

ONLY 35 & OVER NEED APPLY

GLADYS CHUNG  A modelling agency here has started an arm that hires only older women as demand for more mature faces grows



(From left) Models from Carrie Elegance: Jill Saro, 36; Nguyen Kim Trang, 39; Lyra Bennis-Stewart, 40; Yumi Steele, 44; Rasiyah Harrison, 37; Sarah Tan, 35, and Harjana, 44.

Photographer **DIS VINCIT** Jr for The Straits Times. Styling **GLADYS CHUNG**. Hair & make-up **DOLLE SEAH MELISSA YEO, ZHOU JIAN & BERNADE CHIA** from MakeUp Entrance, using Bobbi Brown and Matisse. Outfits (Group photo) Joans and Tahiti by True Religion (B1-05 Ion Orchard) and Estua (D2-19 Paragon); (Individual photos) model's own.

In an industry where a 24-year-old faces retirement and a flawless face and a size 0 frame are pre-requisites, a modelling veteran is out to break the mould.

Ms Linda Teo, 57, managing director of Carrie Models International, has started a new division in her agency. Called Carrie Elegance, it hires only women aged 35 and older.

The agency's first batch of seven models are aged 35 to 44 and they can be seen in an online reality TV show called Models Reinvented. Produced by Monster Image in conjunction with the online platform, Toggle (toggle.sg), the six-partier will debut on Feb 28.

Inspired by popular reality shows America's Next Top Model and Kimora Lee Simmons' Life In The Fab Lane, the show features seven finalists who go through several challenges, including strutting down a raised platform outside Ion Orchard on a busy weekend. The winner will walk away with almost \$100,000 worth of prizes including jewellery, make-up, a customised bag and laser treatments. Ms Jacqueline Khoo, the 42-year-old producer of the show, came up with the idea as she strongly believes that women her age should not be considered over the hill.

"Many of my peers look good and there is no reason models should have short shelf lives. So I approached Linda with the idea and she said, 'Let's do it.'"

Lofty ideals aside, Ms Teo also intends to corner the market for commercials and product launches that require mature faces, such as health supplements, jewellery, properties and skincare for older women.

"We might serve the same clients and markets as other agencies with mature faces in their portfolio, but the difference is that Carrie Elegance is a specific division for women in their prime and we are proud that our models look good for their age."

To groom them, Ms Teo has put her Carrie Elegance models through make-up and deportment classes, as well as make-up, photohoot and runway training.

Although she has not had clients ask for older models at her main agency Carrie Models, she is confident of her latest business venture.

"Most of the consumers who have spending power are in their 30s and above. My clients will have a need for more mature faces as the population ages," she says.

"Furthermore, many models are health-conscious these

days, so they look younger. Forty is the new 30."

One brand that is open to using mature, regular faces to reach out to its consumers is Bobbi Brown Cosmetics, a sponsor of Models Reinvented.

"When we were approached to be a make-up sponsor for the show, we thought, 'Why not?', since the brand is about celebrating women and is for all women regardless of race and age," says its spokesman. "For us, this move is part of our philosophy and not a trend."

Ms Teo intends to hire 30 models for Carrie Elegance eventually and start an arm for older male models. She is not sure how much an older model can command as no one has booked any Carrie Elegance model yet, but she expects them to earn between \$2,000 and \$5,000 for a full day's work for commercials. This is comparable with a younger model's fees.

"The only difference would be that the younger models have a wider range of job opportunities, such as sportswear shoots," she notes.

TRENDING NOW Carrie Elegance is the first of its kind here - most modelling agencies have only a handful of faces who are in their early 30s. Even Carrie Models caps the age of its models at 26.

While talent agencies, whose core business is in finding faces to be movie extras or appear in lifestyle commercials, offer mature women in their portfolios, none are dedicated to grooming them as models.

Still, some note that the demand for more mature faces for ad campaigns has grown in the last few years.

Mr Mark Tan, director of The People Studio, says while his model and talent agency used to receive about 20 requests a month for models aged 35 and older three years ago, it now gets about 30 per month.

There are more than 50 faces who are above 35 in The People Studio's portfolio and half of them are women.

Mr Tan attributes this rise in demand to the ageing population. Most of the clients who ask for older models are marketers for products that target consumers aged 40 and above, such as milk powder and beauty products for mature women.

"They choose older models to better connect with the target demographic," he says.

"It is just a matter of time before more agencies pay

attention to models in that age group as more new products and services are created to cater to this demographic. In fact, we're thinking of expanding our agency to do just that."

Ms Nguyen Kim Trang, 39, an entrepreneur and part-time model who recently signed on with Carrie Elegance, says she is also getting more jobs now. Five years ago, she would get an assignment every two months; now, she models about twice a month. So far, she has appeared in TV commercials and print ads for condominiums, telecommunication services and health supplements. She often plays the role of a mother in these campaigns and is usually paid between \$3,500 and \$6,000 for a full day's work.

Overseas, the demand for older women in commercials is also on the rise.

Larvin famously plucked 83-year-old American grandmother Jacque Tajah Murdock from obscurity and made her the face of its fall 2012 campaign.

Many other luxury brands have also chosen mature faces to front their ads or walk down the runway. These include 82-year-old British supermodel Daphne Selfe, who starred in Dolce & Gabbana's 2012 autumn ad, and 60-year-old Italian actress Isabella Rossellini, who fronts Bulgari's campaign for one of its latest handbags.

OF MODELS AND MORTALS But some industry insiders are not sure if an agency dedicated to grooming mature models will take off.

Mr Watson Tan, the director of Uplift Models, thinks there is a difference between using an older model who is a household name and an unknown, mature face.

"Older supermodels, such as Naomi Campbell or Christy Turlington, are icons. They are of a different league and will always be popular," he says.

As for other regular faces over 35, Mr Tan thinks they will get the job only if the client wants to create a commercial that the man in the street can relate to. But he wonders if the demand for them would be high enough to make business sense.

He has seen how some of his clients would rather style a 25-year-old to look 30 when they are looking for an older face.

"The skin and body of someone in her 20s would often

be in better shape than one in her 30s," he explains. So, they photograph better and require less digital touch-ups.

But veteran fashion show producer Daniel Boye thinks starting Carrie Elegance is a clever move.

"There is definitely a market for mature models when it comes to commercials. This is especially so for cosmetic brands that realise older women cannot relate to a campaign shot with someone half their age because a 20-something has different skin concerns," he says.

"For car or banking services ads, clients wouldn't want a prepubescent girl either. They'd want someone who looks like they can afford the products."

However, Mr Boye concedes that most clients would draw the line at using older women for runway shows.

"If clients hire them for the runway, it would be for the sake of novelty," he says. "Fashion shows are aspirational. They must have entertainment value. Most don't want to see someone who looks like them on the runways."

Dr Seshan Ramaswami, an associate professor of marketing education at Singapore Management University, sees a growing market for mature models. He says marketers need role models and aspirational figures who look, feel and talk like the target market to be successful.

"It will become an even bigger phenomenon in the years to come," he adds.

Associate Professor Sharon Ng, who teaches marketing and international business at Nanyang Business School in Nanyang Technological University, notes that the use of mature models helps a brand to stand out from the advertising clutter by being different.

For example, when a beauty brand uses an older face, it establishes a deeper connection with its target market, she says.

"It goes beyond simply telling its audience that its products can make them beautiful. It tells them, 'We understand and respect who you are and are here to support you.'"

Ultimately, however, age is not everything. Mr Boye says a model must have a proportionate body and possess charisma.

"No matter how old you are, if you don't look good and fit in the clothes, no one will take you," he says.

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HARJANA, 44

After an operation at age 30 to remove a benign brain tumour the size of a 50-cent coin, Ms Harjana lost the hearing in her right ear and 70 per cent of the movement on the right side of her face.

"The doctors said I was lucky that the right side of my face hadn't collapsed like most who have a brain tumour that size," says the graphic designer, who goes by one name.

A part-time model then, she had to stop working as she could no longer balance well on the runway. Plus, her limited facial movements affected her confidence.

"It was a dark period," recalls the Indonesian permanent resident, who has lived in Singapore for more than 30 years. "For six months, I covered up all the mirrors in the house. I refused to meet anyone and rejected calls from my friends. I felt ugly and inferior."

Then, six months after the operation, she snapped out of the darkness.

"I just told myself that I had had enough of the negativity and I wanted to go back to who I was."

One of the first things she did was to groom her brows and cut her hair. "From there, I started to dress up again to feel like the old me."

She then focused her energies on carving out a new career after taking courses in graphic design. The whole episode has made her stronger, she says, and she has since regained some movements on the right side of her face.

"It made me realise that if you don't give yourself a chance, no one will."

It was her resilience that impressed Ms Linda Teo, the managing director of Carrie Models International. On why she chose to sign Harjana on at Carrie Elegance, Ms Teo says: "She has a strong walk and a good body, and I'm impressed with the fact that she

survived her brain tumour with a positive attitude."

Harjana, who is divorced, first heard about the reality TV show, Models Reinvented, from a friend.

When Ms Teo called to ask if she was willing to be a part of it, she hesitated.

"I told Linda I could not smile properly on one side of my face and asked if she was sure she wanted me," she recalls.

"And Linda said, do you care about what people think about you? I said no, and she said, then do it."

"So here I am."

What do you hope to get out of this experience? I'm taking part in the show because it's something I've never tried. I'm not sure if I'm brave for doing this despite my condition because this is just for fun.

If I can represent a cosmetics brand or if anything comes out of this, it will be a bonus for me. If not, I'm cool with that.

Someday, I'd like to have a shot at acting on stage.

What has been your most memorable moment on the show? I was sick with food poisoning on the day of the casting, which happened to be the first day of filming too. I was ready to pull out but Linda convinced me to give it a shot. I'm glad I did.

Somewhat, I was even able to walk on the runway in heels, something which I've not done for ages.

What do you fear most about ageing? I don't think about the fact that I'm growing older.

I don't have children and am divorced, so my life is filled with my work and spending time with my dad and brother. I don't actually feel my age. I never celebrate birthdays because I am not sentimental and it takes me a while to figure out my age when people ask me how old I am.

Physically, I am content with my body. I have a high metabolic rate, can fit into most clothes and that is good enough for me. I still wear low-cut dresses because I think I look good in them.

But I hate to see my eyes droop and my face lose its plumpness. And when I don't sleep well, the dark circles show the next day.

What do you do to maintain your looks? I hate exercising but I swim occasionally. I get Botox every couple of months on my forehead to smoothen the lines and lift my eyes.

What do your loved ones think about you being part of a reality show? My brother jokingly asks if I will be the first to be disqualified. My friends are looking forward to watching it so they can laugh at me.

What would you say to people who think mature women like yourself should not model? This whole mature women modelling thing might or might not work.

There's no need to take it so seriously.

But I hope it would get more people to acknowledge the fact that mature women can still look good; and there are plenty of us out there.



MORE MODEL PROFILES ON PAGES 14 & 15

YUMI STEELE, 44

The Japanese freelance translator, who used to work as a financial broker, has been based in Singapore for 17 years.
 Ms Steele is married to a Briton who works in a financial institution and they have a 13-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son.
 She has dabbled in modelling before; she was in an ad campaign for Jello M1 in 2002. She also played an extra in Mooncake, an hour-long TV drama produced by Tokyo Broadcasting System Television and MediaCorp that aired on Channel U in 2011.
 Her "strong facial bone structure, which is unusual for an Asian" was what caught the eye of Ms Linda Teo, managing director of Carrie Models International.
 But Ms Steele had reservations about taking part in Models ReInvented.
 "This is a reality TV show where I'm exposed to the public. I can never guess what the outcome would be and whether there will be a negative reaction," she says.
 Eventually, however, she agreed.
 "Linda told me this could be my first and last opportunity to do something different," she explains.
 "The 2011 tsunami in Japan made me realise that life is short."

What do you hope to get out of this experience?

To build my confidence.
 I did not know that by taking part in the show, we would all be signed on with Carrie Elegance. But I'm open to the idea.
 If someone hires me as a model, why not? But I won't do a bikini or nude shoot or anything that will embarrass my family.
 I want to send out the message that women our age are still beautiful and suitable for modelling jobs.

What has been your most memorable moment on the show?

The runway challenge outside Ion Orchard.
 When I first arrived in Singapore, I was scouted by an agency but I quit eventually because I did not like to walk on the runway.
 So I never expected to do it again at this age.
 But I managed to complete the challenge, although it was not my best performance, because



I was committed to the show. I practised along the corridor of my home after my children had gone to school.
 The people I've met on the show are also memorable.
 Although I've been here for many years, I don't have many local friends.
 During the course of filming, however, I found many good Singaporean friends.
 We often text one another and would hang out after our fittings or make-up classes.

What do you fear most about ageing?
 I'm not scared of getting older because you can't avoid it. What I fear most is losing my memory.
 Appearance-wise, I like what I call the happy wrinkles around my eyes and mouth. They show what a happy person I am.

What do you do to maintain your looks?
 I want to age gracefully, so I won't go for extreme aesthetic procedures that involve needles.
 I go for laser treatments about once a month to remove pigmentation.
 I don't use expensive cosmetics; just regular sunscreen and moisturiser.
 I hate exercising but I have a personal trainer and I try to work out about once a week. I don't want to get osteoporosis.

Being on the show and knowing that I might be recognised in public has changed everything.
 Now I try to be careful with what I eat and take greasy food, such as tempura and french fries, only on weekends.

What do your loved ones think about you being part of a reality show?
 My husband was initially worried that I would have to deal with criticism and what others might say about me, especially since it is a reality show.

But besides that, he has been supportive and co-operative. He looks after the kids when I have to go for filming or grooming classes.
 My children are excited about it and say they want to be on TV too.

What would you say to people who think mature women like yourself should not model?
 Look at what Australian actress Kate Blanchett, who is 43, has done for skincare brand SK-II.

There is a demand for women our age to be models.
 I'd like to front a sophisticated print ad or fashion show for beautiful gowns and jewellery, and inspire women.

SARAH TAN, 35

A former editor of Female magazine, Ms Tan is currently the managing director of home-grown lingerie and loungewear label Cosset.
 She also co-founded online boutique Robe Raiders in 2011, which stocks pre-loved items and holds pop-up bazaars.
 Ms Tan, who is single, was introduced to Ms Linda Teo, the managing director of Carrie Models International, through a friend.
 One day, Ms Teo called to ask if she would like to be part of the Models ReInvented reality TV show.
 Ms Tan was hesitant at first because "I'd never taken part in a modelling contest, and I knew that being on TV would be a nerve-wracking experience".
 She had been asked to model when she was younger, but never seriously considered it.
 She decided to give the show a shot "because like Linda, I believe there is a market for models who are in their mid-30s and older".

The growing interest in older models shows that consumers have become more savvy, she says.
 "These days, they know how much Photoshopping goes into a picture. So they appreciate the honesty when a brand presents a woman with wrinkles in their ads," she notes.
 Ms Teo thinks Ms Tan would make a good model because she is "beautiful, toned and has nice skin".
What do you hope to get out of this experience?
 I hope it will inspire other women in their mid-30s and older to be more confident about their looks.
 I'd be happy to model for a wide range of editorials and commercials, especially those to do with fashion.
 I'm confident about my body and poses. As a former editor, I used to art direct behind the camera and instruct models how to pose, I know my best angles and how to position my body.
 I also understand what photographers want out of the image. For example, a fashion shoot is about showing off the clothes, while a jewellery campaign would be about



JILL SARA, 36

The public relations manager was approached by Ms Linda Teo, the managing director of Carrie Models International, at a cocktail event.
 She was walking across the room when Ms Teo approached her about taking part in a reality TV show for older models.
 It was her slim figure that first drew Ms Teo's attention. Later on, the modelling agency owner became impressed by her positive attitude.
 "I could sense that she has low self-esteem, but she has a good attitude and is willing to try new experiences," says Ms Teo.
 Ms Sara thought the show was a great idea. But on the morning of the auditions, she got cold feet.
 She stood outside the office of Carrie Models International for half an hour, wondering if she should go in.
 "I asked myself why I would want to have public exposure and start modelling at the age of 35," says the Eurasian, whose mother is Peranakan Chinese and father is Eurasian.
 But before she could pursue that train of thought, Dick Lee, one of the judges on the show, appeared.
 He asked if she was there for the auditions and she said yes. That answer spurred her to open the door and walk in.
 "The moment I walked through the door, I decided to give of my best and take the show as a journey towards self-discovery."
 Ms Sara says she grew up with low self-esteem because her mother was hung up on appearances and used to point out her imperfections.
 "She expected me to look impeccable every time I stepped out of the bedroom," she says. "And that always made me feel like I was not good enough."

Her only modelling experience was at 12, when she appeared in a print ad for a milk powder brand.
What do you hope to get out of this experience?
 I have always feared failure and rejection and I wanted to face my fears through this reality show.
 My goal was not to win the challenges but to be a stronger person.

What has been your most memorable moment on the show?
 I've always hated having to face the camera and smile. Before the show, I couldn't even smile for a casual photo with friends.
 One of the challenges on the show involved a photoshoot and I was so nervous.
 I did not win the challenge and it broke me

showing off the baubles and getting the mood of the picture right.
What has been your most memorable moment on the show?
 I'm least confident on the runway because I've never walked on one before. For one of the challenges during the show, we had to walk on an elevated runway outside Ion Orchard on a Saturday.
 It was nerve-wracking because the lights and camera were on me, while the public stood watching. But I completed the challenge successfully because we had been trained by Linda. We were also given pointers by veteran models Pat Kraal, My Chng and Lilian Sim.
 They were so experienced in walking on the runway that it was second nature to them and that helped me feel at ease.
What do you fear most about ageing?
 The fact that I was getting older hit me only when I turned 30. When you are in your 20s and say you are getting old, it's just psychological.
 Now that I am 35, I have noticed how I get more aches and pains. My skin feels looser and less firm. My face is also less plump and sagging a little.
 That said, I like my flat stomach. I can put on muscle mass easily, so getting a six pack is not difficult for me.
 Mentally, I feel stronger, more confident and satisfied with myself.
 I'm just afraid that when I'm physically falling apart, my body won't be able to keep up with my mind.
What do you do to maintain your looks?
 Up till two years ago, I never exercised because I have a high metabolic rate. Now that I've noticed the cellulite and overall loss of muscle tone, I exercise at least twice a week. I'm into yoga, pilates and tennis.
 I try to eat healthily, like cutting down on refined sugar.
 I'm using more anti-ageing skincare products that contain vitamins C and E and alpha hydroxy acids.

because I don't like how everyone looks at me when I fail.
 Then, I realised that I could not smile at the camera because I have low self-esteem and I'm not in tune with who I am.
 I felt like giving up because I thought I did not have what it takes to be a model and to be on the show.
 But I pressed on because Linda and the resident stylist, who goes by the name Marcus AC, believed in me.
 The show has helped improve my self-confidence and, now, I can look at a camera and smile.

What do you fear most about ageing?
 I have to deal with a sagging bust and butt, but I guess that's all part of being a woman. I don't see that as a problem that I have to fix; I'm happy as long as I'm healthy.
 Mentally, I still feel as carefree as when I was in my 20s. I've grown to be more comfortable in my skin.
 But I'm afraid I will get Alzheimer's disease because both my grandmas have it.

What do you do to maintain your looks?
 I enjoy my thrice-weekly workouts, be it power walking with weights, Ashtanga yoga or just working out to online videos.
 As for my beauty routine, I stick to three simple products: facial wash, moisturiser and sunscreen.
 Before I was educated on skincare and make-up at Carrie's, I used to wash my face with shampoo while washing my hair.
 In my family, women don't use make-up.
 I also go for laser treatments once a month to get rid of pigmentation.

What do your loved ones think about you being part of a reality show?
 No one knows. But I think people who value me will be very happy for me because my experiences on the show are huge breakthroughs for me.

What would you say to people who think mature women like yourself should not model?
 There are women out there who are looking for individuals they can relate to in ad campaigns, not just wall-to-wall 20-somethings.
 Brands which are not comfortable with using mature models simply have a different target audience.
 I'd like to be the face for cosmetic and jewellery brands as well as for fitness programmes.