

French, 40 and fabuleuse

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This guide is the essential companion to the *Hollande affaire*, the book you need if you have been pondering whether either lady in his life has resorted to aesthetic procedures to attract paunchy politicians. Valérie Trierweiler and Julie Gayet are over 40 and gorgeous. Have they had something “done”?

The answer to this is *Non*, according to Mireille Guiliano, author of the bestselling *French Women Don't Get Fat* who has delivered a sequel, nicely timed for an era of enhanced interest in Gallic midlife pulling power. Guiliano, in case you were unaware, is the grand dame of *Très Chic Lit*. This is the literary genre that explores French women's alleged superiority in fields of endeavour ranging from parenting (*French Children Don't Throw Food*) to remaining killer sexy for ever, à la Catherine Deneuve. Even one of the most recent works in this canon: *La Femme Parfaite Est Une Connasse* (*The Perfect Woman is a Bitch*) — which celebrates the Gallic sisters



French Women Don't Get Facelifts by Mireille Guiliano

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e-book £9.49

BOTOX, MOI? Catherine Deneuve, right, *Très Chic Lit* heroine

who rebel against the national ideal — contrives to reinforce French competence. Even when letting things slip, the French do it more stylishly, with *Va Va Voom*, not gloom. *La Française* has splendidly messy bed hair. The Brit has just rolled-out-of-bed hair.

French Women Don't Get Fat — which sold more than three million copies worldwide — was a book into which you ventured bristling with cynicism (They do so get fat! Have you seen them rolling out of McDonald's in provincial towns?) However, by the end, you felt more informed about nutrition and almost persuaded that the ability to seduce need not end until the end. You also concluded that Guiliano, a former senior executive at LVMH, the luxury goods group, was a bit of a ferocious feminist, although at some remove from Betty Friedan who rarely focused on the best way to apply foundation.

French Women Don't Get Facelifts is another such confection, ostensibly as light as a meringue but actually as satisfying as



Guiliano's recipe for duck with caramelised mango (yes, it's a cookery book as well). It's a “no” not only to the scalpel and Botox needle, but also to fad diets and costly anti-ageing serums, about which Guiliano is most snuffy. It is *à Oui, Oui, Oui* to facials, diets “where nothing is restricted, but everything is encouraged in moderation”, plus lots of walking up stairs and putting out the bedroom light at 11pm (for

more sleep, and well, you get the picture). Guiliano also advises that your skin can stay firm, but not artificially tautened, with moisturisers from the chemist, or the supermarket. Here you will also be shopping for the foods that keep that youthful glow such as avocados, bananas, sardines and honey. Guiliano eats a banana with a knife and fork, turning it into a pudding, not a snack. She also puts honey in all sorts of places.

The French preoccupation with privacy means that we will never know the secrets of the maintenance routine of either Trierweiler or Gayet — unless *Closer* magazine supplies these details, or either lady embarks on a new career in *Très Chic Lit*. However, each exhibits an abundance of the positive attitude that Guiliano preaches. They also have culture on their side. *Excuse My French*, by Rachel Best and Jean-Christophe Van Waes, is a recently published primer to dishing the dirt and talking dirty, and much else, in French. It explains that the French equivalent for “to be no spring chicken” is “avoir de la bouteille”, a phrase that evokes a fine vintage wine rather than decrepitude. With a supportive language such as this, who needs a nip and tuck?

Anne Ashworth