

CAMILLA: THE IT GIRL OF 2006

As the Christmas elves relax with a nice glass of Bristol Cream, another set of workers are frantically adding the final touches to their annual contribution to our wellbeing.

January is the month when futurologists unveil their wares and it's a time that is as confusing as it is contradictory. In 2006 we will feast on lifestyle prophecy like never before. The rising number of forecasters, paid fortunes for their mutterings, have never been taken — nor taken themselves — more seriously.

When I call Faith Popcorn, who predicted that we would spend the last decade of the millennium indoors watching telly ("cocooning"), a Manhattan PA answered her phone in the faraway tones of a Delphic priest: "No, you can't speak to Ms Popcorn. Her predictions are still being worked out."

Isn't she cutting it a bit fine? "Don't you think we know that?"

It takes several calls to find someone whose crystal ball is really zinging, but the result is a shocker. Marian Salzman — J Walter Thompson's advertising superstar who popularised the term metrosexual — called from America and a startling thought fell straight from her lips: "Camilla is going to be the next great lifestyle icon."

Sorry... Camilla who? "Parker Bowles, obviously."

Camilla — the It girl of 2006? Playing a bit fast and loose with the word "obviously" aren't we?

"Not at all, just look at that fabulous creature," said Salzman. In times past we would have called her elderly and never would have celebrated the romance of her finding love in her fifties. Do you remember in the early days of Diana how obsessed we all were with youth? Young women are so over now.

"Look at the young princesses today — Beatrice, Zara and whoever. No one cares. All the lights are turned on this 58-year-old woman. Camilla tells us almost everything we need to know about where society is headed."

Salzman is not the only savant vouching for Camilla's cutting-edge importance. From the offices of Demos, the political think tank, Tom Bentley, the director, explained: "We're witnessing the dawn of a new golden age for baby boomers. They've stayed healthy, met their parenting responsibilities and are starting to benefit from assets and financial schemes that the next generation can only dream of."

"Suddenly they have the money, freedom and confidence to enjoy life and devote themselves to the causes they really believe in."

"Camilla," he laughed, "could definitely be a pin-up." Are Salzman and Bentley getting carried away? Admittedly the duchess's tale is triumphant (seasoned woman nets man, title and fantastic jewellery years after it was thought possible) but are we ready to accept the "rottweiler" as a 21st-century icon?

Penny Junor, biographer of the Prince of Wales, believes it is possible: "The wedding last year could have been disastrous, but Camilla turned it around. She was so natural, fun, mischievous with a really good sense of humour."

Camilla did what baby boomers have always done — casualised her surroundings, explained Junor.

"She was gracious without being regal. If not the common touch exactly, she has great empathy with all sorts of people. Ironically, she is very like Diana in that way."

While Diana (herself a young baby boomer) remains for ever associated with the pitfalls of young adulthood, Camilla looks set to triumph in middle age.

There is something even more startling than this, however. The duchess is going to define many areas of modern life in 2006, according to the futurologists. She is an exemplar for finding fulfilment later in life, one of this year's key lifestyle themes.

Thanks to Bridget Jones and Sex and the City, the predication till recently held that by 2010 western cities would be overrun with miserable spinsters. Wrong.

"What we're actually going to see more of," said Salzman, who has crunched the numbers, "is a lot of women who were stuck in bad marriages, or who stayed single in their thirties and forties, starting to de-emphasise their careers and get married in their fifties."

"I honestly believe that

Futurologists have got the coming year taped. The Duchess of Cornwall will be a lifestyle icon, we are all going to get neighbourly, and the contents of your fridge will be a key social indicator. Giles Hattersley peeps into the crystal ball

we'll soon start seeing communities of older newlyweds being built because love over 50 doesn't feel stigmatised any more. Camilla makes it look wonderful."

NEW communities of all kinds are in for 2006. Crawford Hollingworth of HeadlightVision, the trend analysts, said: "I hesitate to say we're approaching a new medievalism but we can expect a big return to local living. People are tired of being cut off from one another and living in identical towns. All those gated roads and high street restaurants that were so popular five years ago are very unfashionable now."

Bentley agreed: "The next period of politics will also revolve around how we localise power, devolve control of frontline services and revitalise communities."

"But it doesn't necessarily mean an exodus from the cities," said Hollingworth. "In real terms we could see projects in places like Leeds where neighbours will be able to live more sustainable lives by relying on each other to share cars and even grow food. I know it sounds a bit like The Good Life but it will start happening soon."

Anne Lise Kjaer, who advises companies such as Ford, Nike and Ikea, believes that growing our own food will be the "big aspiration thing" for 2006.

"We've become victimised by abundance and I would go as far as to say that food is almost the most critical thing for 2006, much more so than fashion anyway," she said.

"What you eat will say a lot more about you than what you wear. You can expect people

Books will tell women to embrace their inner size 12. People want to be happy like Camilla, so pasta is going to make a comeback

at your dinner party to judge you very harshly if you are serving things that have travelled too far or are out of season."

Good news then for Duchy Originals. Prince Charles's organic food company, which is at the vanguard of the home-grown revolution.

"Certain statistics keep getting repeated," said Kjaer. "Between 40% and 50% of western managed crops are thrown away and Britain

throws away five times more than it donates to charity. No one wants to be an obvious consumer and Camilla Parker Bowles is a really good example of someone who, despite their status, always plays it down a bit."

The maturing baby boomers have a certain cachet among the younger generation, claimed Bentley.

"Just look at how David Cameron brought in Bob Geldof to enhance his global

poverty credentials last week. Geldof feels right for the time. He's a dad, he's still making music, he's a global campaigner who can speak out but doesn't operate as a politician. I think Camilla is just like him."

If baby boomers are so popular, then why didn't David Davis, born in 1948, win the Tory leadership?

"A generational power shift is another important trend for 2006," said Bentley. "There is

a key group of people born between 1965 and 1975 who are just on the cusp of taking over the visible bastions of cultural, political and commercial power. David Cameron, of course, is the first of these."

That generational shift could make for one big surprise. "I think we could see a serious debate about a Lib Dem/Tory coalition," said Bentley. "It's being hinted at already because of this new radical centre that's emerging in politics. These pragmatic, centre-ground issues have the potential to unite a very disparate coalition of middle-class voters. A radical centre coalition of Liberals and Conservatives could be the thing that replaces new Labour."

"THE other debate we'll be having in 2006 will be about privacy," said Hollingworth. "We're going to be forced to question at what point our protection becomes someone else's invasion. For example, insurance firms will soon have the ability to monitor your car, to track its speed and see where it's parked."

"The selling point will be that they could lower your premiums, but what if instead someone notices you parked outside an old flame's house

at odd hours of the night? Legislation is really raw in this area." Romancing baby boomers beware.

Fortunately, technology will become kinder in other ways — thanks to the over-fifties. "Of course," said Salzman, "there's a backlash against things like BlackBerry at the moment, but I don't think we're going to be eliminating any of the gadgets we love to moan about. That train has left the station. Instead, older generations are going to drive the simplification of technology."

"We're going to see more products like Nokia's new mobiles for the older market," said Sean Pillot De Chenecey, a trendspotter. "All these phones are capable of it making calls or, if you're feeling really adventurous, texting."

"Twenty years ago there was great loyalty to brands but nowadays most products work so well that there's no real difference between stereos or family saloons. The companies that are really going to win out are ones which can provide great services to niche consumers... especially anything that excites the over-fifties. It's about capturing the Camilla market."

"The internet is great at this," said Salzman, "because it tailors itself so well to an individual's needs. Over-seventies chat rooms are big news for this year. Children need to make sure they get their parents online in 2006 — otherwise they're going to miss out on their entire social life."

Older generations, say the forecasters, will also gentrify our social life. "It's ironic with your new 24-hour drinking laws, because the one thing I'm sure we're going to see more of this year is alcohol-free socialising," said Salzman. "I see less drinking in airline lounges, I see less drinking in restaurants and even the average man in the pubs isn't drinking in the way he used to."

Of course some binge drinking will remain, but in 2006 "most people will not want to be seen to be overdoing things", said Kjaer.

"We will still want to have a drink but in the same way that we will no longer respond to overt materialism and designer handbags we won't want to look like we're conspicuously consuming anything, including alcohol."

The ideal social persona for 2006 will be the restrained bon viveur. "In England it's all about a new connoisseurship, sipping and savouring," said Salzman. "With our increasing sensitivity to the environment at large, we will also become more sensitive to our social environments. It is very out to be garish."

Once again, the paradigm will be Camilla.

A new-found respect for our livers will be echoed by an improved attitude to nutrition. "The thing that is really going to surprise people this year is how we are finally going to start losing weight," said Salzman. "Affluent women in their forties and fifties are leading the way by returning to the way they ate as children."

Another testament to the power of Camilla, says Salzman: "We used to call her fat, but as we look at her more carefully in today's light we realise she's not fat at all. She is well put together and actually very healthy-looking."

"We're going to start seeing a lot of books that tell women to embrace their inner size 12, because people are no longer interested in having the kind of fraught relationship with food that Diana had. They want to be great-looking and happy like Camilla, so pasta is going to make a comeback."

The duchess also fits appealingly into the new sexual landscape. Not only is she symptomatic of the acceptance of sex beyond 50, she is also a welcome alternative to our polarised sexual tastes.

"Sex is the great divide. Half of us hate this new prudishness and the other half hate how pornographic images are totally mainstream," said Salzman.

"In 2006 two big sellers are going to be chastity rings and the light erotica that we can now purchase at supermarkets."

"I can think of only two women who deal with this yin and yang well. Charlotte Church, because she manages to be sexually overt but not sleazy, and Camilla. She has an earthy, restrained sexiness that makes her bizarrely desirable. Madonna has had a good year, but as she turns 50 she should really model her next reinvention on Camilla Parker Bowles."

WANT TO BE HIP IN 2006? THEN BUTTON UP (IN PINK) AND GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

New connoisseurship

This year will be less two pints of lager and a packet of crisps and more one sip of Châteauneuf du Pape and a sliver of roquefort. Even getting drunk will become a no-no. It's about sipping, so if you must drink ale, why not take one of the fashionable new beer-tasting courses?

Love thy neighbour

... because you're going to be spending a lot more time with them. As the economy gets tougher and environmental awareness

increases, communities are starting to pull together. A car-pooling rota, shared recycling schemes and an allotment are predicted to become status symbols.

Emotional intelligence

Huggable David Cameron leads the charge as we all get in touch with our feelings. Labour whips should pay heed. A leading Scandinavian think tank believes emotional intelligence is so important this year that any unfeeling boss will have a staff exodus on his hands, no matter how good the pension scheme.

New puritanism

Asda may be stocking sex toys, but this year will see a different kind of sexual revolution with Google and other internet search engines clamping down on porn. Say goodbye to Jordan, hello Fiona Bruce — because buttoned-up restraint will be even bigger than boobs in 2006.

Back to reality

I'm a Celebrity and Big Brother are in trouble, as American trend-spotters forecast the end of "staged" reality TV. Instead we can

expect to see more blow-by-blow medical shows with people giving birth and having open-heart surgery in prime time. Come back, Davina!

Politics

Westminster could get exciting this year with a new emphasis on personality politics. With Cameron keen to make his mark, there's going to be much more scope for real leadership and there's a store of practical, voter-friendly issues up for debate — pensions, parenting and local services.

Yanky Doodle Done

America is just so over, and not just because of Bush and Iraq. With a mature economy and an unpopular attitude to Kyoto, the US is losing its grip on world culture as the rest of the world looks to nations with a bit more razzle dazzle. Step forward, China.

Transparency

Sportswear giant Nike has installed cameras in its factories so customers can log onto its website and assess working conditions. Expect conglomerates to clean up their act and throw

their doors open in 2006, as ethics become a driving consumer force.

Neon pink

The new black, apparently.

Nanotechnology

Living moisturisers that penetrate the skin, foods that are improved at a molecular level — with new technologies there will be opportunity for fantastic innovation in 2006. But beware. Government legislation in this area is crude and 2006 could be the year the boffins go too far.