

FirstClass Jacquie Hayes

jacquie.hayes@me.com



Wardrobe a bit wan? Dial a stylist

Melbourne's Spring Racing Carnival has suddenly arrived so it's going to be a last-minute panic to get the gear together. With no one rushing to dress me, I'm out on my own scrambling for a series of hat-shoe-frock-bag combos that are knockouts but still functional enough to get me through a long, hard campaign.

I'm sorted for this weekend's Caulfield Cup, but it's hard to focus on remaining events when there are school camps to organise for the children, luxury cars to test drive for readers and forays to the Mornington Peninsula in search of the perfect holiday rental.

Little wonder colours, textures, hem lengths and headwear just aren't front of mind for me right now. So I've decided to do what many smarter women (or men) than I have done and call in an expert.

Gessica Marmotta is a personal and online stylist who knows my dress sense and – more importantly – my wardrobe back to front. She ditched half of it a few months back.

Since she did, I'm wearing more of my clothes than ever before in exciting combinations that rarely fail to attract flattering comments. And – bonus – I feel less inclined (though not entirely) to go out and buy anything new.

Perhaps I'll indulge in a lone hat, like the incredible Philip Treacy piece I saw at Melbourne accessory mecca Christine the other day. Adorned in black couture lace and Swarovski jet, the only thing I balked at was the \$5550 price tag.

There are a bunch of vanilla stylists out there offering "on-trend" approaches. But since returning from Milan and Barcelona a couple of years back, Marmotta's made a name for her business, Style By Gessica, by teaching women to find personal flair while dressing appropriately for the

corporate environment. "I'm passionate about having women step outside what they think is normal for work, to move away from the cloning to a confident yet authentic style that reflects themselves," Marmotta says. "By doing that, it gives women an inner power that they may not have believed they had."

It seems there is burgeoning demand for exactly this service from the very successful end of town.

Larke Riemer, who has worked at Westpac for 30 years and has been the bank's director of Women's Markets for the past 20, says her success at work has risen in line with her efforts to maintain a style that suits her.

"I've always been very focused on what my personal brand is, in particular in my corporate life," Riemer says.

"It becomes important to you as your career progresses but also as you get older. You've always got to look for that edge to have your brand standing out from everyone else and, for me, it's about how you dress."

While she's always been confident of her own fashion sense, stylists like (and including) Marmotta have helped her keep an edge to her look.

"You might know yourself what suits you, but the fact that you have somebody who does this for a living [with whom] you've built a relationship and who you trust, that's what women are all about," she says.

Most people who buy into such a service end up agreeing that a few hundred dollars for a two-hour wardrobe session is money well spent. It can make a material difference to career prospects.

Founder and CEO of JBS Financial Strategist Jenny Brown says her financial planning business took off when she changed the way she dressed for work.

She says she used to wear "the suit"



Spring racing demands a statement, like this Philip Treacy hat in jet and lace.

when she started her business 22 years ago. "It was very much my uniform and it was very tailored," Brown says. It was also often uncomfortable. So she switched to flowing, layered clothes which still fitted the corporate vision.

"I could walk into a boardroom and not feel underdressed," she says. "But I felt comfortable rather than in that suit that made you feel tight around

the stomach if you put on a few kilos. It was still professional but not the corporate, Collins St adviser who is unapproachable. I related to the clients who didn't have this wall of suit in front of them."

Even those working for themselves need to feel an edge from making an effort rather than succumb to the temptation to dress down.

While juggling work and children,

Dionne Kasian-Lew had started sliding down that path, so called in Marmotta for some damage control.

As CEO of The Social Executive, a social media consultancy advising board directors and executives, she knew she had to have the right impact with clients.

"Gessica came and reviewed the wardrobe and tossed out what didn't suit but also showed me how to pull things together differently," Kasian-Lew says. "Ironically, less has ended up being more – the less I had, the more combinations I've been able to make."

Marmotta also encouraged the use of belts, bags and different ways to add jewellery to make her wardrobe more elegant without losing its edge.

"Just having that outside eye made a huge difference," she says.

Women should use every advantage they have to make an impact in the corporate world, advises Sydney stylist Ian Hadlow, of Three Rooms at Paddington.

"Equality with men in a workplace does not mean the same as. It means

I'm passionate about having women step outside what they think is normal for work.

Gessica Marmotta, stylist

equal to," Hadlow says. "So there's no reason for women not to celebrate their femininity in a workplace, because that has nothing to do with the fact that they are just as capable of doing any job a man can do in the corporate world."

Many women wear "boring suits" because they feel they're one "power woman" among many suits, and that they have to be part of that for the men to accept them. "But really, they actually don't," he says.

"Feeling good about what you're wearing is what makes you more confident. And, in a way, it gives you a huge advantage because it's what they least expect."

It all comes down to confidence, says Westpac's Riemer, which is something that some may need to fake before they make.

"I defy anyone to say it's wrong that if you feel great in something, the way you walk, the way you behave, the way you sound is really confident," she says.

"So if you make that step to change the way you look, then your whole demeanour changes. And you feel – then make yourself – successful."



Catherine Livingstone AO
Chairman
Telstra Corporation



Kenneth Borda
Chairman
Santos



Dr Ken Henry AC
Non-Executive Director
ASX and NAB



Tony Boyd
Chanticleer Columnist
The Australian Financial Review



CHANTICLEER LUNCH

FINANCIAL REVIEW

J.P.Morgan

The Melbourne 2014 Financial Review and J.P. Morgan Chanticleer Lunch will bring together three eminent business leaders with a deep understanding of technology, innovation, resources and financial services.

Join our panellists, and Chanticleer columnist Tony Boyd, as they discuss the far reaching policy issues posing a challenge to Australia's sustainable economic growth.

This is the most attend business lunch of the year.

Date: Thursday 23 October

Time: 12.00pm - 2.30pm

Venue: Mural Hall, 6/314-336 Bourke St, Melbourne

Tickets: Single ticket \$190 or tables of 10 \$1,700

**Book tickets at: afr.com/events
or call (02) 9282 2325**

A 20% subscriber benefit offer is available, call (02) 9282 2325 for more information.

