

STYLE

Mistress of the Wardrobe

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Main Picture: Specs from Cutler & Gross

There are milestones that trigger reassessing your wardrobe: promotion, divorce, fatherhood, decades, marriage, motherhood – not necessarily in that order, of course. Personal stylist Annabel Hodin – the sartorial genius talent spotted by US Vogue’s Anna Wintour – now helps everyone from celebrities and city folk to leading fashionistas to update their closets. Read on, says Caroline Phillips, to learn how this mistress of the wardrobe could help you create a style for your new persona...

Once the Brits thought that professional style advice was best left to Desperate Housewives and Mad Men. Americans, in other words. Women in the UK ran a mile from beauty consultants wearing concrete-mix makeup and men legged it at the idea of skin care, moob jobs or a personal stylist. We women preferred instead to be amateurish in our clothes purchases – going for the DIY approach – or, in the case of men, electing to be, well, man-ish. But now that’s all changed and the stylish and wannabe cool are hiring Annabel Hodin, erstwhile model (talent spotted by US Vogue’s Anna Wintour) and the fashion editors’ favourite. She is the *ne plus ultra* of stylists.

Annabel offers a bespoke service, from £350 for an initial consultation to meet you and look at your present wardrobe and discuss editing and/or shopping and budget. She arrives punctually for my appointment – sporting model’s face and figure and Celine–style outfit. “I like clean lines,” she explains. (Wear your best knickers when you see her – you’ll be trying on your clothes. And chucking a lot out!) With frankness and a twinkle in her eye, she goes through my clothes, jewellery, makeup..... And then through my husband Adrian’s wardrobe (albeit with him as an additional consultation on a different day).

It’s an epiphany. I put on my favourite coat. “It’s too angular for you,” she says. “Not doing you any favours.” I slip on a dress. “It’s furnishing fabric,” she says, but tactfully. During Adrian’s appointment later, it is suggested that he jettison several particularly unattractive garments that he clearly inherited from Fred Flinstone. Annabel’s directness gets results. In between doing the wardrobe clear-out, she’s giving tips: where to get the perfect eyebrow created (“Threading gives too harsh a look”), best his ‘n’ her laser hair removal (Joanne Evans at Kensington’s Medical Rooms), brilliant facialist (Vaishaly), where to get great grooming or even Bro-tox (Botox for him).



Designer inspired looks at Joseph

As we do the wardrobe exploration, Annabel highlights my good points. Perfect Fifties silhouette and beautiful, sculptural face, since you ask. “So keeping to simple, classic lines will enhance your natural look. Which is why,” she reveals, “I’m editing out the masculine shapes...” She takes notes

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and sketches what I'm keeping. "In case you call and say I need something to go with Y.." (Later, I tell her I'm going to Marylebone. When I'm standing in queue to buy some fish, I get a text. She offers phone support as part of a follow-up package. 'Remember to go to Matches to look at the plum and taupe sandals,' it reads. 'Very chic.' Equally Adrian receives a timely and useful text reminder of a garment he actually needs – rather than an impulse buy – when he's in the middle of having a quick peek at wish-he-could-afford-them cars in a Knightsbridge showroom).

Annabel identifies a person's style and is great on colour, proportions and what's age appropriate. For me: out with tagliatelle straps and shoes that look like a dead lizard – and that's just for starters. For him: out with the shirts that make his complexion look as if he's feeling sea-sick. "I want to help you assess how to convey – with what you wear – the message you wish to get across about who you are," she explains. "We're going to build a capsule wardrobe of 20 or so classic pieces which you can accessorise for work or play – a look that fits your life."



Who ever thought of splashing out on more than one pair of the same trousers? Not me. Until I met Annabel.

We pull all the pieces out of my schizoid wardrobe – a combo of bloke-ish tailoring and boho-not-chic. Over our morning together, Annabel does what she calls an 'edit' – but which I'd call a chic cull. She's aiming with me more for Grace Kelly meets '50s Dior than my series of sales oopsies and unmatching separates. (And for him? Well, hmm, a sort of Colin Firth in Tom Ford's Single Man look.) "You've wasted tons of cash buying the wrong things," she says. "Getting your look right saves time and energy and money." (Until now, we have both considered ourselves to be fairly stylish and well-groomed!) "You've certainly got a good eye," she continues. "It would take a one-day shop for you to have a fabulous wardrobe and feel incredible too. Cut out buying uncoordinated items on a whim. The secret to great style is an uncluttered wardrobe full of key pieces that you love and staples that work."



We put aside clothes that are too small, too cheap or never worn (mostly sale) mistakes. Things that I've been holding onto because I wore them at my 21st/my brother's weddings/on my first date. High fashion that is dated. Garments that are tired or marked. Hey, even a fair amount of Prada and Pucci goes to that clothes pile in the sky. But apparently we wear barely 20% of our wardrobes; and streamlining, well it's just so very *now*, isn't it?

After her phenomenally efficient edit, I have a thin wardrobe (and Adrian has piles ready to adorn the rails of a second-hand shop that sells Gucci. Get ye there quickly). Then Annabel puts my clothes into outfits to see what's missing, identifies the gaps in my remaining material

possessions and we set out to fill them. "You should never go shopping unless you are looking for something specific," she counsels wisely.

Ah, shopping. If you've got more pressing things to do (i.e. take out your speed boat/go sailing/take your Ferrari out for a whirl) than traipse around fashion boutiques, then it's worth hiring someone like Annabel. She already knows precisely what shops have in stock, understands what suits you better than you know yourself, and knows where to find everything – whether it be a big name designer or high street – because she researches so very well.

Our first stop is Browns, where we get treated like royalty and pick up Hollywood dresses, statement shoes and Norma Kamali. "Delicious costume colours," says Annabel appreciatively. (His first stop is Selfridges. Under her expert gaze, he buys a zillion-ply cashmere jacket, which costs more than ten arms and ten legs. "Quality over quantity," says Annabel, ever the sartorial economist. "It's better to buy fewer and better".) Then there's Matches for everything under the sartorial sun, and more.

We proceed to Joseph (St John's Wood), where we're helped by the indefatigable Elly. "They're great at doing designer inspired looks, at a snip of the price," explains Annabel. "All the fashion editors go there." Morphing into a fashion editor, I leave with a few carefully selected items: cropped trousers, Prada lookalikes, pieces of wonderfulness at reasonable prices. But it doesn't stop there. Soon Annabel has also kitted me out in retro sunglasses from Cutler & Gross – which look better than anything I've ever selected; and shoes in enough colours to make a paint chart from Tod's in Bond Street – helped by manager Simone Artuso. (There's nothing he doesn't know about feet and handbags.)

There are financial benefits to all this. I save days of trudging around stores like a demented bargain hunter simply in order to waste lots of money on ill-fitting, mismatched outfits in styles that suit Victoria Beckham or Kate Middleton. Annabel insists on buying key pieces that will last. "The simpler the cut, the more timeless it is." She avoids cheap fabrics, cheap cuts and cheap colours. "Select something," she explains, "that is or looks expensive and timeless."



As for him, he's now got a fabbo wardrobe and has followed the Annabel Plan For Looking Good Inside and Out – raiding her little black book secrets...

She goes for multiple buys. Not exactly two for the price of one. And not quite stack 'em high and buy 'em low. But you get the gist. Who ever thought of splashing out on more than one pair of the same trousers? Not me. "It saves time later," she explains. "If it's a classic, you can have it in more than one colour." Sales? "Only if you already know it's the right size and colour. But I prefer Refund Shopping – if you are at all unsure and alone – only go where they'll reimburse."

For the first time in my life, I end up with what the cogniscenti call 'a capsule wardrobe' that works and can be updated (inexpensively) with accessories. "It'll take you just minutes to pack whenever you go away," she says reassuringly, "because everything cross coordinates." As for Adrian, he's now got a fabbo closet and has followed the Annabel Plan For Looking Good Inside and Out – raiding her little black book secrets for everything from how to get naturally white teeth ("Super white is too American") to where to get the best massage in town.

Annabel has a loyal following including ever-increasing numbers of male clients. "They want the makeovers, grooming and tips they've seen women get," she explains. "They know that successful men *look* successful, and they want the transformation they've seen in a George Clooney or Daniel Craig. A smart, well-chosen suit won't get you the job or the partner – but it helps." It is, she adds, less about fashion than style.



Barack Obama? He could be one of hers, he's so well dressed.

"When I'm dressed right, I look the part, feel more confident and do better," explains a bond trader friend, later. "But you have to get the guys over a bottle of Crystal before they'll admit seeing Annabel – unless they have lots of public appearances. Hell, who wants to admit they cannot dress themselves?!"

During these times when people are tightening their (Louis Vuitton) belts, Annabel has seen a ten per cent rise in business. She's not someone you want in tough times, she's someone you *need*. She's the person who simplifies life. The one who helps women/fellas get or keep their guys/babes/jobs.

In the autumn, she's launching a service specifically for well-heeled Americans visiting London. "To give them the unexpected style accent that the Brits do so well," she explains. Barack Obama? He could already be one of hers, he's so well dressed. "Well, is he?" I ask. She smiles.

As for me, she's worth her weight in clothes that I chucked out. It's (almost) the best money I've ever spent – making everything work in a different way and creating a functional wardrobe. Wherever I go, people tell me now how fabulous I look. "Annabel," I reply knowingly. Do you remember what Carrie Fisher wrote in Postcards from the Edge? "The only clothes I like are the ones I'm about to buy." For the first time in my life, the only clothes I like are the ones I've just bought. And my Mr Fisher feels the same way too.

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Caroline Phillips (www.carolinephillips.net) is an award-winning journalist who has written for the Sunday Times, The Times, Observer, Guardian, Independent, Mail on Sunday, Daily Mail and Evening Standard. Additionally she has been published in a variety of magazines, from Tatler to Harpers Bazaar and Vanity Fair. She is a consultant for Globalista – website for the discerning traveller – and contributing editor of Country & Town House and of Spear's Spa Guide. She also co-edits the Spear's Spa Guide.

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