

# 'PERFECTLY IMPERFECT'

CONSOLIDATING YOUR OWN STYLE AND CREATING A WARDROBE TO SUIT TAKES SKILL, BUT ANYONE CAN DO IT WITH A BIT OF HELP, SAYS STYLIST LUCIA CAINE

WORDS: NICKY MOFFAT

**W**e are our own harshest critics but when it comes to image, taking control can change your life.

Passionate stylist Lucia Caine helps women from all walks of life transform or consolidate their personal style.

"A lot of women don't like shopping. They get very frustrated," she said.

"They feel ... that they're inadequate, and they leave the shopping centre in despair, thinking, 'there's nothing that will work for me'.

"A lot of the time it's because they're not fully aware of their own physicality in terms of their own body proportions – their shape, what colours might work. Fabrics can make such a difference, too – the way a garment drapes on your body."

Lucia said it was rewarding to work with people who were surprised and delighted at the outfits they ended up with.

For example, a recent client who said she had put on weight, approached Lucia as she needed to do presentations and book launches.

"She had lost her mojo ... she said, 'I just want to feel like when I was younger – you know, when you put on a nice pair of shoes and a dress and you think 'I've got this'. I want that feeling'.

"We went into the change room, and tried on a few outfits that I thought would work and it did work – she was prancing around the shop, feeling so confident.

"She said, 'Oh my God, I feel fantastic'. Her whole face lit up and she said, 'How do you do this?' And I said, 'I think I'm just really good at narrowing down what you are. I see what you don't see, and now you're seeing what I see'."

The client planned to use the clothes for a branding shoot, but they were also comfortable for sitting in behind her desk, Lucia said.

When a person contacts Lucia for help with styling, she sends them a questionnaire about their body type, lifestyle and their needs. Many choose to do a shopping outing with Lucia, and wardrobe consultations are also popular.

"There's a lot in it. I'm very holistic, and (their) budget comes into it as well," she said.

"I'm good at multi-tasking and really listening to people – you've got to listen to your clients, and build a rapport very quickly."

Before a shopping trip with a client, Lucia does a "pre-shop", where she selects items.

Returning with her client, she helps them



**PASSIONATE:** Lucia Caine (right) helps everyday women take control of their image. Pictured with Lucia is client Sarah Robinson.

Picture: Patrick Woods

try on outfits and find the right match.

"Not every item a person tries on is perfect straight away," she said.

"The process is quite organic, and what I find is that a lot of them say to me at the end of a shop, 'Wow, I didn't realise there were so many options – that so many things would work well on me'."

Lucia shares styling tips as they go, explaining how different fabrics and styles complement body shape and complexion.

"As women, one of our faults is that we really are our harshest critics. We judge each other and we compare ourselves with each other," she said.

"I want women to feel positive and confident. I want them to see themselves the way that I see them – see their striking eyes, beautiful strong legs, that they can rock a skirt because their lower limbs are perfect."

She laughed, saying everybody had "bits they like to hide", including herself.

"I say, 'Yeah, I wish I had lower limbs like that', she said. "I've actually got varicose veins, and I had major surgery this year ... but that's not important. What's important is feeling that you're OK. In fact, you're more than OK as a woman, and you can get out there and be like anyone.

"Women I work with are just normal, perfectly imperfect people.

"I get so excited because I love to help transform. At the end of the day, we all have to wear clothes and it makes sense to wear what works best for you."

She joked that the phenomenon of total paralysis when facing one's own wardrobe was common, and people should realise it's OK to ask for help.

"You talk about waking up in the morning, opening your wardrobe and thinking, 'Oh my God, what am I going to wear?'"

Having worked as a schoolteacher for 20 years, Lucia said she was good at listening and understanding "all the sensitivities and idiosyncrasies" that made people who they are.

A wardrobe consult is a very intimate service, as she gets to see into a person's life, but also it is one of the most enjoyable, she said.

Lucia helps people devise a strategy for making their clothing collection represent who they are.

"Some ladies really want me to be quite direct. They say, 'Lucia, if something actually doesn't work, can you get rid of it or can we make a pile', she said.

"Other ladies want to show me outfits.

"They've already got garments, but they're not sure how to mix and match.

"Some ladies have a lot of clothing ... I get

them to take photos on their phone, and we create a whole wardrobe by actually shopping their wardrobe."

Helping a person work out their own style was exciting, she said.

"Some women, they like their stripes and spots and clean lines," she said.

"Perhaps she just likes very minimal jewellery. Then you've got the opposite of that" you've got a client who wants to wear all the on-trend fashion."

Many women have a mix of styles, but most people have to include work attire in that, she said.

A recent client was promoted to managerial position at a firm and suddenly needed a corporate wardrobe for her work.

"She was really nervous. She asked, 'What's corporate wear, Lucia?'"

She needed some comfortable but stylish closed-in court shoes, some conservative skirts, jackets and blouses.

"She could mix and match. We took photos, but she had her working week sorted," Lucia said.

She said style was about being confident in your own skin.

"If you are your authentic self, and you can confidently wear something – that's style," she said.

Style depends on mood, and should change as it needs to, but Lucia can usually get a feel for what a person is into and what works for them.

Being a conscious consumer made a person more savvy when they went shopping, she said.

"I think sometimes we're like, 'Gee that looks pretty. I might try that on', and it may not work for you at all," she said.

"If you've got a soft direction, colouring-wise, and you go and put something really blingy and sparkly on, then I bet you you're not going to wear it. There'll be something about it that you're not sure about. It's probably got a lot to do with the fact it takes over your whole complexion."

Women had a sense of failure around their image, she agreed.

"The whole pressure to look a certain way is still much more strongly there for women," Lucia said.

"There are protocols ... but it's up to you whether you engage with that."

Lucia said she couldn't imagine herself tiring of the work as a personal stylist, helping people feel more positive about themselves.

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**MIX 'N' MATCH:** Stylist Lucia Caine helps client Sarah Robinson find a wardrobe of clothes that suit.

Picture: Patrick Woods