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one to watch

clothes calls

Becca Bowen reinvents herself as a personal shopper and fashion consultant.

By Rebecca Kleinman

Former Dallas accessories showroom owner Becca Bowen is back—back from a three-year sabbatical in Hawaii; back from a jaunt to Paris, where she test-drove an extended service of her new fashion consulting and personal shopping business, and most of all, back on the scene.

Clothes Coach, which she launched in Honolulu in 2003 and brought to Dallas upon her return in 2006, is the culmination of Bowen's life to date. It brings together her extraordinary childhood as the daughter of a famous Western wear tailor, 17 years as the owner of Becca Bowen Associates and the lifestyle and career transition faced by many of her generation.

"Like me, many Baby Boomers are at a crossroads in life, whether related to a new job, a divorce or empty nest syndrome, and they need someone to reinvent their image, wardrobe and confidence," said Bowen, who also applies her craft to other groups in flux, such as college graduates and disadvantaged women entering the workforce.

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— Becca Bowen, Clothes Coach

Rather than focus solely on the exterior, Bowen is part of a growing entrepreneurial movement to consider what's inside, too. Clients undergo personality profiles to remind them of passions and hobbies dropped along the way. And mothers, sensing some familial bonding is in order, may call to arrange a back-to-school shopping spree for themselves and their moody teen daughters.

According to Bowen, reinventing oneself through fashion can also lead to cultural nourishment. As a result, her latest concept offers Parisian excursions that enrich the mind beyond retail. Besides introducing great boutiques, she throws in interesting tips about free museum nights, affordable, hip dining and travel.

"There are a million shop-'til-you-drop guides out there," she said. "I'm more about in-depth information exchange, as small as don't be the ugly American by wearing white sneakers in Europe. Opt for a DKNY city shoe or Coach ballet flat instead."

Bowen says her clients, many of whom are busy professionals who travel frequently for work, are hungry for information above all else.

She's open to accompanying them to stores, but many simply request a closet cleaning and discussion, followed by a shopping list that takes into account their physical assets, necessary items and seasonal trends.

Bowen does not believe in throwing away perfectly good garments. Perhaps it's



Becca Bowen

something a client bought on a trip and has just never had the nerve to wear. Or it may be that last year's hemline or jacket can be revived with a few alterations. From socialites to career women on a budget, people appreciate Bowen's efforts to save money, so she also sets reasonable rates of \$65 to \$85 an hour for à la carte

services and works with regular clients to develop package rates based on need.

These budding self-stylists also love being fashion insiders. "Once they learn the system of how to put things together and play up the positive, they're off. My male customers like that there's an order," she said, estimating 30 percent of her more than 40 regular clients are men.

Bowen says "the system" is where her accessories training really pays off, because most people don't maximize the value of a few quality pieces. She teaches customers how to inject color or update tired suits with a simple scarf or cuff.

The style guru also spreads her knowledge to large audiences, holding wardrobe seminars for corporate clients such as J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., for which she stages fashion shows with real employees to incorporate plus sizes, maternity and petites.

"I always tell organizers to give me every challenge you have because this is real life," said Bowen, who learned many of her professional skills from her father, Jack McClure, who outfitted celebrities and cowboys in Fort Worth. "He treated every client the same, from the biggest stars like Bob Dylan and Conway Twitty to a regular rodeo worker."

One of Bowen's earliest memories involves playing with her father's sequin trim. In addition to a love of sparkly stuff, she inherited his talent for pattern-making and cut-and-sew work. This summer Bowen plucked one of the top tailors from local fashion school Wade College to perform alterations in clients' homes. She also heads to tried-and-true outside sources for special jobs like adapting wedding dresses for non-nuptial eveningwear.

"If a client can't use it, I'll take it to the resale shop or donate it to Attitudes & Attire in Dallas," said Bowen, who volunteers at the nonprofit organization that helps women gain autonomy and self-esteem. "Working with the wealthy doesn't jazz me. It's about transforming someone, so they still feel like themselves, just better."



Becca Bowen (right) with client Amber Baldwin D'Amico.

PHOTOS BY VAN COULDER