

## Style 101

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**If you can't figure out how to dress to kill, find someone who can. In this image-obsessed era, it isn't just Hollywood celebrities who are hiring their own stylists.**

Céline Dion has one. So do Nicole Kidman, Julia Roberts and Halle Berry. And you can, too. Stylists are coming out of their closets to delve into yours. They're hanging shingles, launching websites and joining associations of image consultants to help average Joes and Janes get dressed in the morning. They offer services from wardrobe analysis to personal shopping to image-building in our increasingly time-crunched, style-obsessed society. « People more and more need order in their lives, » said Yves Monast, who opened a Montreal styling agency called Mona Marino with partner Anne Marineau this year. « There are too many options available for consumers and they need guidance. »

« At some point, everybody needs a stylist, » said Marie-Claude Pelletier, who started her styling agency, Les Effrontés, seven years ago. With about 500 clients a season, business is booming for the team of eight stylists working out of the agency's quarters on Laurier Ave. W. « At the start, people thought you needed to be a star, a political person or person of influence, » she said. But the glare on the red carpet – fashion faux pas among the stars are in danger of disappearing – and shows like What Not to Wear have taught us that help

is a magazine, book or consultant away.

The instant makeover programs have fascinated the public, says Carla Mathis, an L.A. image consultant who travels the globe training stylists for her Body Beautiful network. Next week, she lands in Montreal to give a training course, which is booked up. « There's more to just looking good on the outside. It has to have integrity on the inside, » said Mathis, co-author of *The Triumph of Individual Style* (Fairchild, \$65), first published 12 years ago, but recently reissued.

There's a difference between a stylist and a personal shopper, insists Annie Horth, a prominent Montreal stylist who started working with Céline Dion in June for the final leg of the diva's Vegas tour. Horth previously worked with Dion from 1996 to 2001. Clearly, a star's wardrobe needs to go way beyond that of someone who is looking to get good value out of a pantsuit or classic white shirt. But that doesn't make it simple. « Styling is not only about clothes, it's about ideas, »

Horth said. « It's about translating clearly who the artist is – with clothes, but also with hair, makeup, body language. » For Dion, she says, it was time to trade girlie for sleek, creating a more modern and sophisticated look. « She was looking much older than she is, » Horth said.

Horth not only dresses divas but provides artistic direction for companies, artists and magazine features, each of which task carries its own challenges and stress, she says. « With whatever medium, though, you always have to create a story. »

The stories of those seeking styling services fall into a few categories, Pelletier said. There are businesspeople who have no time but need to look « impeccable » on the job; mothers returning to the workplace who need the assurance that they look good; women in their 40s or older who don't want to look like « ma tante »; and those who have watched the TV shows and see entertainment value in getting professionally styled.

For Frederick McNicoll, the epiphany came five years ago, when he noticed a friend wearing a nice suit. Inquiries about its provenance elicited mumbling, even embarrassment, McNicoll recalled. Then the truth came out: The friend was a client of Pelletier, at Les Effrontés, and she chose the suit.

Now, McNicoll, 38, a consultant who sold his screw-cap company recently, visits Pelletier about three times a year. She has analyzed his wardrobe, dressed him for a hectic travel schedule when he still had his company, and helped him find the perfect fitted long jacket, a redingote, for his wedding in the wilderness last year. « My wife thought I was snobby when I said I had a stylist, » he said. « Once she actually came with me, she really enjoyed the service. »

McNicoll says the cult of Hollywood style has nothing to do with his decision to use a stylist. It's about laziness, he says. « It's one-stop shopping, » he said. « I need shoes, socks, I need shirts, dressdown shirts, I need sports clothing. When I arrive, she will have a selection of two or three things of everything I need. »

## **GOOD BASICS ARE KEY**

In basics, you want quality and perfect cut, according to stylist Marie-Claude Pelletier of Les Effrontés.

## **IN HER CLOSET, THE BUSINESSWOMAN NEEDS**

- Great black pants to highlight more individual tops and jackets.
- A white shirt, though not necessarily plain or classic.
- A three-piece suit, with skirt, pants and jacket.
- Start with the right undergarments. Find a bra that fits properly at a specialty boutique. Plain pumps with a slender heel that can be modified with the addition of brooches, ribbons or other accessories.
- A high-heeled boot.

## **MEN NEED**

- A good suit. Charcoal is a good colour, very versatile and easy to coordinate with ties and shirts.
- Good jeans.
- A sports jacket.
- Three-quarter length trench coat. For casual chic, go for high quality.

## **STYLING RESOURCES**

Les Effrontés. Wardrobe analysis, shopping services – in store or in office – makeup and hair consultations by a team of eight stylists. Evening and weekend seminars offered as well. Agency founder Marie-Claude Pelletier, a former menswear designer, quit her day job as her styling advice was increasingly in demand. 514-521-4734. [www.leseffrontes.com](http://www.leseffrontes.com)