



This page: groomed and confident, Angela was amazed by the response to her new service. Her clients are usually open to change, but gaining their trust is still an essential first step.

Shopping for a living? Some gals just have all the luck. Wardrobe advisor Angela Stone helps women lay their fashion faux pas to rest and discover what really suits them

STORY **LUCY HONE** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON BOA**

Angela Stone stands in her kitchen, two preschool children at her feet, mobile phone clutched to her ear with one hand, paintbrush in the other. But this svelte mother to five doesn't actually paint for a living, although the walls of her immaculate Sumner home are adorned with her own colourful canvases.

Instead, Angela is carving herself out a reputation as New Zealand's answer to BBC style gurus, Trinny and Susannah. As the first personal wardrobe stylist at Christchurch's Ballantynes department store, her life is now constantly punctuated with calls from clients across the country wanting a new look.

Angela, 32, had been in the fashion industry for 16 years, working both internationally and domestically as a model when, 18 months ago, she sensed a growing need in Christchurch for a personal wardrobe consultant. She launched Angela Stone Consulting and now, thanks to Mr Ballantyne himself, her business is installed on his emporium's fashion floor and her services advertised to the store's 16,000 account customers.

The response has been incredible: since the fliers went out this winter, Angela's phone hasn't stopped ringing.

"I felt sure that the timing was right," says Angela. "People now are so much more aware of how they look, but I couldn't have guessed I'd get so many emails and calls, and so quickly. It's mind-blowing," she laughs. "I'm flying up to Nelson one day and driving to Timaru the next. One lady came down from

Wellington, bringing four suitcases with her. She spent three whole days with me."

While Wellington's Kirkcaldie & Stains does employ an in-store personal shopper and Smith & Caughey's in Auckland is able to deal with individual requests, Angela's in-store service is unique for two reasons.

Firstly, after an initial enquiry by telephone or email, she joins her clients in their own homes to review their existing wardrobe and, secondly, she's not actually employed by Ballantynes, so isn't restricted to shopping there. This second point is crucial for Angela's business, allowing her to maintain her objectivity.

"I made the initial approach to them because they're renowned for service and that's what I'm providing. At first they declined my offer, but I found I was spending so much time in Ballantynes with my clients that one day I bumped into Mr Ballantyne; he was supportive and it took us just a couple of days to combine forces," says Angela. "But the fact that I'm on an hourly rate, paid by my client, means I keep my shopping integrity and they can be sure I'm working for them rather than just being committed to Ballantynes. For most people, shopping there works – they have such a fantastic range – but if we don't find it there, then we jump in my car and we'll make it work somewhere else."

And boy does she work. Before seeing Angela in action, the job description didn't sound much like hard graft. We girls like a bit of shopping, so how hard can it be to wander around a department store digging ➤

GETTING DRESSED



FOR SUCCESS

trends

out things for someone else? But hard it can be: at \$100 an hour she's under pressure to get it right, and there's much more to her job than just searching for clothes.

"My clients have decided before I get to their homes that they want me to make a difference, so they're usually very open to change. But this whole process also does make them feel exposed, so I have to build up their trust and make them comfortable trying clothes on in front of me," she explains.

In this respect, her towering 1.8m frame and taut size-10 figure don't actually do her any favours.

Ngaira Meyer, a local teacher and recent client, doubtless speaks for many when she says: "When I first saw her I nearly ran away. I was thinking, *How's this stick figure going to know anything about dressing me?* but I'm glad I got through that because she's been fantastic.

"I feel like she's taken me on a journey," laughs Ngaira later, as she parades around in the first pair of heels she's worn for 24 years. "I've loved it. She encouraged me to discard two-thirds of my clothes. We went right through my wardrobe and she's made me realise that I don't have to look fat, 50 and frumpy. I would never have even tried on half of the things I'm buying today and it feels so good."

Although thrilled with her new clothes, Ngaira also alludes to the more painful aspects of the makeover process. "I did feel really down after she left my house the other day," she admits. "Even though I knew she was right, it's obviously quite depressing to find out you've been getting it so wrong all these years, and to think of the money I've wasted," she confides. "But she's made me look at clothes in a new light and really taught me what to look for to suit my size and shape."

There's no doubt that the BBC's iconic television show, *What Not To Wear* (the second series screening on TV One), has helped her business. The criticisms made by the show's glamorous hosts, Trinny Woodall and Susannah Constantine, might be too sartorially scathing for some, but their insights have made women all over the world sit up and take a long, fresh look at their personal style. Researching



This page: she's a mum to five and runs her own business but Angela, pictured with daughter Isabella, 6, says she still makes time for her painting.

this story, each of Angela's clients I met made references to the show, and they were clearly in the market for a similar kind of makeover.

"People either love the show or hate it, but there's no doubt that it's helped my cause," acknowledges Angela. "Trinny and Susannah have raised people's awareness of clothes and what they can do for you, encouraging us to take a good look at ourselves. It's just plain good sense really; when you are wearing the right clothes you feel great about yourself. Clothes are a reflection of how we feel."

Looking at Angela, she clearly feels elegant, confident and immaculate. Everything about her – the car, the house, the clothes, hair and makeup – shout organisation and efficiency. Even her preschoolers look tidy. When asked how she manages it, while she does trot out the usual platitudes about juggling, organisation and wonderful support networks, she's also the first to admit there are days when it doesn't run so smoothly.

"Yes, of course, there are times when it all goes wrong and I feel stressed by trying to do so much, but when it does work I love it. I don't get up early – I'm never out of bed before 7.20am. I take long weekends, usually not working on Friday or Monday, so that gives me plenty of time to

be at home with the family. On Mondays I prepare all the food for the week and my four-year-old daughter Eva and I bake. I paint here in the kitchen when I can."

With three children of their own and two from her husband Bevan's previous marriage, it's difficult to imagine there's much time for painting.

"Actually I do loads," she laughs, displaying the latest works she's preparing for a local exhibition. "I've never found anything that makes me so happy and gives me so much satisfaction, so I do try to paint regularly. I'm lucky to have Bevan's support, in my business and at home, and having three of the kids at the school across the road helps."

She certainly looks happy. With her trademark, "Don't you worry hon, I'll just go and have a squizz for a better T-shirt", she's so very at home rifling through clothes racks at lightning speed. At \$100 an hour, and with most clients clocking up at least five hours, the commercial sense of her new business venture is obvious. No overheads (just a mobile phone), no paperwork and she gets to choose her hours. Not a bad part-time job for a mum.

Watch out Trinny and Susannah, here she comes. ■

Angela Stone Consulting. Phone: (03) 326 7959 or visit www.angelastone.co.nz