



COLLAGE: SAM BOXER. IMAGES: KEMI ALEMORU

Life

Welcome to the Redhead Renaissance

"I went from teasing gingers at 12 to becoming one of them in my late 20s - and I'm not the only one."

KA By [Kemi Alemoru](#)

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I fire crotch. Fanta pants. Ginger minger. I grew up during some dark times for the ginger community, where comedies like *South Park* took cheap shots and it was a regular punchline in schools and beyond. I was in year eight in 2006 when *The Catherine Tate Show* aired an episode named “Gingers for Justice”, where protestors dressed as carrots and Duracell batteries to fight for the right to leave the house “hatless”. Then in 2010, I quoted most of the lines from Michael Kittrell’s passionately orated PSA, the viral YouTube video “GINGERS DO HAVE SOULS!!”. There was even a mid-noughties Facebook event for Punch a Ginger Day, which was then followed by an annual countercultural Kiss a Ginger Day on January 12. Years later still, the community had to campaign for Apple to rectify its ginger erasure in its emoji selection. All in all, things have been pretty dire.

I clearly absorbed this like a bigoted sponge. When I recently looked back at my teen diaries, I noticed a list of qualities I deemed desirable so that boys would fancy me. “I still wish I could be like every guy dreamed of, because if dreams came true I’d get everything I ever wanted,” I wrote in a frenzied scribble. “But hey... at least I’m not ginger.” What this passage shows me is; first of all, I was a little weirdo who maybe needed to see a child psychologist (you can’t cancel me, I was 12) and secondly; gingers have come such a long way.

By the time I found this entry I actually *was* ginger. The change was ushered in by my global pandemic urge to transition into a walking Stabilo highlighter pen, because there’s nothing like a pop of colour to take the edge off your own apocalypse-induced nihilism. And I’m not alone in finding joy, glamour and power by experimenting with a much-maligned tone - 2022 was the year of redheaded reverence.

There was the first redhead to win Miss England, who triumphed despite being bullied for her looks during her school years. *Euphoria*’s Sydney Sweeney debuted a new strawberry blonde look and then Kendall Jenner kept her auburn hair from Prada’s AW22 show in Milan. A giant step for gingers everywhere.

“It’s true that where the Kardashian-Jenners go, many

will follow,” says beauty editor and brand consultant Daniela Morosini. She also notes the most popular tone is a hard-to-achieve copper that’s generally only possible with a “very expensive colourist” - which may be part of the appeal. The stats backs this up: In 2022, LOOKFANTASTIC saw a 38 percent rise in searches for copper hair and 121 percent for copper hair masks for the girlies maintaining their tricky dye job. Morosini adds: “There’s also a repeated cycle with trends wherein a celebrity will try a style often considered unpopular, and then it becomes a subversively cool look and more people do it. Crocs are another good example of this.” Unlike the divisive shoe, this hair colour is genetic for many people: Like big lips, tanned skin and curvy figures, there’s always going to be a pushback when naturally occurring features are heralded as a newly “fashionable” trend.

When I posted a picture of my teenage diary entry in an Instagram carousel with my new look (possible hate crime, sorry), my actual ginger friend essentially approached me to say: “My culture is not a costume.” It makes sense that people who were ostracised for being ginger in their early years might find the sudden celebration of the look “triggering”, as one clinical psychologist tells i-D. There aren’t any current ONS stats to quantify

whether having red hair puts you at risk hate crime-wise, but it’s clearly a sore subject for many.

“Red is one of the rarest natural hair colours in the world and is historically linked to outcasts and rebellion,” says Anne-Catherine Auvray, executive editor of BEAUTYSTREAMS. For centuries, it was associated with witchcraft and, according to Artsy, artists from Sandro Botticelli to Dante Gabriel Rossetti used red hair to suggest “promiscuity, sensuality, deviousness, and - above all - otherness for centuries”.

Maybe in some way I’m culturally appropriating an oppressed group? Or maybe I’m “ginger-fishing”? Ultimately, I just want to be accepted by my flame-haired brethren: The Black-ginger alliance is growing and I think we’re stronger together. Not content with already sitting at multiple axes of oppression, it’s become the experimental shade du jour with Ciara, Masai Martin, Zeze Mills, Indiyah Polak, Patricia Bright and other Black celebrities who’ve all trialled the look lately.

No Signal radio host Victory Sanu-Goodness explains how her view of ginger hair has shifted since her teen years, when it felt like a no-go zone. “It definitely wasn’t a desirable colour to me back then, because I wouldn’t have thought Black people could be ginger. It wouldn’t have even crossed my mind,” she says. Similarly to me, Sanu-Goodness changed up her look because she was “super depressed” and in need of a vibe shift. “This crappy boy said I wasn’t his type anymore, so I thought I’d show him by becoming ginger. I wanted to shock everyone and be a new person.” It worked - her scarlet-haired revamp had strangers stop her in the street saying she looked good.

For others like 23-year-old Ogo Oluleye, who works in PR, it was also a rebellion against what hair is deemed appropriate for Black women. “In school, Black girls would get in trouble if our hair wasn’t considered ‘natural,’” she says. “I made a vow to experiment with every colour before I got into the corporate world and had to be taken seriously.”

There are many great gingers who’ve seriously contributed to popular culture: Elton John, the Weasleys, Chuckie from *Rugrats*, that guy from Simply Red. I’m honoured to sit in such good company. Whether the latest rise is a “fuck you” to archaic beauty standards or a nod to rarity, and a statement about individuality, I’m glad gingers are experiencing a sexy renaissance.

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