



Dress to impress

Living in Paris inspired Rosemary Allan to trade in her job in insurance to become an image consultant and run a boutique bed and breakfast. She hasn't looked back since, she tells **Gillian Harvey**



Rosemary Allan of BWonderful

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The courtyard at 52 Clichy

Famed as the fashion capital of the world, Paris may seem the ideal place to set up an image consultancy - somewhere people can come to discover the colours, shades, cuts and styles that enhance their natural looks.

However, when expat Rosemary Allan, 55, decided to train as a consultant in 2010, it was for more personal reasons.

"I'd gone grey," she explains. "And suddenly everything in my wardrobe seemed to make me look washed out. I'd go to stores and pick up colourful clothes because I liked the shade - but nothing seemed to suit me. I felt completely confused as to what to wear to suit my new colouring."

In some areas of France, this might not seem such a fundamental problem, but working and living among apparently effortlessly stylish Parisians, not knowing quite how to dress was a real frustration for Rosemary.

"It was as if, overnight, nothing in my wardrobe suited me anymore!" she says.

Determined to regain her style, Rosemary booked the services of a local image consultant to help her to understand how to dress to suit her new colouring.

"Unfortunately the appointment didn't go well," says Rosemary. "I left feeling more confused than when I'd gone in. There was no clear advice - nothing to take away with me and use on a practical level."

FRESH START

It was this confusion about style that prompted Rosemary's decision to train as an image consultant with Colour Me Beautiful in the UK in 2010.

Taking leave from her job in insurance, where she'd worked since moving to Paris from Hong Kong in 1996, she took the first of several two-week courses and returned with a wealth of knowledge about how different shades and tones complemented people's colouring.

"I chose to train as a consultant simply to gain a full understanding of how to adapt my choices to my new appearance," she explains. "I didn't ever imagine I'd start working as a consultant; it was a rather expensive present to myself."

Newly confident, Rosemary arrived back in Paris with a clear appreciation of how to dress to suit her natural colouring and look her best. And people soon noticed the change.

"When I went back to work, dressed in some of my new outfits, people started to comment how well I was looking," she says. "That's the thing about wearing the right clothes - people don't say I love that shade of blue or that jumper really suits you, instead they comment on how healthy you look - that's what the right colour and style can do for you."

To her surprise, Rosemary also came to realise that there was real demand for her services in Paris.



"Friends would ask me for advice," she says. "And people began to contact me having found me on the Colour Me Beautiful website. I was astounded to find that most of these women were French women - Parisians - who seemed to be so confident and stylish. It amazed me that they felt they needed advice."

"However, I soon realised that often these women stuck to neutral tones - safe colours and a strict set of rules about when they should be worn. They wanted to wear more colourful clothing, but didn't know where to start."

Gradually, Rosemary began to take on clients and realised how much she had to offer, setting up her consultancy business BWonderful alongside her existing job.

"To my surprise, I even won Best International Image Consultant at the Colour Me Beautiful awards in 2011," she says. "I was so surprised; I blushed a beetroot colour."

FEEL AT HOME

In 2013, Rosemary also decided she wanted to step aside from her corporate life and try something new.

"I started a boutique B&B and apartment let in Paris," she says.

"I was a little unsure, but actually I've found that dealing with B&B guests on holiday is completely different from dealing with the corporate world; I've found B&B guests to be wonderful, very relaxed and open and genuinely grateful for all my efforts at hospitality."

And it seems that Rosemary has a talent for making her guests feel at home. Her accommodation 52 Clichy comes highly recommended; rated one of the top places to stay on three major booking websites including TripAdvisor.

In a city with thousands of options, this is a real accolade.

"This year, I had 100 nights already booked by 1 January," she says. "I get repeat business and recommendations from previous customers. I'm always working hard to help my guests to enjoy their stay in Paris," she says.

"I try to keep up-to-date with local events, visiting theatres, restaurants and exhibitions in the afternoons and evenings to ensure that I can make informed recommendations and enhance people's holidays."

"It's great, as I'm not sure I'd be out and about so much if I wasn't running the guest business - it's a win-win as it means I am truly enjoying living in this vibrant city."

Rosemary has also expanded her image consultancy work, offering consultations, advice on style and even accompanied shopping trips where she helps people to use their new-found knowledge to refresh their wardrobes. She's also noticed a difference when it comes to working with customers of different nationalities.



Enjoying breakfast on the balcony



There is a fully equipped kitchen



One of the bedrooms



"I've found that British people often want to gain as much knowledge as they can in a short space of time," she says. "They will tend to just book a colour consultation and are pleased with the knowledge they acquire. However French clients seem to want to know everything inside out - they'll often book a colour and style consultation and then ask me to accompany them on a shopping trip too. They are really interested in learning how everything works."

STYLISH STAY

With her image consultancy also making its mark - she was voted the Best Image Consultant in Paris by an expat magazine in 2017 - it may seem surprising that Rosemary, who is extremely busy, wants to develop her businesses more. However, her next goal is to knit together her passion for hosting and image consultancy so



ROSEMARY'S STYLE TIPS

- If you're curvy, choose softer fabrics as they drape better. A top in a softly shaped jersey material is more slimming than a crisp cotton which can add kilos to your silhouette that don't really exist.
- If you're petite, try to match the tone of your skirt/hosiery/shoes and avoid wearing a highly-contrasting colour on top, or shoes with an ankle strap.
- If you are pear-shaped, accentuate your top half and choose clothing styles to minimise your hips and bottom. Keep detail and pattern to your top and try to avoid straight skirts, trousers with detail on the back pockets, tops and jackets that finish at your widest point and raglan sleeves.

that more guests come to use her service during their stay, rather than booking separately or coming from elsewhere.

"At the moment, people who book into the B&B often book a consultation as well, but as an afterthought - an additional treat," she explains.

"Mothers might book as a confidence boost for their daughters, friends book together as a fun afternoon treat, or others who are intending to refresh their wardrobe come for advice. But my goal is to have more guests come with the aim of building image consultation into their stay, as a primary focus."

More than anything Rosemary enjoys seeing her clients leave their consultation with a renewed sense of confidence.

"People come to see me if they've gone grey, or lost their way a bit, or want to do something special for themselves," she says. "It's hard enough having self-confidence, especially in Paris where everyone seems to find it so easy."

"I like to leave my customers with a toolkit to use - it's not about



52 Clichy offers a comfortable base

recommending a particular shade of blue, it's more of a general idea of whether dark, strong bold colours suit, or whether to choose muted rather than reflective material. And I always explain why - having a 'because' helps people to remember the recommendations and understand a bit more about how the right style or colour can completely change the way they look.

"For people coming for a colour analysis I give people a mantra of three words - mine are cool, deep and clear. For me, it makes my choices so easy. I don't waste

my time when I'm shopping.

"At first, I treated my image consultation service more as a hobby - I was convinced no one could be as confused as me! But I've found that while most women basically have the right ideas, they don't know exactly why certain things suit them.

"It is the 'why' that makes choices obvious, so you stop wasting time (and lots of money) buying the wrong things or worrying about your choices. It's super-empowering to absolutely know that you look your best even without make-up, whether you're wearing jeans or are dressed up to the nines."

And, in her new niche - worlds away from her work in the insurance industry - Rosemary has found the happiness that comes with helping others to feel great about themselves. "I'm so lucky to be able to do two jobs that make me happy and seem to make others happy too," she says. "It's truly transformative." **LF**

52clichy.com
bwonderful.com