aging well and being *bien dans sa peau* with style and attitude.

## BRANDING

I am a big advocate of being your own brand, wearing your own initials, not those you can buy at a luxury fashion store. Your brand is your identity, what sets you apart from others. It is what defines you and makes you memorable. Perhaps it is the scent you *always* wear that helps to define your brand. Perhaps it is a signature piece or type of clothing. It is hard for me to picture Yoko Ono without her wearing some variation of an old-fashioned newsboy's cap.

Through your decades you can evolve with the times without losing your established identity. You can refresh your brand without going for a complete makeover and attempting to become some new person. That's a bit like a crash diet, and such diets don't work. You will be back to your old self sooner rather than later. Better to tweak. *Update* does not mean "abandon."

Alice, my godmother, taught me about the "signature" element of the brand that is you. For her, it was all about her hats (and she did have a collection!), which she called the prolongation of herself. Being tall helped. She had a hat for every occasion and every season—for walks, church, market, for daytime and for evening, even for the garden—and with her hats she definitely turned men's heads around in a flattering way. A trip with her to the local milliner was an experience and an education. She would never leave the shop without a hat box. When I would tease her about a particular outfit, she'd say "C'est l'élégance du chapeau," to which her husband



would reply, “No, it’s because you have class, and it does not matter what you wear.” They would *philosopher* (some may say argue) endlessly (a very French trait) about it. I came to understand that her class, style, and brand came from within (the “know thyself” that comes from looking in the mirror and being at peace with who you are inside and out). And for her, it exuded seduction and femininity.

As to “femininity,” Alice was imperative: it comes and expresses naturally once you accept yourself. Adolescence works against us, and “becoming a woman is not so simple,” but maturity and experience help. Remember Simone de Beauvoir’s words, “On ne naît pas femme, on le devient” (One is not born a woman, one becomes one). A lifetime of ongoing inner search. Once we become a woman, it is not something we should surrender to age.

Jewelry is certainly a signature item for many women. While I believe less is more as you age, if you always wore frog charms on your collar or lapel, or a big diamond on your finger, why should you abandon them? What would that say? However, as your hair gets lighter and shorter in your “mature” years, those big pieces of costume jewelry or loops may need revisiting. Look in the mirror.

I suppose tattoos are a form of jewelry, though I have never quite understood permanently painting one’s skin in heavy doses. Okay, a little ankle butterfly might be cute or some other symbol a form of individual branding. And while a new tattoo on a seasoned body may be seen as an attempt to be with it or recapture youth, tattoos have been around a lot longer than designer brands.

Pay close attention to your style and brand as you transition from decade to decade. What you wear and what it says is an exercise in attitude and expression. Enjoy cultivating your brand and helping it evolve with the passing years.

### *COQUETTERIE* AND DRESSING WITH STYLE

Unless you are Sophia Loren, there comes a time when showing cleavage is a bad idea. For her it is a brand signature. For me, I don't have enough to matter, but I have mostly thrown away my bikinis and gone back to one-piece bathing suits. There's a phrase in American English that is very effective in describing an overexposed woman of a certain age plus five years: my cruel young friends would call it "gross." A more venial sin and concession to dressing our age relates to exposing our arms, especially our upper arms when they have lost a bit of muscle tone, and our biceps and triceps have a bit more jiggle than joie. Hold the sleeveless dresses and blouses! Learn to carry around scarves and wraps and long-sleeved sweaters. And while hems go up and down as part of fashion's refreshment and economics, it is the rare sixty- or seventy-year-old who can handle more than three inches above the knee. I don't want to see it, except perhaps on their daughter or granddaughter.

When I write about the French style of dressing, I am, of course, generalizing based on a core group of women and men who have traditional anchors in the past and have evolved over the last decades of their lives. This is the "Old"

France alive and healthy today, especially in the minds and hearts of the post-thirty-five set. However, fashion and style have become increasingly globalized and homogenized (and in France, multicultural), so not only do exceptions exist, but new tracks continue to emerge (in the “New” France), and some no doubt will lead to dead ends. But I am confident in mentioning such staples of French wardrobes as a good cardigan sweater in a neutral color. (Many girls in France grow up wearing uniforms to school, which surely carries over, including the obligatory cardigan as well as a less-is-more approach to wardrobes.) Other staples include, of course, a little black dress, a white blouse with high collar, a tailored jacket, well-cut and fitted pants, a stylish but comfortable travel outfit, a classic raincoat, and, *naturellement*, scarves and belts to accessorize and turn one outfit into three. It is the short list I revisit. The sexiness of your underwear is, well, your underwear. French women spend the most in the world annually on lingerie (but good, inexpensive basics for everyday wear). Oh, here’s a tip: no one is going to be noticing your underwear’s brand label. I cut mine off.

Business women, women of a certain age, and Hillary Clinton owe a huge debt to Yves Saint Laurent for inventing and popularizing the pantsuit as a viable fashion statement. Certainly a good-looking, well-fitting dress can be the most flattering piece of clothing a woman can wear, but a well-tailored dark pantsuit (or trouser suit, as it is called in many parts of the world) can be more than flattering at any age, besides giving great comfort, especially after fifty. It is the must piece for French women who like structured and polished clothes and

a perfect combination for the twenty-first-century workplace. Wearing one well requires knowing your body so you can play with details from cut to shoulders to collar to width. Black (especially for evening wear), navy, gray, and maroon are the colors we still tend to favor, at least those among us who are pragmatic.

Often both a less expensive and more flexible alternative is the magic, timeless dark or colorful blazer over a deeper-colored pair of well-cut pants that make us look slimmer. French women like the idea as it gives us much more to fiddle with, starting with length and color. We love endless options. It's a bit like in cooking making three meals out of one. Effortless once you get the knack for it. We tend to favor tailored jackets that hit just below the butt. Pastel colors are great from spring to fall and give a soft touch to the overall look. My husband reminded me of that last spring as we were walking near our home in Paris and saw a woman—I'd guess in her late sixties or early seventies—from the neighborhood with a light soft-pink jacket and light purple pants that were striking. The designer Elie Saab used these shades in his collection, and it's all about refinement and understated elegance. Our Left Bank doyenne wore off-white loafers and carried a soft tote bag. She looked absolutely stunning. She wore it all with allure and elegance and projected a wonderful softness, and it complimented her age. Lots of classic women would rather opt for a shade of deep blue or Klein blue or emerald green as the one striking item, with the rest being in darker colors. It comes to picking what goes with the coloring of

your hair and face, your overall look, and what you want to project. Know thy DNA.

When I retired from corporate life, I did not envision myself buying any or many dresses ever again, being partial to pantsuits. Then I was in Paris in November 2011 and walked by my current favorite designer's shop in the 6ème, Béatrice Ferrant, and saw a stunning dress in the window. I walked in and overheard the salesperson speaking with a customer to let her know that all was 40 percent off, as they were closing for good at the end of the year.

I've liked this designer for the substance of her line as well as a touch of romance. Her clothes can inspire while being elegant, well-made, and easy-to-wear couture clothes at ready-to-wear prices. I tried the simple plum-colored dress with a small leather belt and it fit perfectly. *I really don't need a dress*, I said to myself, but I could not pass it up. So I gave myself an early Christmas present (ah, how we rationalize pleasing ourselves at times). A few months later, I wore the dress to a party in New York City, and I don't remember getting so many compliments on clothes in a long time from women and men. I surprised my husband, who went "Wow" and said I should wear dresses more often. I admit the little dress suited me, and when you feel great in an outfit you know it. The compliments are just an added bonus.

As it turned out, the shop did not close, but rather just became "by appointment only." I recently arranged a long chat with Béatrice about fashion, trends, and what women should or should not wear. She is a delight, and is busy expanding to

China, where she claims there is a great need for dress code education and lots of businesswomen who love French fashion and are eager to learn. She is even eyeing America. I was thrilled. Here's a woman who is opinionated and knows how to dress women.

Béatrice's ideas come from her experience of working at top designer firms before establishing her own atelier, traveling extensively, and observing. She dresses women from age eighteen to eighty and has a lot of businesswomen in their late forties to sixties to whom she recommends avoiding black. That shocked me. Most of us should avoid it, she says. And here I was all in black. It may have been my only point of disagreement with her till she claimed that for me, black was one of my most flattering colors. Thank you. The transfer point is, if you feel good in black, keep wearing it. I agree with her that many women look older in black after a certain age. Perhaps in France there is an unconscious connection with widowed old ladies wearing black that influences us, though the mourning practice is a fading tradition. When my father passed away, my mother wore black only one day: at the funeral. She could not stand it and did not look good in it... "washed out" as she said. Who needs it? For Béatrice and many French women, including myself, navy, charcoal, eggplant, claret, and dark purple are the new black. Softer. Color gives life. Go for it, though pause before selecting orange or striking red after fifty.

Girlish looks for mature women are *not* something French women are keen on. With today's choices, one does not have

to dress old at any age, but again, in France, a sense of respect in what we wear is part of the equation, which does not mean one can't make a statement or be noticed. Accessories are an easy alternative: cool sunglasses, a vintage scarf, an unusual belt or piece of jewelry on your jacket; we can all come up with some that suit us. My fashionista Parisian friend Mélanie, known among her friends as a frustrated fashion designer, still has fun in her late fifties playing with details like replacing the standard buttons of a dark blazer with pretty pearl buttons found at the Marché St. Pierre in Montmartre, or adding a lace collar to an old little black dress.

Textures and materials are important, too. French women generally favor what's soft, warm, and comfortable such as cotton, wool, flannel (some of us grew up with Damart flannel underwear!), jersey, velvet, and cashmere, as well as the new fabrics that make clothes affordable, casual, and cozy like the mixtures of cotton and cashmere, viscose and cashmere, silk and cotton.

Béatrice is opposed to jeans (vehemently so), and leggings as pants (except at home), overalls, any top that is shapeless (which, alas, is becoming more and more the norm as more women are overweight and think a loose, shapeless top hides their shape), running shoes, high platform shoes, and high boots. As I said, she has strong opinions. She was proud to describe how she dresses when she flies. Comfort, yes; casual/sloppy, no. Not on a plane. Not in the street. Not anywhere. She loves pencil skirts, though not above the knee after fifty, and wears hers a bit loose to avoid tightness and let it flow; long

cardigans over pants; belts are very effective to get a second outfit from a basic one; she loves dresses; she feels that investing in a nice coat with a flattering cut is a wise choice. Not the oversize kind that will soon be out of style, but a well-proportioned style. She creates clothes to reveal and not hide, and she likes to be looked at.

Coco Chanel said, "I can't understand how a woman can leave the house without fixing herself up a little, if only out of politeness." For my mother, it was a variation on the same theme with "You never know who you are going to meet."

I remember accompanying my mother on her Saturday afternoon chore of going to the cemetery to take some fresh flowers to the family graves. She would always go and change beforehand, though to me she already looked fine and clean, and it was, after all, just around the corner. No matter, she claimed dressing well was also a sign of respect, for yourself and for others. A sense of decorum is important. More often than not we ran into some important townspeople, and my mother's face would give me an *I told you so* look.

Still, style is hard to define—it is being your own brand, but it's born from a talent for living or *joie de vivre*; and it can be innate or unconscious, though you know it when you see it. It has to do with individuality (maybe this explains why French women are *individualistes invétérées*, or stubborn individualists, especially *les Parisiennes*), vivacity, passion, breeziness, enthusiasm, and curiosity.

For some women, all of this may sound trivial, considering that clothes exist only on the surface, yet this is not the same as being superficial. Clothes are, after all, about communication



between a person and everyone who sees them. I see it more as just a basic human instinct, and a universal one for that matter. We all wear clothes and make choices about clothes, and nobody has any scruple about judging others' clothing.

My mother's idea for seduction and beauty and elegance or being chic was that they are all interrelated, and her motto was simple: "Be natural, keep your sense of humor, and do whatever it takes to be *bien dans ta peau* without torturing yourself." Beauty, like age, is an attitude. For me, elegance is also a silhouette, a look, a smile. When it exists, people will notice.

Diana Vreeland, the great Paris-born American fashion icon, said about style and elegance: "Style is everything... style is a way of life. Without it, you're nothing" (to which she added, "To have style you have to be born in Paris"). Well, that might help. As for elegance, Vreeland said, "The only real elegance is in the mind; if you've got that, the rest really comes from it. Elegance is innate. That's an attitude that works for any age. It is something to cling to."

Dressing with style, having style, knows no age and is a cocktail made with equal parts sensibility, personality, audacity (without going to the extreme), and some natural class. The latter is perhaps the hardest to get, though we all aspire to it. Isn't the best compliment a man can make about a woman "Quelle classe!" (What style!)? The best style is authentic, natural, and appears effortless. A woman may forget she has it, but when she gets noticed, she is reminded she has it.