



GROWING INTO OUR TRUE SELVES WITH PIP WILCOX

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PIP WILCOX, CERAMICIST AND FOUNDER OF GLOBAL ONLINE COMMUNITY MIDDLE YEARS MONDAY, TALKS CREATIVITY, WISDOM AND FOLLOWING JOY

Pip Wilcox held many roles before finding her way to clay. She's worked in finance, as a therapist, a corporate fundraiser for charities, and a secular funeral celebrant. All these career choices left her searching for something more.

In her mid 40s, Pip started making pottery, and the impact the change has had on her life has been huge. One of the most inspiring off-shoots started with two beautiful images posted on Pip's Instagram feed: one of her face and one of her hands working on a pot. Part of her caption read: "No lighting, no hiding of lines, pores, facial hair. When my husband and I first saw this photo my husband absolutely loved it – but I recoiled in horror. The second photo of my ageing hands also made me cringe. This is not what the middle-aged women I see staring out at me from glossy magazines, catalogues and billboards look like. Where are the other women, the ones who look more like me?"

The post gathered such huge momentum that Middle Years Monday was born, a community Pip started in order to spread hope and inspiration among women aged around 40-60. We chat to Pip about its success, and the way she now looks at the world around her.

Let's start with your career change.

What set the ball rolling? I burnt out. Having never imagined that I would be someone who would get signed off work with stress and anxiety, that's exactly what happened. And it may sound strange for me to say this but I'm actually grateful now. I'm not sure that anything but coming to an enforced grinding halt would have enabled me to feel free enough to give myself permission to start again and rebuild my life from the ground up. So, here I am now, risen from the ashes, working for myself and doing something that I thought only other people 'out there' got to do – working as a potter and running an online global membership and community!

How would you describe your style?

I'm 50 this year and one of the liberations »

Pip's much-loved studio space, a room often filled with music. The Cat's Cradle hands illustration is by Mathilde Aubier.



I'm increasingly experiencing with this life stage is freedom from the pressure to base my home, my garden, my business brand or my personal style on what might be perceived as 'cool' by the outside world. I think this has led to my visual ethos being centred around what feels authentic and uncontrived to me. I'm much more interested in how certain colours, fabrics, shapes and styles in my home or wardrobe will feel to me, as opposed to look on me. I guess it comes down to asking myself how would I style my home or myself if no one was looking?

Tell us a bit about why promoting and celebrating older women is so important to you. When I posted the images you mentioned above on Instagram, the wave of bright, fierce energy that built around it was a surprise and a joy. It was moving and exhilarating to witness the outpouring from the thousands of not-young women that responded, and to realise that they too had been yearning to see themselves represented. In the days that followed, hundreds of women posted photos of their faces and hands on Instagram – many of them doing so for the first time. And in turn I was flooded with yet more moving messages from women of all ages telling me of the transformative impact that seeing all of these beautiful and real middle years women was having on them. I realised we needed a hashtag and a way of keeping this mini revolution going, enabling us middle years women to connect with each other. And that's how #middleyearsmonday was born. I'm delighted to say there are now over a thousand images in that hashtag gallery. And it's made me very happy to think of all of these women from around the world stepping out of the middle years shadows and into the light of visibility.

So how did the community grow? A year after that post, I started Middle Years Monday as an online membership and community for women aged around 40-60. It can be difficult finding the language to describe the myriad ways in which these middle years may feel disorienting. Some of it is deeply uncomfortable, even feeling we no longer understand who we are or why we're here. We may fear that opportunity has passed us by, that life from here gets only smaller – and that perhaps it's all just too late. But there is so much more to our story than this,



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01 Painting with cobalt oxide to get a beautiful indigo. 02 A close up of Pip's hands at work, the catalyst image for Middle Years Monday. 03 This serene picture was taken by Conrad Lee for UK Handmade

magazine. 04 Pots displayed on shelves that once hung in Lion Street Store, one of the first shop and gallery spaces to show Pip's work. 05 Pip's faceted bud vases have become something of a signature make.



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“It’s made me very happy to think of all these women stepping out the middle years shadows.”

because this life stage brings us gains as well as losses. With support we can find an opening up of time, opportunity, confidence and creativity. We can befriend and harness that pull to do something significant with the rest of our lives. We can attend to the whisper that’s nudging us to revisit the dreams we’ve pushed aside. We can act on the urge to shake things up and stake a claim in this life. Because this is the reality of being a middle years woman. All of this beautiful, messy nuance. And that’s what Middle Years Monday is about.

Who inspires you? Jeska Hearne (@lobsterandswan on Instagram) is one of those people who creates aesthetic magic with everything she touches, seemingly effortlessly, and the home and garden she shares with photographer and fellow The Future Kept store-owner Dean are to die for. Barbara Hepworth, too – it’s been too long since I visited her sculpture garden »



01 Vignettes of beautiful prints, postcards and pots dotted around keep Pip inspired.

02 Pip's maker's mark stamp, first used four years ago in a "proper potter" moment for her.

in St Ives but it's a very special place. Breon O'Casey's beautiful work spanned various art forms and his prints make me mad with desire! And some of my fellow middle years creatives whose work I adore are New Zealand ceramicist Pip Woods, London-based jeweller Tamara Gomez and Sussex stone carver Jo Sweeting.

How has your creativity shifted with age? It's shifted beyond recognition in that it wasn't until my late 30s it even occurred to me that giving myself permission to take my creativity seriously wasn't an indulgence. Once I'd lifted the lid there's been no stopping me! I've been through passionate dalliances with bookbinding, feltmaking and enamelling, but it's been the medium of clay that has really captured my heart. One of the things that happens for many women as they hit their 40s and 50s is they start to feel an urge to stake more of a claim in their lives – to focus, often for the first time, on their own fulfilment rather than prioritising the happiness and nurturing of others. I definitely sense a parallel shift in my creativity in that I feel free to follow my own gravitational pull to make the things that excite me – rather than starting from the position of what I think the market wants. It's a much more joyful experience of creativity.

Would you say that our middle years are a more creative time? Yes, in the broader sense of the word, in that our

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middle years often bring an urgent drive to start creating a life that feels authentic and true for us. This creativity takes different forms and may not result in a move towards more obviously creative or artistic activities. But we may start to create and curate our lives differently and with conscious intent – perhaps even starting all over again and rebuilding from the ground up. This might look like a career change with a shift in focus from ambition to vocation, introducing stronger boundaries into our relationships, ending friendships that no longer feel good and seeking out new connections, or moving out of the city. I would say that we definitely tend towards reviewing what is behind us and questioning whether we want the second half of our life to look the same or different. It's an incredibly exciting and potent time.

And finally, what advice would you give your younger self? I would remind myself that joy is my birthright. 🍷

To find out more about Middle Years Monday, visit www.middleyearsmonday.com. Find Pip on Insta @pipwilcoxceramics, and shop her beautiful ceramic pieces at www.pipwilcoxceramics.com.