

Senior *Style*

AN INTERVIEW WITH DORRIE JACOBSON

Dorrie Jacobson shot to internet stardom with the creation of her blog *Senior Style Bible*.

The 82 year old retired Playboy Bunny, model and make-up artist fed up with the portrayal of mature women in the media and fashion magazines, and wanting to create a platform that celebrated older women and offered a more modern approach to fashion and ageing stylishly.

Faced with loss and uncertainty in her 80th year, Dorrie decided to make use of her experience and fight the invisibility of the older woman in the fashion industry. We were able to catch a jet-setting Dorrie between shoots and trips to Hawaii to talk reinvention, and throwing out the rule book. She is a lady with a lot to teach.

SO DORRIE, CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT THE WOMAN BEFORE THE ONLINE FAME?

Prior to internet stardom, I was a print model. At 5'3, I was too short for the catwalk, so I did a lot of catalogue work for designers in the 50s and 60s. Being a vertically challenged model had its limitations, but it also had its advantages. Because I wasn't working on the international runways, I had the opportunity to work directly with a variety of new and upcoming companies as their brand ambassador.



I was also the first *Miss Polaroid*. When the camera company first launched, I travelled around the country demonstrating the new Polaroid camera to the public for the very first time.

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I also met, and worked alongside Hugh Hefner to launch the first Playboy Club in Chicago. No matter what I have accomplished in my career since then, people always want to know what it was like being part of the Playboy brand. I never kiss and tell, but it was a lot of fun.

Although the women's movement hadn't quite happened yet, I was fortunate to have had a career that brought me into contact with such wonderfully creative and iconic brands like Playboy and Polaroid. I think my experience with those companies has continued to inspire me to take risks and be bold in coming up with new and innovative ideas. Which is a good thing, because not many 80 year olds wake up one day and decide it's time to launch a *senior style revolution* via social media.

YOU REINVENTED YOURSELF AT 80 WITH THE BLOG. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO WOMEN UNSURE ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF REINVENTION, IN THEIR CAREER OR OTHERWISE?

I love reinvention. Who doesn't? It gives us the freedom to be whoever we want to be. My best piece of advice for older women is to throw away the rule book. Just toss it. The long list of do's and don'ts we've been sold no longer apply to the world we live in.

I think age is an attitude, so women need to just embrace it, rather than apologise for it. Take a look at Iris Apfel. Now there's an older woman who has accomplished extraordinary things, and didn't really hit her stride until her mid-eighties. She turned 95 this year and was featured in at least six major ad campaigns for various fashion labels. Iris proves anything can be accomplished if we have the right attitude. *Old broads* are extremely trendy at the moment, so women over 50 need to have the confidence to ride that wave.

Be bold. Be innovative. Take some risks. If you fail, so what? That's the beauty of reinvention; we can simply pick ourselves up, wipe the slate clean, and try again.







CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO START SENIOR STYLE BIBLE? WERE YOU BLOG SAVVY AT THE TIME?

I launched Senior Style Bible two years ago after I lost my partner to Alzheimer's. I was turning 80 and at a crossroads, unsure what to do with the rest of my life. I felt like I still had a lot to contribute to the world, but I didn't know how to direct that energy.

It was my daughter who suggested launching a fashion and lifestyle website for women over 50, because we weren't seeing mature models in mainstream fashion magazines or advertising campaigns. I decided that it was time to change that, and address the invisibility of the older woman in the fashion industry.

It was a challenge in the beginning because I was not very computer literate. I didn't know what a blog was, or anything about Facebook or Instagram. It was a steep and frustrating learning curve, but something I had to dive into in order to get my message out there. Luckily, my daughter Jodi works in social media, so she was able to teach me the ropes pretty quickly.

YOU AND JODI STILL WORK QUITE CLOSELY. TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORK DYNAMIC?

My daughter Jodi is the Creative Director for Senior Style Bible, and was also the one who conceptualised this idea. Establishing a mother/daughter creative endeavor has been a wonderful experience, but it has also been challenging, as I'm sure you can imagine.

My daughter had to teach me all of the ins and outs of social media, which required the patience of a saint. That part was definitely our biggest hurdle. Having survived that, we have moved on to the fun stuff.

As my photographer, Jodi is in charge of sourcing our locations and styling the photo shoots. We shoot mostly in Downtown Las Vegas, which means getting up at 5am, packing up the car and driving to locations that most tourists never see. It's definitely pushed us both to move outside of our comfort zones. Now that we've been at this for a few years, I think we have fallen into a rhythm that works. She pushes me to take risks and I bring experience and a certain perspective to what we're doing that you can only have after eight decades of tottering around on this earth.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE TERM 'AGE APPROPRIATE'?

The term 'age appropriate' is pretty much the equivalent of nails on a chalkboard to me. I think it triggers such an intense reaction because it represents everything that I am working so tirelessly to change.

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The fashion industry tends to view the mature consumer as a separate entity that exists outside of fashion, and that term only serves to exclude us even further. Why should age prevent women from wearing things that allow us to express our individuality? We don't suddenly wake up one day to discover our cool factor has completely and utterly vanished.

What do they want us to do, turn 50 and then slip into a floral house frock for our remaining years? The idea that women of a certain age should dress in a way that society deems to be 'age appropriate' is quite simply ludicrous and deeply offensive. I'm 82 and love my leather skinny jeans and 4-inch stilettos. I am fairly sure you wouldn't find those items on the usual age appropriate fashion list for old broad fashionistas.

WHAT ARE YOUR VIEWS ON HOW MATURE WOMEN ARE PORTRAYED IN ADVERTISING, AND THE MEDIA?

I tend to write a lot about the way the media and fashion magazines represent older women. In general, the few roles that are written for women over 60 are usually nurturing, non-sexual, supportive characters with a very limited inner life. They're usually stuck in a rut, not out there working and accomplishing amazing things. Portraying women this way is not only uninspiring, it's inaccurate.

Just look at some of the real life role models we have to aspire to! Women over 60 are Prime Ministers, Supreme Court Justices, Supermodels. There are so many role models, I cannot understand why interesting older female characters are so few and far between on screen. There seems to be an ingrained ageism in our society and we need to speak out against it. We need more shows like *Grace & Frankie* on Netflix, that show older women as sexually active, accomplished, and still incredibly engaged in the world around them. Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin do a wonderful job portraying the complexity of ageing.

We need more roles written for older women that are interesting, complex and inspiring. If Hollywood isn't on board with changing the way we are portrayed then we need to write and produce projects ourselves. Having said that, I think the fashion industry is finally taking notice of the mature consumer. We are beginning to see older models featured in fashion campaigns now, and on the runway.



There is definitely a move towards more diversity in fashion, which is long over due.

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YOU ARE CURRENTLY LIVING IN LAS VEGAS, HOW DOES THAT AFFECT OR INSPIRE WHAT YOU WEAR?

I've been living in Las Vegas for the past 20 years. It's such a crazy, energetic, over the top place to live. Everything is bright, bold, shimmering, loud and like New York, it's a city that never sleeps.

The fashion here reflects that. We're a city that encourages self-expression and creativity, so really anything goes. It's not unusual to see girls walking around dressed in nothing but body paint and high heels, and no one takes a second glance. Sadly for me, those scantily clad days are long gone, but I still love wearing statement shoes.

Nothing puts a smile on my face like a fabulous shoe with a sky high heel. I may be 82, but I can still totter around in heels with the best of them.

**HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE?
WHAT FASHION INFLUENCES YOU?**

My style is definitely a bit edgy. I like avant garde pieces from Barney's, mixed in with designers like Helmut Lang, Alexander Wang, Elizabeth and James and Alice + Olivia. Although I tend to gravitate to a handful of designers, and I'm always on the look out for lesser known labels. I'm also quite a fan of high street fashion like Zara, Topshop and H&M.

Next up, I might try to create some bespoke designs of my own. It's so frustrating trying to find garments with the right sleeves, I've decided it would be easier to just design my own capsule collection.

**WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEBODY
UNSURE ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL STYLE?**

Creating a signature style is really about determining what you want your style to say about you. I think it's important to do a self-analysis every once in a while to see if the clothing you choose to wear every day is actually reflecting the image that you want to present to the world. Our style shouldn't be dictated to us by fashion magazines or what we see on the catwalk, I think the days

of slavishly following fashion trends are over. Sometimes fashion is about trial and error. It's meant to be fun and sometimes that means pushing the boundaries a bit. If a woman is hesitant to go all out, then I would advise her to shake things up subtly, by trying a bold colored handbag or a statement shoe with a conservative outfit. A great signature style doesn't have to be bold, it can be wonderful in its simplicity as well.

**YOU SAY NOTHING CAN CHANGE YOUR
APPEARANCE MORE THAN YOUR HAIR.
CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THIS?**

Nothing updates your look quite like a new hairstyle. Back in 80s I was adding blond highlights to my hair to camouflage the gray. As time went on, my hair got lighter and lighter and eventually it looked very washed out. It wasn't flattering. I went to a new stylist and asked for a major change. We dyed it back to my natural brown color and added auburn highlights, then cut it into a short spiky style, which took ten years off my face.

I think we all get into a rut with our hair and makeup sometimes, so it's important to keep changing things up to make sure that our style is current and it is flattering.

YOU ALSO LIKE TO WRITE ABOUT SEXUALITY, AND YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE DATING?

I write a lot about senior sexuality and dating because at the age of 80, I found myself dating again after my partner went into a care facility with Alzheimer's. It takes a lot of courage to get back out there and I think one of the major hurdles for a lot of women is the possibility of physical intimacy. Many women have only been with one partner and the idea of being sexually intimate with someone new is terrifying, for other women they have body issues that they need to overcome, for other women, menopause has decreased their interest in sex.

So, I talk a lot about senior sexuality on the blog and the many different aspects that women experience. It's a delicate and complicated subject and one that we also discuss on our Facebook page because I wanted to create a space where women could share their experiences and speak openly and honestly about it.

At the age of 82, I am still sexually active and am very open about it, which I hope inspires women to feel comfortable enough to talk openly with their friends. Unfortunately, mature sexuality is still a subject that makes people uncomfortable, so I try to be a good source of information for my followers.



HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT AGEING? WHAT HAS SURPRISED YOU THE MOST?

I look at aging as a state of mind. It's important to continue to be curious and engaged with the world around us as we get older. I don't really believe in retiring because I think we all need a purpose, and a reason to get up in the morning.

Launching a business at the age of 80 was the best decision I ever made. It forced me to learn new skills and challenge myself to do things that were outside of my comfort zone. Because I interact with people half my age on a regular basis, I am able to relate to younger people and we share interests. It has kept me young, involved and connected. I may be an old broad, but I'm a cool old broad.

Nothing is really surprising at this age. I tend to just be fatalistic about things. What will be, will be. I don't really think about it too much. Although I have to say, becoming famous at this late date was quite unexpected. Yes, that was quite a surprise, and a lovely one at that.

What advice would I give my younger self? Throw out the rule book. There are no rules. Do what you feel is right, and don't listen to listen to other people's negative opinions. They don't matter. ♦



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