

GOING BUY BUY

Need to update your wardrobe or style quotient? A personal shopper may be the answer

by Jhilmil Motihar

EYEBROWS ARCHED, I tried to put my best sceptical-yet-not-rude face on. Teena Ahuja Kapoor, personal shopper and stylist, had just spoken the two words I've been shielding my wardrobe from - animal print. Kapoor knew she was in dangerous territory.

My name is Jhilmil Motihar and I'm a shopaholic. Not the starve-to-buy-bag variety but the I-need-something-new-every-three-days type. Everyone's encountered girls furiously seeking opinions on potential buys. I'm not one of them. Shopping to me is personal and I like being left alone. So when the idea of using a personal shopper came up, I shifted in my seat multiple times. But like every clothes obsessor knows, you should try everything once.

Though most people assume personal shoppers go best with celebrities, a number of corporates, NRIs, wedding shoppers and even new mothers have been leaning on them. Jignasa Parikh Shingal, founder of XY Personal Shoppers, quashed my idea that these services are expensive. "We work on different budgets and work out individual plans," she said.

Uber-apprehensive before my meeting with Kapoor, I decided I was going to reject everything she suggested. But she was probably used to such juvenile behaviour. "No one likes to be told what to wear," she proclaimed, and soon directed a dozen questions about my work, play and everything in between. "When will she ask me about clothes," I wondered.

It happened soon. At the end of the 45-minute ses-

IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOT BE AGGRESSIVE WITH CLIENTS. THEY SHOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE



THIS OR THAT?
Personal shopper Teena Ahuja Kapoor (left) suggests bag options to a client

MALL SERVICE

OBEROI MALL, MUMBAI: Started its personal shopping service in September 2011. Customers are charged a fee on an hourly basis. An appointment can be made with Parul Shukla over the phone. Call 9821680079

SELECT CITYWALK, DELHI: Has a styling and personal shopping team of three people. The service is available Mon-Fri from 11 am - 7 pm. Appointments need to be made a day in advance. Call 011-42114270. Charges: ₹1,000 per hour. The style lounge is located at P1 level (basement 1, lift lobby A)

sion, Kapoor declared I needed more formal wear and had to take risks (feathers, sequins, leather). Apparently, I dressed too casually. "But I bought pink pants two days ago," I resisted. I may not be the most on-trend person, but it's rare that I'm not well put together. The drama queen inside me threatened to emerge if my wardrobe ego got hurt.

To avoid credit card damage, we decided to stop at ₹25,000 (this would include clothes, shoes, accessories). Since I already had the basics - well fitting pair of jeans, at least three formal shirts, black and nude pumps and two clutches - we decided to concentrate on frills. Didn't think it would include a tutu skirt.

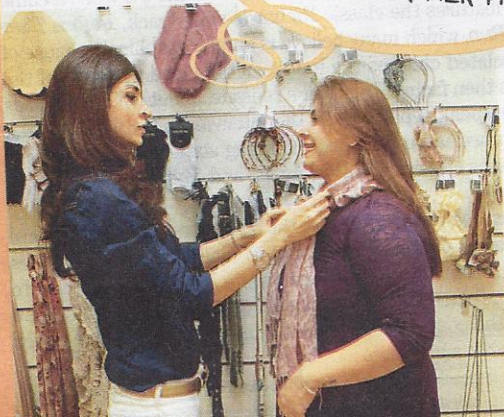
Though a personal shopper isn't supposed to dispense style tips, they often come with the package. "How can I tell a woman to wear the right things but stop at telling her she needs to regularly colour her hair," says Kapoor, who warns me against wearing booties because of my 5 feet 3 inch frame.

The day after the consultation, we meet in Bandra. Though I'd thought our first stop would be a high-street shop, Kapoor heads to an accessory stall on Hill Road where the goods are shiny and cheap. I'm hardly a snob but I've never been to one of these.

My shopper, however, waves stacked gold bangles and says that a similar looking thing would cost at least seven times more at a store. Who was I to argue? One gold neckpiece, two cuffs and a set of bangles later, I'm led to an export surplus store. I look cynical, Kapoor doesn't.

While I reacquaint myself with the store, Kapoor picks up two dresses and three sparkly vests. The orange dress I like, the vests are a problem. "At

HOW CAN I TELL A WOMAN TO WEAR THE RIGHT THINGS BUT NOT TELL HER SHE NEEDS TO COLOUR HER HAIR



least try them," says Kapoor. I do, and am surprised at how shiny and yet non-OTT they make me look. Kapoor also tells me what shoes and accessories I should wear with these. At this point, I have to remind Kapoor that our budget is ₹25,000, not ₹2,500. Soon I'd be saying the opposite.

We next waltz into Mango and I feel assured among the clothes. While I veered

towards yet another citrus shirt, Kapoor gently pulled me in the direction of a star print vest. It was cute, I had to admit. But my shopper had other plans. Soon she was forcing me into a leopard print skirt, feathered vest, leather bodice dress and a pair of patterned black pants. None of these would have even been on my radar had I been shopping alone.

Though the dress looked rather vixen-like on the hanger, it wrapped around me perfectly. As did the skirt. The two pieces gave me visions of five-inch heels and a champagne flute. Once I had been eased into looking at things her way, Kapoor said the toughest part of her job was over. She was right. "It's important to not be aggressive with clients. They should feel comfortable. It's also a bad idea to force them into buying something or ask them to change their style drastically," she said.

I was soon trying on a pretty pleated top with rosettes at Vero Moda, printed jumpsuit at Promod, gold belt at Chemistry, sequin shifts at Zara and chunky gold cuffs at Curio Cottage. With ₹3,600 of my budget left, my crossover moment came at Forever New when my shopper handed me a flouncy pink tutu skirt and I didn't wince.

Most of us assume that what we're wearing is perfect. Some of us are right, some terribly wrong. More importantly, we're scared of breaking patterns. I know I won't be dialing a personal shopper in a hurry. Also, I'm not quite ready for anything with feathers just yet. But will I swipe my card for that zebra print shirt? Oh yes.

MOST OF US ASSUME WHAT WE'RE WEARING IS PERFECT. SOME OF US ARE RIGHT. SOME WRONG

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Location courtesy: Forever New, ground floor, Oberoi Mall, Goregaon (E), Mumbai. email: teenaahuja@gmail.com