

So you think you can date?

Are those baggy jeans in your closet? Beer cans piled in the corner? Time to call a bachelor stylist...

Globe Life
Bachelor Makeover - Helping Men Get a Clue
by Siri Agrell

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Jill Hannan spent three days in the apartment of a 34-year-old Vancouver executive. The man was good-looking, pulled in an income of more than \$100,000 a year and had a fabulous sense of style.

But when she first arrived at his Yaletown home, she found it covered in stinky hockey equipment and littered with beer cans and the kitchen stained with the remnants of long-ago takeout.

Soon, she was cleaning out his fridge and stocking his bar with wine and imported beer. She bought him candles, hung blinds on his bare windows and even replaced his mildewed shower curtain.

Finally, she gathered up the superhero paraphernalia that she had found scattered around the apartment and delivered an ultimatum. "I put them in a pile and said, 'Take your top five,' " she recalled.



Bachelor stylist Jill Hannan helps client Frank Furesz get in date-ready form. *(Laura Leyshon/The Globe and Mail)*

Ms. Hannan is not the executive's cleaning lady or lover. The 35-year-old is a one-woman consultancy called My Girlfriend, a "bachelor stylist" for men who have everything, except a clue. "The idea is, are you comfortable bringing a woman back to your house?" she said. "I'm targeting men who are open toward dating and are willing to improve themselves."

Across the country, personal stylists and individual image consultants are opening their doors to an increasing number of men who are looking for help with everything, from how to dress to what to drink.

It has been four years since *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* made its debut, teaching the world that even the most accomplished and attractive men can use a hand - or 10 - sprucing up their look and their living arrangements.

Since then, Sandy Moore of the Association of Image Consultants International, a U.S.-based group with several Canadian members, said more male clients have been seeking out professional help. "Within the last several years, the percentage of inquiries that come from men is on the increase," she said. "It is clearly an industry that's in growth mode."

Ms. Moore said many of the men she works with as an image consultant come to her during a transitional moment in their lives.

That is, after buying a home, splitting up with a romantic partner or losing a spouse.

Catherine Graham Bell of Prime Impressions, a personal image consultancy in Kingston, said about 30 per cent of her clients are now men, a dramatic increase since she started her business 13 years ago. "Initially, I thought it would be mostly women," she said. "But I love working with men. They're so much easier to work with than women because they come in and say, 'Tell me what I'm doing wrong and how to fix it.' "

Ms. Graham Bell said she works primarily on physical appearance and etiquette, leaving the state of their homes to other professionals.

As with Ms. Moore, most of her clients have recently gone through a break-up and want help with presenting themselves in the dating pool. "I had a woman send her male friend to me, not a young man, and we worked on how to treat a woman socially," she said. "He lived alone,

so he was attacking his food and he really didn't understand that he should open a door for a woman, things like that."

In Vancouver, Ms. Hannan said her service is unique because she addresses not only behaviour and style, but also home decor. Upon arriving at a client's home, she goes through their every possession and grills them about where they keep detergent, whether they have cologne, if they know what's under the sink and how long it's been there.

"In my experience with my past boyfriends, their attention to detail is not the same as a woman's," she said. "A woman is looking for things that men just don't think about, like whether or not they have clean towels."

Tom, a 33-year-old call-centre manager who didn't want his real name used because his friends would make fun of him, said Ms. Hannan bought him towels as part of his styling process. "My friends kept saying you gotta make your apartment look nice because you've got a good job and you're a cool guy, but your place looks like you're still in university."

Ms. Hannan cleaned his apartment and then took him shopping for a new wardrobe to rid him of his baggy jeans and oversized T-shirts, as well as accoutrements for his now very grown-up digs.

"One of the reasons I did it was there was this girl I was starting to hang out with, and I was a bit self-conscious about my place," he said. "I'm dating her now. I think she was impressed that I had some wine."

Ms. Hannan said it can take her from two days to two weeks to overhaul a bachelor, and some are harder to change than others. Many of her clients seem to be dedicated packrats, reluctant to get rid of their 1979 Saskatchewan Roughriders sweatshirt, collection of mini alcohol bottles or really, really Old Spice.

Ms. Hannan is confident in her ability to make over even the most stubborn bachelor, but she suspects few of her clients will be able to maintain their new-found style. She expects many, including the Yaletown executive, will come calling as soon as they run out of Riesling or forget how to organize their throw cushions.

"I'm counting on him not being able to keep it up. So I can go and do it again."