

Into the closet

Help is at hand for the shopping challenged

Words by Simon Pound Photography by Todd Eyre

We're living in an age of near-chronic specialisation and contracting. For fitness, we see a personal trainer, for diet a nutritionist, and now there are people offering the unfashionable some style. Christchurch-based Angela Stone (right) is a personal stylist, and although her clients have mainly been women, more and more men are taking up her services.

Angela works with a mixture of set rules and intuition. With a client she will first analyse their suited colours with the aid of a series of large fabric swatches. This determines whether her client is best with blue or yellow-based tones and then she checks to see if they are matched to the summer or winter versions of these.

Then comes the instructional trip to the wardrobe. A trip similar in manner to early Norse visits to England. Angela chucks out every offending garment, all the while keeping up a Spanish-Inquisition-like question line – “When did you last wear these?” “Do you think this is a good colour for you?” And, most devastating of all, “Did your mum buy this for you?”

There is also a running commentary, much of it variations on “I’d suggest you shouldn’t wear this ... ever.”

The bunny who FQMen met getting this treatment was taking it all pretty well. At least, there was no actual blubbing while we were there. He wasn’t a drastic fashion case by any means, either.

But, like many blokes, he isn’t a fan of shopping, and he had become gun-shy after a series of purchasing blunders. Those blunders were the garments flying left and right out of the wardrobe around him.

Having whittled things back to basics, the next step in Angela’s service is a shopping trip during which she will point out to the client what to look for in terms of colour, cut, fabric and fit.

The advice we saw being given was solid and sensible, tailored to fit the nature of the client. Angela wasn’t so much making over as making better and removing the own-goal factor.

That said, a lot of her best advice – ditch the double breasted suit, throw out things you haven’t worn for six months, invest in good shoes – can be found by a cursory glance through a magazine like, say, FQMen.

And some advice seemed to be channeling a stoned Carson Kressley: “Thai fisherman pants can be okay with a tight



t-shirt.” For beach wear, admittedly, but still, what is undoubtedly true if you’re a Thai fisherman is not necessarily advice to be adopted by the general public without a considerable amount of deliberation. But that was the only clanger in a couple of hours of generally gold-plated guidance.

Angela can only do so much. Advice alone doesn’t always get people moving. And there is something about her almost Tony Robbins-type certainty and helpful charm that makes us suspect that the next time you see her she’ll be fronting a New Zealand version of *What Not to Wear*.