

Image consultants can help turn 'now' into 'wow'

By Paula Story
November 6, 2005

Try as we might, there's no denying we are judged by our appearance. In the sometimes too-real world of extreme makeovers, image ambushes, Botox parties and airbrushed abs, looks matter, even in casual San Diego.

So if your style is more aging hippie than hip trendsetter, if your bushy hair has been the same since the first President Bush was in office or if your makeup is stuck in a pretty pink rut, it may be time to seek professional help.

Enter the image consultant. This person is paid to tell you the truth about your hair, clothing, grooming – and the message that image sends to the world. Stylists and people who have a knack for making a familiar face look suddenly fresh and fabulous are no longer the luxury of movie stars and high-level politicians. Anybody – man or woman – can have an image makeover, for just about any price, and the changes can be big or small.

For many, it's difficult to be objective about our own looks and appearance. Friends and family – being friends and family – can push honest criticism only so far. An image consultant can help you determine how to update, enhance or change your look based on your career or personal goals.

It's not necessarily easy, and it's not always pretty; they will probably tell you things you don't want to hear and ask you to spend money in ways you would not normally do. However, if the job is done right, those who undergo an image makeover can end up looking great, feeling more confident and thanking the consultant for their honesty.

"Everybody says, 'Oh my gosh, you look so good' " said Gina Lacagnina, a San Diego attorney and mother of three who recently had a hair, makeup and clothing makeover with the help of Carlsbad image consultant Beth Thorp. "I think I definitely stand a lot straighter. I feel really good, and it's not just a moment of feeling good."

Lacagnina's new look has made such an impact that the law firm where she works, Neil Dymott Attorneys, plans to have Thorp consult with all the lawyers to update their images.

"I was in a mediation and the mediator complimented me," Lacagnina said. "I went into the courtroom and the judge said "Like your outfit!" The opposing lawyer said 'You look great.' To have opposing council compliment you, that's saying something."

San Diego mayoral candidate Donna Frye was judged relentlessly on her long, lackluster, center-parted hair and dubbed a "surfer chick" in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Economist* magazine. "At first it was funny," Frye told the *Union-Tribune* in July. "Then it wasn't so funny. I'm running for mayor of the seventh largest city in America and I'm being referred to as a barnyard animal."



LAURA EMBRY / Union-Tribune
and SEAN MASTERSON

Lawyer Gina Lacagnina underwent a makeover, from top: (1) Lacagnina looked in the mirror as image consultant Beth Thorp referred to a celebrity photo Lacagnina liked; (2) Thorp took Lacagnina in hand before the makeover; (3) Thorp reassured Lacagnina about her hair color choice;

She now sports a shorter, sharper look with subtle highlights that she calls her 'mayor's do.' Her stylist had been pleading with her to make a change, and said while it has nothing to do with making her a smarter or better politician, it allows people to move beyond critiquing Frye's hair and focus on the real issues.

Tim Tadder, an Encinitas photographer, was focused more on making great images of others than on polishing

his own. His date with makeover destiny came while photographing a jazz-in-the-park event for the city of Carlsbad.

"When I met him, he was just a hippie," said Kathi Burns, a professional organizer and image consultant in Northern San Diego County. "I could tell he was a genius – professional, great at what he does – but he had on these sandals, some sort of Hawaiian shirt with ratty pants, long, scruffy hair and his beard was out of control. I saw that he was really cute and had huge potential, so I went up to him. I approached him – he was the first client that I ever approached – and said, 'Can I change you?'"

Tadder, an outdoor freak who admits to wearing the same clothes for a seven-day bike trip, said he is clueless about what to wear. "I have no problem going out and buying a \$3,000 mountain bike, but I do have problems going out and buying a \$600 sport coat," he said. "Everything in my closet was what I learned in high school."

Tadder had a big assignment coming up, knew he needed to update his image and planned to cut his hair anyway, so he agreed. He and Burns spent about seven hours together the following day, with Burns charging \$85 an hour.

"It felt a little like, 'God, I just spent a lot of money to have this lady shop with me,'" he said. "But it was more than that; it was teaching me how to shop, what fits and what doesn't fit, stroking my ego. For me, one client at a time, if it makes a difference to me, it was well worth it."

All told, he spent \$1,500 between the fee to Burns, clothes, shoes, a haircut and new sunglasses. He describes his look as artistic and a little funky, but professional.

"Hopefully, it is my work that makes clients want to use me again, but it makes a difference to some people, and that's the reality," Tadder said.



LAURA EMBRY / Union-Tribune
and SEAN MASTERSON

Lawyer Gina Lacagnina underwent a makeover, from top: (4) Thorp applied Lacagnina's makeup; (5) at Kasper, Lacagnina tried on a new suit as part of her wardrobe makeover; (6) Lacagnina liked her new professional look.