

PERSONAL TIME

BY EMMA WILLIAMSON

Even a style maven can get inspired by a personal shopper

I WALK INTO MY FIRST PERSONAL SHOPPING CONSULTATION with Erin Nadler of Better Styled in midtown Toronto with trepidation, clutching my coffee like a life preserver. Will she judge my oatmeal sweater (definitely not my best colour) that's pilling after years of wear? Maybe she'll tell me I need to be more conservative, or be shocked I don't like suits. Instead, right away, Nadler tells me she loves my Russian fur hat (I mean, it is a fabulous hat). As we settle onto a sleek white couch to chat, she makes me feel comfortable and at ease.

She's all questions. What's in my wardrobe? What do I wear to work? Do I wear prints? What colours do I like? We discuss sizing and preferences. It doesn't feel like an interview, but a conversation between two women who love clothes. Moments later, Nadler appears with an armful of pieces snagged from her inventory of primarily Canadian designers, carefully selected based on my answers. A gorgeous navy dress with three-quarter-length sleeves (I picture this with nude pumps and a coral necklace); a tartan blazer with shades of blue, grey and yellow (infinitely more interesting than my grey and black numbers); and a strawberry, chocolate and cream shift with the tiniest bit of leather detailing (mmm...dessert). Nothing I would've picked myself and yet all strangely perfect for my current wardrobe. In addition to learning that I should be wearing more bright, primary colours (rather than the pastels I favour — they wash me out), I leave feeling like I've learned something about myself and my style.

While I may adore fashion, that doesn't mean my closet isn't full of the same old blazers, dresses and tights I've been wearing as my work uniform for years. Even stylistas get stuck in a rut.

While, obviously, personal shoppers shop (duh), they also provide other services you might not expect. Toronto-based The Refinery, headed by founder Wendy Woods, also does closet makeovers, will "shop your closet" to reimagine what you already have and can find you the perfect outfit for a special event. (She charges \$350 for a two-hour session). When Nadler shops for you, she pins the clothes when you try them on and has them professionally altered post-purchase. She also does wardrobe organizing and "girls' night out" shopping parties, where you get to kick back with a glass of vino while you select the pieces you like. (Um, wine and clothing? Anyone see a problem with that?)

The best personal shoppers get to know you first before they pull out the credit card on your behalf. "It's not about being trendy or forcing your style on clients," says Woods, looking sleek in burgundy jeans, riding boots and a multi-strand pearl and rhinestone necklace that pops against her classic cream blouse. "It's about learning how to read clients, and translating who they are into their style and manner of dress." For lawyers, personal shoppers know the rules and can help us subtly break them.

Pro shoppers get you the right look in little time. Nadler says her goal is to make shopping efficient, easy and fun. "No dashing from store to store, no size stress and no pressure sales." With a personal shopper, you won't be wasting time trying on clothes that don't work for you. It's delegation in its finest form.

My time with a personal shopper made me realize this kind of service is not just about buying clothes, but finding a way to accept who you are and what works for you. "I try to create good energy around style, helping women build a positive relationship with clothing," says Woods. Now that's a real fashion statement. ■



WHERE THE BOYS ARE

Men need wardrobe advice too. Victor Catalli, general manager at Harry Rosen's First Canadian Place location, tells us what a personal shopper can do for guys



Why bother

The goal is to make looking great easy and effortless. Men's fashion has evolved; there's a lot for a client to consider, and often, only with the counsel of a professional will he allow himself to be led.

What's involved

A Harry Rosen sales associate can visit your home to take inventory of your closet, provide suggestions on how to mix and match your existing wardrobe and determine a plan for seasons to come, all at no extra charge.

How often

Add pieces a couple of times a year. Menswear doesn't change at the speed of womenswear, but there are always new fits, styles and colours.

What's hot this season

A casual yet elegant mood prevails this spring, with soothing neutrals and energizing brights as the main colour trends. Traditional tailoring techniques make the look refined.



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