

# KAREN MILLEN INTERVIEWS

## LEIGH ROBERTS

Award winning colourist **Leigh Roberts** has firmly established himself in Tunbridge Wells. His salon is now 9 years old and we thought it was about time we found out a bit more about him. Here he talks to long term friend and client, fashion legend Karen Millen.



**Why did you choose hairdressing as a career?**  
“I was lucky that I knew what I wanted to do from quite a young age. I was always quite artistic as a child and hairdressing lets me explore that. Salons are always full of pretty girls, that probably had something to do with it!”

**How would you say hairdressing differs today from when you first started?**

“Hairdressers today tend to be much more all-round in their approach. When I was training you were encouraged to specialize. There are few specialists around now, which I think is a shame – skills are becoming more diluted.”

**Why did you decide to open your own salon?**

“It was the only way to do things my way. Salons now all want to be part of big chains, and they are losing their individuality. I wanted to develop a one-off independent salon full of talented individuals, which I think we have achieved.”

**What are the most challenging aspects of hairdressing generally and owning your own salon?**

“You need to constantly motivate yourself and be fresh in your ideas. It's easy to copy something you've seen, but to create something new and unique, that's hard. As for owning a salon, managing people can be tough sometimes, especially when there are a lot of different personalities involved, although it can be very rewarding as well.”

**The competition must be tough, what makes your salon different from so many other salons?**

“The way we approach things is different. I'm a great believer in having specialists in the salon, which is something you see less of now. I also don't like how pretentious hairdressing has become. You won't find that with us, it's a very relaxed and friendly salon.”

**The past 3 years have been difficult for many businesses, has this affected you?**

“Of course, but I try to be positive. As a business we need to work harder and offer a better service every day and we need to do it at a price that's honest. I think ultimately our clients appreciate that.”

**Your team have been with you for a long time, why do you think they're so loyal?**

“I hope it's because it's a great place to work! Clients often say that it feels a happy and relaxed place to be and they're right. We are all friends and the atmosphere reflects that. My team knows that I care about them and I will always try to do my best for them.”

**Who has been an inspiration to you?**

“My first boss Lionel taught me a lot. I was so young when I started and he really helped me to grow. We're still great friends and he remains an inspiration! For pure artistic and technical ability it's got to be Angelo Seminara. To me he is the only true genius of my generation. His work never ceases to amaze me.”

**What's your biggest success?**

“My proudest achievements come through my teaching.”

I've taught a number of apprentices and they've all done me proud. It's a very personal thing, taking somebody as an apprentice. It's not just about passing on your skills, it's about helping them grow as a person and trying to pass on some of your values. It's a wonderful feeling to watch them progress, gain confidence and eventually become talented individuals in their own right.”

**You have been quoted in the press as saying “Don't call me a celebrity hairdresser.” Why not?**

“I can't understand the need to attach the word celebrity to everything. My best work is done in the salon. Does it really matter who my clients are or what they do? As long as they've got great hair, I've done my job.”

**So will you reveal some of your client list?**

“No.”

**Finally, what advice would you give to anyone wanting to go into hairdressing?**

“Find a salon that will offer you a proper apprenticeship. You need to be patient. Don't be tempted to fast-track through a college system. Being a hairdresser is about more than just doing hair. The only way to learn all the skills you need is by working day in, day out in a salon. Be prepared to work harder than you think. Someone said to me when I was younger, 'Decide what you want to do with your life, then be the best at it.' The only way to achieve that is by getting off to the best start.”

