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solving your wardrobe dilemmas

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This month's guest blogger, Caroline Phillips, on solving your wardrobe dilemmas.

Caroline Phillips is an award-winning journalist (www.carolinephillips.net). She writes for the glossies and most of the nationals, from the Independent to the Sunday Times. She spent years at the coal-face doing The Caroline Phillips Interview - writing big name interviews for the Evening Standard. Now you're more likely to find her having Dracula Therapy at BWW or dipping her manicured toes in the Indian Ocean. In the name of journalism, of course.

If you're the type who has tons of clothes but never anything to wear, read on. Once we Brits thought that professional style advice was best left to our Transatlantic cousins. We legged it in department stores at the sight of consultants wearing knee-high foundation and extreme designer clothes: reincarnated Stepford Wives telling us which colours and styles of clothes (and makeup) to wear.

We preferred instead to be amateurish in our garment purchases – either going for DIY or stupidly relying on shop assistants to give us honest, objective advice. (Hello, who's on commission here?)

Either way, all too often we ended up with expensive and uncoordinated items. Impulse buys and age inappropriate clothes. Rubbish sales purchases. And clothes that will fit one day, honest.

Now Notting Hillybillies, sharp investors and slebs are turning to professional help. "Personal stylists have gone big," confirms Fiona Golfar, editor at large of British Vogue. More specifically, they're hiring stylist Annabel Hodin to help them make their sartorial choices. She's an erstwhile model – she was talent spotted by US Vogue's Anna Wintour - and is the fashion editors' favourite.

There's scarcely a glossy magazine editor or newspaper fashionista who hasn't sought her help. After all, the girl has pedigree: she has created looks for Paul McCartney, Mick Jagger and Bryan Ferry, styling their photo shoots. And the same for Helena Bonham Carter, Rachel Weisz and Mariella Frostrup.

Annabel offers a bespoke service that includes consultations, wardrobe edits, shopping trips and follow ups in person and/or on the phone. Initially she comes to your house or office – the latter for a consultation, ideal for those who feel shy about a lady going through their drawers within an hour of meeting. If she's doing a home visit, you'd best wear good underwear – you'll be trying on clothes.

With refreshing frankness and energy, she'll go through your wardrobe –and with you, she'll select looks that work for you, find gaps in your closet, identify what you think you want and need and discuss what she reckons would work. Yep, time to chuck the vintage if you're old enough to have worn it first time round.

After her efficient edit, you'll have a leaner wardrobe. (Mine was positively slimline.) Then she'll put your clothes into outfits to see what's missing, and together you'll set out to fill them. So now to shopping! Yipee! She has already scoured the shops for weeks prior to meeting you, understands what suits you probably better than you know yourself, and knows where to find everything...whether it be designer or high street. She'll whizz you through West London's stylish boutiques and on to Selfridges or perhaps to St John's Wood High Street's Joseph - which has clothes not carried elsewhere - for core items. And all done with military precision and a brilliant eye.



Annabel helps you buy key pieces that will last: simple, timeless cuts. She avoids cheap fabrics, cuts and colours. She goes for multiple buys if it's a vital core item. (Genius. It never occurred to me to buy more than one of something that suits me. "It saves one for best," she says. "If it's a classic, you can have it in more than one colour.") She discourages shopping in the sales. "Only if you already know it's the right size and colour." And when you're all alone and that shopping urge comes upon you, she recommends that you, "Only go where they'll reimburse!"

Having an appointment with Annabel may be the some of the best money you've ever spent. It was for me. When I sold my 'rejects' to a second hand dress agency, I made more money than she charges for a consultation. Oh, and she gave me top tips on everything from beauty, my hair cut and colour to personal trainers. Friends keep telling me how good I look. For the first time in my life, I have a capsule wardrobe that works and can be updated (inexpensively) with accessories. For the first time ever, I can't say that the only clothes I like are the ones I'm about to buy.....

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