

Living



Fashion

A change in season calls for a reinvention – but it can be hard to get right on your own. Enter the personal stylist **Carola Long** and **Harriet Walker** seek professional help

Brave new wardrobes

After just a few hours in the capable hands of the personal stylist Eliisa Makin I'm feeling liberated from the bonds of my achingly safe dress sense. It feels good. So good, in fact, that I temporarily think I'm Gisele and pick up a pair of small, silk, black shorts that look like lingerie but are in fact outerwear. Back at Liberty's private shopping area, where Eliisa is advising me on the much more chic pieces she has picked out in advance, it soon becomes clear that the shorts and I were not meant to be, but I'm having fun and experimenting, and that's the point. Eliisa is helping my wardrobe get its mojo back.

You might think that working in fashion would give a girl confidence in what she wears; but much of the time it's made me dress in an overly cautious way for fear of making the very fashion mistakes I've castigated celebs for in the past. My default look consists of black dresses, blue skinny jeans, dark blazers, the odd "interesting top" and flat pumps. Fortunately, with acres of experience working as a stylist at *The Independent* and other publications, Eliisa has come to the rescue. She has developed a real knack for helping people to delve into the deepest recesses of their sartorial psyches and create a signature look.

The first stage of the personal styling process was answering Eliisa's questionnaire, which consisted of practical questions about size, favourite colours and lifestyle, and more individual ones such as "which celebrity or person in the public eye's style do you most admire or relate to?" Eliisa says that this is the most revealing question and apparently my hastily brainstormed list – Jane Birkin, the singer Françoise Hardy, Lou Doillon, Kate Bosworth and, perhaps predictably, Alexa Chung – showed that I wanted a rocky, sexy, quirky look. I know Celine-style understatement is the mood du jour, but right now I also want something a bit more exciting.

After having my hair styled at Trevor Sorbie – where Eliisa can arrange a 20 per cent discount for clients as part of the personal styling package, along with numerous other offers and access to the private shopping areas of key stores – we arrived at Liberty. Eliisa had already prepared a rail of clothes which included a pair of red cropped trousers by Sessun which I loved, paired with a drapery grey vest, platform boots and a silk scarf; a dark-pink leopard print APC cardigan to go with skinny, grey J Brand jeans – makes a change from blue – and killer



stilettos, and several dresses. After looking over the rail and trying things on we headed into the store for a joint recce, then back to the luxurious, boudoir-ish room for a monster styling session. My favourite looks were the red trousers pictured and a colourful scribble print Theory minidress with platform ankle boots.

Apart from the benefit of Eliisa's considerable experience and taste, which includes genuinely useful advice about how to beat days when nothing looks right, I also found that shopping with her me made me less inhibited about making a statement. She would never push anyone into wearing anything they didn't feel comfortable in and she's also an absolute delight to be around. After all, fashion is meant to be fun.

Half a day with Eliisa Makin is £300. Thewardrobeconsultant.co.uk

CAROLA: AFTER



Trousers, £110, Sessun; vest, £110, Enza Costa; scarf, £225, Liberty of London; belt, stylist's own; boots, Opening Ceremony, £360; bag, Miu Miu, £630; all available at Liberty, 020 7734 1234

HARRIET: BEFORE



When it comes to clothes, I definitely fall into the "current" bracket rather than the "classic" one. I like pieces that are dramatic,

challenging, a bit quirky and that come in a palette of grey, black and navy. I own a dress that has geometric holes cut into the armpits and another that is slashed directly across the crotch (to be worn with sturdy pants or cycling shorts). I do not own a suit; ditto anything that doesn't stretch.

So imagine my horror at the new season's trend for crisp, sleek tailoring and grown-up classic pieces in subtle camel, blush pinks, khaki and white. Most of the pieces in my wardrobe are drapery and voluminous – in part an aesthetic choice, but also because I don't like ironing. In the field of "grown-up chic" I'm utterly at a loss as to how to pull it off and I need a helping hand.

Beth Dadswell has been a stylist for more than 12 years, working across editorial shoots for *The Independent*, commercial work for high-street brands and, more recently, personal appointments for those who find themselves in the fashion wilderness. She has overhauled wardrobes for clients who have had a change of heart or a change of scene; she has even been bought as a birthday present.

Before we meet, I fill in Beth's online form, which includes essential questions about sizing and price, aspirational ones about who I want to look like (Patti Smith in a high-powered job), and sensitive evaluations to gauge how confident I am about my look, my body and my shopping techniques. By the time I have filled it in, I already have a clearer idea of what I want and also of what I want to change.

When I meet Beth in Selfridges, we spend a few moments discussing further the ways in which I want to change my look. We scuttle around the shop for quite a while, and I take a step back, allowing Beth to pick up things that would never normally have even caught my eye – a crisp white shirt, some grey-wool cigarette pants, and a chic cream skirt that makes me wonder how long it would take me to spill red wine or chocolate all over it.

As we select pieces and Beth holds them up against me, she talks me through the version of classic that she has in mind. It isn't so scary a departure, I realise, as visions of Thatcher's pussy-bow blouses melt away.

Beth's great strength is that she is able to process and tailor trends directly to the individual she is working with. The sort of classic chic that I should be aiming for, she tells me,

HARRIET: AFTER



Pink vest, £49, COS; black skirt, £460, Miu Miu; black leather shoes, £150, LK Bennett, all available from Selfridges, 0800 123 400



is the clean, modern minimalism that is so prevalent – nothing too fussy or too frilly.

My final outfit is a high-waisted, A-line skirt from Miu Miu, which is much more structured than anything I normally wear. I also generally avoid anything on the waist, because I don't really have one. But when Beth tucks in a pale pink vest from Cos, there's a definite whittling effect and I suddenly look like someone I might take seriously. A pair of ladylike court shoes seals

the deal: I've achieved the uptown, groomed look that I've hankered after for so long. Whether I have the discipline to maintain it is another matter, but Beth sends me a "styling prescription" reiterating what we discussed and suggesting ways of integrating my new look with my existing wardrobe. I'm not sure where the slashed-crotch dress fits in, though.

Half a day with Beth (four hours) is £250. mypersonalstylist.co.uk