

# LICENSE TO STYLE

A personal shopping experience on the high street

*Personal shopping (or styling) was, not so long ago, a premium service provided by luxurious department stores to their VIP clients. Now, it's booming – and mostly free – on the high street. Intended to boost sales and to meet with consumers' always higher demand for a unique and exclusive client experience, what can we expect from it? Marie Fourmeaux went undercover behind the curtains of the styling studios and found a few tips along the way.*

Disguised in my former “I’m-a-lawyer-in-Private-Banking” armour, I decided to play the (not so) clueless client and signed up for a wardrobe refresh personal styling service in various high-street stores. Wherever I went, the usually two-hour long appointment was advertised as the promise of enjoying expert advice to help you create a closet that is unique and tailored to you, while also injecting current trends. With an article to write in mind, my little venture may not have been that innocent, but I nonetheless found myself burning with anticipation and curiosity, impatient to come home with new ideas and, of course, a few clothes! I had also made good resolutions: apart from pledging I wouldn't dig a bottomless hole into my bank account, I was determined, having trained as a personal stylist, to be as docile as a lamb and to bite my cheeks and tongue to refrain from taking the lead. Hum... hum...

So, what's in a woman's mind when she books a personal styling session? She's excited because she wants to spend some quality time with herself. She's eagerly hoping for a selection of clothes fitting both her silhouette and her personality like a glove. She's



Image via Shopaholic.

expecting expert advice on how to make her body look its best and on how to create new styles. She wants to be understood for who she is and her lifestyle. She wants to leave the session with bags of self-confidence and of clothes she knows she won't regret. These expectations are universal, whether you're booking the “experience” in a high-end department store or a high-street shop, whether you pay for it or not. Let's now discover what goes on in the exclusive privacy of the styling studio. If you will follow me, please...

First of all, trust should be built, especially by getting to “know” you and assessing your needs. The prospect of finding yourself in front of a monumental mirror with a total stranger is not always an easy move, even more so as you might bring up some difficulties and body-related complexes. You might give away a part of your intimacy and sensitivity into what believe will be skilled hands. The

first contact is paramount and I have to say that all the personal stylists who attended me were all extremely nice, smiling and caring. They made me feel at ease, offered me a drink (just water please, if I go for the Prosecco, I'm no longer responsible for my credit card!). Ideally, this first interaction should be deepened into a little chat, sometimes based on the online form filled in during the booking process, to define your tastes, lifestyle, occupation etc. On this particular aspect, one personal stylist, I could tell, had paid great attention to my client profile and I was very impressed that she rephrased the aforementioned online form to perfection. However, on another occasion, who I was, what I liked or what I did was not brought up which is a shame as it helps appraising your actual needs, therefore greatly facilitating the actual “personal” dimension of the service. It also makes you feel listened to. **Tip number two (2) – skipping number one (1) will make sense later. Yes, you have to read it all! –: with thy personal stylist, thou shalt get acquainted.**

Then, logically, should come a trickier part of the getting-to-know you: body type. Many women are not aware of what theirs is and how to figure it out. For many of us, this step can be a bit of an ordeal. Let's face it, rare are those amongst us who are not shy about their silhouette and who are fully at ease with it. Determining your body type is a prerequisite to ensure the clothes are appropriately selected (cuts, fabrics, and even colours). Otherwise, the odds are high that they will not be a fit. And yet, I was surprised to observe that, on some occasions, assessing my body type (and therefore, size) was not a concern, even when my silhouette was hidden, wrapped up in a very loose jumper. On the other hand, a

personal stylist who did actually check it nailed the clothes selection in terms of fit and sizes. Tip number three (3): by thy personal stylist, thy body type shalt be identified.

When it comes to the approach for providing the service itself, well, I encountered two radically different methods: either the personal shopper would stay with me in the studio (respectfully drawing the modesty curtain when needed) or I would be left on my own, the stylist either spending all their time in the store or quietly waiting at the reception, remaining at my "disposal" should I need anything. Er... trying clothes on my own? That's what I do when going regular shopping... Is personal styling simply about sparing me the time to go through the store? Tip number four (4): by thy personal stylist, thou shalt be attended at (mostly) all times.

And what about the relevance of the clothes selection and the actual styling advice? It depends. I noticed that when the stylist got to "know" me properly (both in personality and body type) she had made all the right choices, even suggesting outfits I probably wouldn't have considered (yep, even a trained personal stylist needs an external eye and to learn from their peers).

When they didn't, I was driven out of my comfort zone but not in the direction I'd hoped for, i.e. mostly unflattering. At one I was taken on a long (remember, it's two hours) and gruelling trip down Granny Lane and back! The situation I dreaded had occurred: I hated every single piece of clothing! Split between curiosity of how they would fit, a desperate attempt to be open minded (you never know) and the will to be polite, I tried on every single one of them. The fact that the stylist was out of the room pretty much during the entire duration of the session made it easier and less embarrassing. I burst into nervous yet honest giggles more than once when I saw myself in the mirror (I took some souvenir pics which will not be displayed here) and couldn't repress a more open laugh when told that an obviously far too big shapeless orange top looked really nice.



Image via Devil wears Prada



Image via Pexels



Image via Pexels



Image via Freestock

As for the how-to-flatter-my-body-please- advice, well, it felt like, most times, I had to ask for it if I wanted some. So I asked, using open questions (“But don’t you think the cut of this skirt is faaar too large?”, “Don’t you think I should maybe prioritise high-waist?”). I was often under the impression that I had to “guide” the stylist rather than being guided myself. **Tip number five (5): by thy personal stylist, thou shalt be given personal advice; if not, thou shalt ask for it.**

After two hours, the dreaded moment arrives: what to buy... or not? The great thing is, never, ever, was I put under any pressure to purchase something and the budget I’d specified was respected. I felt entirely free to make my own decisions (it helps when the stylist has been out of the room most of the time) and I was free to disagree (no, really, I do NOT need those frills around my waist and hips, they’re not

flattering at all and yes, the bottom of this jumpsuit is far too baggy!). **Tip number six (6): thou shalt be free and thy budget shall be respected.**

Let’s however bear in mind that personal styling cannot be an absolute science. Indeed, stylists have to make their best with both whatever specificities current trends deem fashionable and the general tailoring and styles of the house. Some trends may not suit some of us and the general tailoring or style of a particular store may not as well. Personally, I know there are shops where I will not find anything that I like or that will fit me because their general tailoring and styles do not match with my silhouette and tastes.

On one shopping session, the studio had already been prepared with a lovely selection of outfits. Nothing better to pretend, for a few seconds, that you’re the

Carrie Bradshaw of the high street! If some of the shapes of the clothes were, in theory, right, they didn’t fit me, simply because the shop’s general tailoring is not appropriate for my silhouette. So, to prevent any disappointment or any dent into your self-confidence, for this is what personal styling is about, I would advise, when possible, turning to a brand the aesthetics of which you relate to and the general tailoring of which has a proven tracked record of fitting you. Even better, try a department store, for the variety of brands and, therefore, styles and tailoring, is wider, maximizing the chances you will come home with clothes you like.

**Tip number one (1): for personal styling, thy store thou shalt choose accordingly.**

You can see more from Marie Fourmeaux on Instagram.com by following her [instagram.com/marie\\_fourmeaux\\_tips\\_and\\_style/](https://www.instagram.com/marie_fourmeaux_tips_and_style/)