

From *Hip Teen & Beauty Queen* to a Closet Full of Mom Jeans...

And Back



By Elena O'Connor

What can we learn from three women who are in the business of helping other women to look and feel good about themselves? Elena O'Connor, Pamela Hines, and Kerry Stich – all successful entrepreneurs from different generations – met on a blustery afternoon in January to chat about how Rochester women feel about themselves.

I love Saturday Night Live's commercial parodies, particularly the one for Mom Jeans. This one features Amy Poehler and the rest of the SNL ladies sporting stonewashed, elastic waisted denim slacks that the voice-over describes as, "cut generously to fit a Mom's body." The spot wraps up saying "So this Mother's Day, don't give Mom that bottle of perfume. Give her something that says 'I'm not a woman anymore, I'm a Mom.'"

What is it about having children that makes a woman lose her sense of style and self?

Is it the many roles we play all at once – the "Domestic Doyenne," the "Mother Like No Other," the "Career Brigadier" – that leads to roomy slacks with elastic waists heralding comfort and an end to looking good?

Kerry Stich begs to differ. Kerry's a 40-something wife and mother of two. She co-founded Bella Bleu Color, a small and chic studio dedicated to providing personal color analysis and image consulting. "Women want to look pulled together, but they don't want to look like they are trying too hard," she said. "They want to feel positive about themselves and are willing to spend a little money on something that will make their lives better."

"Funny how that red, red lipstick looked great on everyone circa 1987," I replied. "Spiky red blush too. It was the era when haute couture first met prêt-à-porter. The bullish market...and the bullish shoulder pads, the age of the power suit and the women who wore them."

Among those women was my very own mother, Pamela Hines, a glass-ceiling-busting, working-mother-toting-last-name-hyphenating-phenomenon, who traded her lunchtime power-walking sneaks for a pair of red, patent pumps. "There was always a struggle to balance looking feminine and looking competent. Women want to look good, yet not stand out too much; therefore, women want to be noticed for their intelligence and business acumen instead of simply for looking sexy," Pamela observed.

There's a marked difference between the opulent fashions of the '80s and fashion today. Our current economic climate has perhaps made us more conscious about flaunting designer labels. We see fewer LV monogrammed pochettes, and many smart fashionistas opt to forgo designer goods in toto. "The global world makes people feel more modest. The 2000s are about going green and simplification with an emphasis on what works for you as opposed to the indulged opulence of the 80's," says Kerry.

"There was a style of dress for each age," Garcia Marquez wrote in *Love in the Time of Cholera*, "but the style of old age began soon after adolescence and lasted until the grave." Marquez's fatalistic take on the clothing styles

for those of voting age and older might be regarded another way: the phrase suddenly rings true by simply swapping "old age" for "maturity."

Maturity begets sophistication, comfort in one's own skin, and the notion of a woman wearing the clothes rather than the clothes wearing the woman. "Teenagers," Kerry comments, "like to experiment, but as a rule, want to look like everyone else."

Pamela nods in agreement and notes how she's come into her own: "As a 54-year old, I don't feel the slightest urge to hold onto my youth. Instead, I have a strong desire to stay in shape and approach 60 in good health. I own my age, and have no desire to squeeze into the leggings my 18-year-old is wearing."

She feels that her peers agree with her. As the owner of Jackson & Hines, a Pittsford cosmetic and gift boutique that advocates discovering one's "beauty within," she has talked to scores of women who echo her sentiments. When it comes to denim, she swears by Diesel brand boot cut jeans. "I finally found the type of jean that fits me and is comfortable. They aren't skinny jeans, but I feel good in them. For the record, they're the kind with a hidden zipper fly and no elastic in sight."

Elena O'Connor: Elena@jacksonandhines.com
Pamela Hines: Pamela@jacksonandhines.com
Kerry Stich: kerry@bellableucolor.com