

'I said I'd never marry again but I've found my soulmate'

The divorcée

Ten years after splitting from Noel, Meg Mathews is remarrying at 44.

By Marianne Macdonald

It's hard to get used to the Meg Mathews sitting in front of me, drinking peppermint tea, talking a mile a minute, with her hair in a model-shiny toffee bob, tinged with caramel highlights straight from a shampoo ad. The Meg Mathews I've been following in the newspapers for 16 years wore wild, raunchy outfits under bleached white hair, shopped for Britain during her marriage to Noel Gallagher of Oasis and partied with Kate Moss, Sadie Frost and the Primrose Hill set until she looked, as a tabloid unkindly observed, "wretched".

A decade on, the parties have stopped and she seems genuinely happy after a spell in rehab made her realise that her drinking and partying was an attempt to bury the never-dealt-with pain from her divorce. She is now drink and drug-free, and has broken away from a long line of bad boys to get engaged to Peter Sidell, a 49-year-old professor who owns The Library, a menswear store in Knights-

bridge. "It was time to get rid of the blonde," she says. "It's reflecting what's on the inside on the outside, definitely. I feel a lot happier and a lot calmer."

Is Sidell different from her previous husband. "Of course he is! Completely different. I've known him for longer; I've known him since I was 18.

"He's really funny, he's never moody. He's so well read, he's a professor at the Royal College of Art, he's the most amazing fashion buyer, he's got the most amazing shop on the Brompton Road, so basically everything I love. He teaches me. As we know I'm now clean and sober and it's like being a kid again. I'm in the land of the living and I've got this amazing new teacher who's also the person I love. So, weekends we go to galleries and read *The Times*, we go to bed at 10pm, we've got two dogs, we have breakfast in Hampstead. It's the grown-up life that you read about in textbooks, and I feel so blessed. I've come through everything."

What's he like? "Well, we all fall in love for different reasons at different times. I've

just found someone who has everything." Sidell gets along well with Anais, Mathews' daughter from her first marriage. "He's the most tactile, loveable person, really responsible with Anais, 'cos he's got a 21-year-old son and a seven-year-old daughter, and we just actually all work brilliantly as a team."

It is the end of a ten-year transformation that began with the acrimonious divorce from Noel in 2001 and was marked along the way by motherhood, her decision to go into rehab four years ago which cut short her 40th birthday celebrations in Ibiza, and the realisation, as she looked at a paparazzi picture of herself two years ago, in hair extensions and leopard-skin trousers, that she looked like "mutton dressed as lamb". She was 44 on Sunday and today she looks well-groomed, healthy and down-to-earth in Zara T-shirt and trousers, trainers and a white Hermès belt.

"I could have married Peter before — but I probably would have been a nightmare," she admits. "I wouldn't have wanted to go out with me then. I have to check myself all the time to make sure I don't go



back to that because I can get an ego that big. I was the most self-obsessed person. It was very much about what was on the outside — the way I looked. I tried to control everything.”

She can't talk about the wedding next year, having sold the story to *OK!* maga-

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zine. But she is planning to wear a dress, unlike the trouser suit she wore with Noel. How does she feel about getting married again? “Oh, I love the idea. Absolutely love it. I did actually say I would never get married again, but I have fallen head over heels in love and found my soulmate and he's never been married and never been engaged, so it seems like the perfect time.”

So no more bad boys? “Well, if you met him or have seen him, he's a South London boy!” She puts on a South London accent. “He talks like this, he goes to the football all the time, he's a man, he's very strong, he came from scrapyards, he rode horses bare-back from Tooting to Clapham as a kid, his mum had a caff, he's worked his way through but he comes from the same working-class background as me.”

Meg's father Stan is a carpenter from Liverpool; her mother Chris worked for the National Coal Board in London as a secretary. Meg grew up in Guernsey and South Africa. “I was sent back to a Quaker boarding school, Sibford, in Banbury, at 12, where I met Guy Ritchie and his sister Tabitha.”

Expelled for being “boy mad”, she hitchhiked to London with a black bin bag and

never went back. She met Noel when he was going out with her flatmate and started going out with him just as *Definitely Maybe*, Oasis's debut album, was turning them into huge stars. If she had to sum up that period what would she say? She grins. “Mad for it!”

If she could click her fingers and have it all back, would she? “Yeah, would I say no?” she muses. “Of course I couldn't do it now, but if I was that age, I would do it all again. One of the most talented songwriters asked me to marry him. I mean ...” She trails off in wonder.

She works these days as a dresser — a sort of interior designer, and since last year she has designed wallpapers for Liberty.

“Oh no,” she says when I ask if she wants to have more kids, or adopt. “No, I'm happy with Anais, she fills my life. I'm 44, I don't want to be an old mum, nothing against Madonna or anything.”



TOM STOCKILL FOR THE TIMES, PHOTOGRAPHED AT SKETCH



Happy together
Meg Mathews and her
new partner Peter Sidell

