

# One lady owner

IS A SENSIBLE 34-YEAR-OLD MUM TOO OLD TO GET HER FIRST TATTOO? OF COURSE NOT, SAYS SALI HUGHES, PROUD NEW OWNER OF HER VERY FIRST DESIGN - AND PLANNING NUMBER TWO

I am sitting in a back room, stripped down to my bra and surrounded by burly men. With my stomach doing a Viennese waltz, I lean forward, so a complete stranger can dig hot needles into my back for the next hour. I can't help thinking a 34-year-old, middle-class mother of two should know better.

I've always loved tattoos but, until now, only on other people. I've admired gorgeous tattooed girls in the street and sat through episodes of *Prison Break* purely for the eye candy. But, as for inking my own English rose skin, I've always bottled out, telling myself that it's, 'Just not me' and, I freely admit, fretting about what my husband, colleagues and in-laws would think.

But something unexpected has happened in my thirties. I call it my, 'Stuff it' impulse – the pay-off for gaining sun spots and moving up a dress size is a sudden disregard for what anyone else thinks of me. I've gone through a number of big changes in my life in recent years and a tattoo seems like a permanent way of marking the new beginning, like a shiny trophy I'll never have to give back.

I'm not the only one craving a good inking. These days, a tattoo is as much a yummy-mummy must-have as a Kate Spade nappy bag. Davina, Angelina, Reese, Victoria – all have gone under the needle; even Samantha Cameron has a dolphin on her ankle. In 2009, ladies don't lunch; they tattoo.

So, I've decided to go for it, but choosing my design isn't easy. I'm too vain for black tribal splodges, not exotic-looking enough for elaborate Japanese motifs, and too old and snobbish for a 'tramp stamp' (those lower-back tattoos seen on *Big Brother* contestants and raucous hen nights). My rigidly Anglo Saxon pallor lends itself more to traditional sailor motifs – the simple hearts, roses, anchors, birds and pin-ups your grandfather might have got



**'A tattoo is a way of marking a new beginning – like a trophy I never have to give back'**

during the war. All have different meanings and, on this tip, I opt for a swallow. Pretty and elegant, it mates for life (my husband and I have been together 10 years) and is a home bird (the last time I went out clubbing, I was wearing a smiley T-shirt and clutching a glow stick).

Phil Kyle, of Discovery Real Time's reality TV show *London Ink*, is famous for his soothing bedside manner with first-time tattoo-ees. Women now make up 65 per cent of the clientele at his Magnum Opus studio in Brighton. I want to incorporate my children's initials and Phil suggests having the bird fly with them in elegant handwriting in its beak. He sketches some options, which seem big (about the size of a saucer). It turns out that asking a tattoo artist for something small is like asking Leonardo da Vinci if he can take out a few of the disciples.

Eventually, we reach a compromise and a stencil is placed on my back – just at the base of my neck – for my approval. I push through one last, 'What the hell am I doing?' panic and prepare for the agony.

Does it hurt? Without question. But, next to epidural-free childbirth on my living room floor (twice), or even a particularly brutal bikini wax (more than I can count), tattooing is a picnic. And, like both, there's some relief in the knowledge that it's meant to hurt and, unlike the tattoo itself, the pain won't last forever.

Two weeks, £150 and a tube of nappy ointment later, I'm thrilled with the result. I feel sexy, confident and proud to have had the balls to do it. I've raised a few eyebrows at the school gates, but received a few admiring compliments, too. My husband loves it and, yesterday, I caught him designing a tattoo for himself on the back of the cornflakes box. As for me, I've got my eye out for a weeny design for the back of my wrist, which I plan to treat myself to on my 40th birthday. Because I've realised that, just like diamonds and little black dresses, good tattoos look fabulous, whatever your age. 📌