

8 THE WAY WE LIVE NOW

DISH



Ross Anderson

What every sodden Signor needs...

ANYONE who thinks Italy is all sunshine, tomatoes and olive oil has clearly never been in the Stadio delle Alpi in Turin on a dark, damp, misty autumn night watching their football team being systematically dismantled.

October 1995, it was Juventus 4, Rangers 1. Could have been 40. Men against boys. Humiliating. And they didn't even have Gianluca Viali, who'd gone AWOL. Torturer-in-chief was a slippery little cove called Alessandro del Piero. He sounds like a Renaissance sculptor, which is fitting, since he spent the evening making our defence look like statues. (Only wish he'd been as chopped out and unacknowledged as he is now.)

What I remember most about that evening, before the dinner that saved my sanity, was the mist. It was like something out of a Hammer werewolf movie, only colder and wetter. It was worse than February in Metrol. This stuff seeped into your clothes, it was cozed under your skin, and it was in the process of insinuating itself into the very marrow of my bones when I sought refuge in a little restaurant just off the Piazza Carignano and made the acquaintance of a waiter called Umberto. It was the work of but a moment for him to size up the situation. "What you need," he said, "is the mushroom risotto."

"What we need," I replied, "is a defence with fewer holes than a colander, a midfield that can remember the colour of its own team's shirts and a striker who can find his way to the goal without the aid of a map and bleedin' compass." We still do, in fact. But the risotto is easier.

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Your household dilemmas solved

Q. How can I clean stains from an old marble-topped washstand?

A. Marble can be cleaned using warm, sudsy water. Make sure that you rinse thoroughly and buff the surface dry. If you are dealing with tough old stains, make a paste of baking soda and bleach and cover the stain with the paste. Cover the paste with a damp cloth, leave overnight, then wet it down and scrape off any residue. Always remember to rinse thoroughly. Alternatively, you could try a commercial marble cleaner. You may want to seal the marble to make future cleanings easier, either with a commercial sealer or a coat of high-quality automotive polish.

Tomorrow: How can I ensure that my new stainless steel kitchen surface stays gleaming?

PORCINI RISOTTO

Prep: 20 min Cook: 20 min

Serves 2

50g dried porcini mushrooms
100g unsalted butter
2 shallots, finely chopped
200g carrot rice
150ml dry white wine
100g freshly grated Parmesan
Salt and black pepper
Chopped parsley to serve

Method

Put the porcini in a bowl, pour over some boiling water and soak for 20 minutes. Reserve the juice. Chop the mushrooms and fry in a little butter for three minutes. Put to one side. Bring the stock to a rolling boil. Melt half the remaining butter in a heavy pan and fry the shallot till soft. Add the rice and toss in butter till it's all coated and becomes translucent. It should look a bit like pearl barley (no, not the singer, that was Bailey). Add the wine and cook till the rice has absorbed it. Add the mushroom juice, and ditto. Now add the boiling stock, one ladleful at a time. As each ladleful is absorbed, add another till the rice is cooked. It should take about 20 minutes. Keep the rice moving as you cook but try not to stir too violently or all the starch will leak out and you'll finish up with mush. Add the mushrooms, Parmesan and remaining butter, stir till you have a creamy consistency, then season to taste with salt and pepper. Add a sprinkling of parsley and serve. ● *All Duplex is easy*

FASHION

The top personal

Corrie Jackson was cynical about 'style advisers' but after visiting many department stores and high-street chains, she's a convert. Here, she gives her verdict



Clockwise from above: Roland Mouret at Harrod's; Star by Julien Macdonald at Debenhams; Coast at John Lewis; Topshop; YSL; Row Gaultier at Topshop; and Victoria Fox at Dorothy Perkins

12 DECEMBER 2004

shopper quest

IT USED to be the case that entrusting your wardrobe to a stylist, let alone one who worked in a department store, was absolutely not done. It seemed a little odd to say so, but it was not only a low-than-styleish shop assistant but the whole experience consisted of a lot of the direction of the store's most expensive threads.

But fast forward a decade and everyone's doing it, from the fashion-obsessed to the totally uninitiated. Department stores have responded by providing a variety of styling services, from the most basic to the most sophisticated. I can say that it is something every woman should do, at least once. A first-time stylist is worth her weight in gold.

At Harvey Nichols, I watched in a capsule wardrobe in less than ten minutes, while at Liberty, the much-loved Celia Clark taught me how to banish the fashion horrors that haunt my wardrobe year after year.

And my vision of being reduced to a pushy shop assistant, well, it's not my style. I'm a bit of a minimalist, but I'm not a minimalist. All services listed are complimentary, with no sales pressure. So, whether you are a style novice or a low-key babe, like the editor and seek professional advice.

HARVEY NICHOLS (nationwide)
The lowdown: The Manchester branch's superior stylist, Liberty phone for a few minutes before you meet her when you do, it's as though she has known you for a while. When I arrived, a selection of fabulous outfits — which I could have put me in — were laid out for me. Renowned for being able to track down the latest pair of Chloé boots in the country, Liberty can also work with any brand you're into.

Best for: Elderly labels, think Chloé, see & hide. Oh, & Pique.
Worst for: Sticking to your budget. The stylist puts together dreamy outfits but you can't part with the massive amounts of cash.
Would suit: The savvy girl about town with her finger on the pulse.
Rating: 8/10
Contact: 020-7235 5880

HARRODS
The lowdown: After discussing my goal in the tranquil executive suite, Victoria Keira guided me around the designer departments while imparting insider tips on how to shop.

Best for: The volume of established labels — with more than 150 brands on the first floor alone, there is everything from Amanda Wakeley to YSL.
Worst for: Small budgets — these clothes are far too tempting to resist.
Would suit: Grown-up fashionistas who want an extra-polished look.
Rating: 9/10
Contact: 020-7730 1234

LIBERTY
The lowdown: Sink into the sofa in the oak-paneled suite, safe in the knowledge that your wardrobe is in the experienced hands of the brilliant Celia Clark. She went through every aspect of my life, from where I work to what I like to do on a Saturday. By the end, I felt that Celia knew more about me than some of my friends.

Best for: Trying something new. Shopping with Celia is like shopping with your coolest mate. She is unreservedly honest yet diplomatic, and will coax you out of your comfort zone and into a Celia Deacon jacket.

Worst for: Striking violet. Liberty's collections favour the bohemian, with lots of print-heavy and textured splendor. Those hankering after a minimalist look should steer clear.
Would suit: The open-minded. Support of shop talking, prepare to go hobo — and vice versa.
Rating: 8/10
Contact: 020-7734 1234

HOUSE OF FRASER (nationwide)
The lowdown: The shopper asks for your details in advance so that when you arrive a selection of outfits is waiting. I walked in off the street, however, and was discussing what I was looking for as she went to scour the shop floor. Best for: Trying something new.

Young, funky stylist Alison Brown put me in clothes I never dreamt would work. From leopard-print knits at Whistles to apple-green corduroy military jackets at Fiumucci, she created a whole new me.

Worst for: Choice. There is a rather limited range of designers.
Would suit: Shoppers who are stuck in a rut.
Rating: 8/10
Contact: 0870 1602270

TOPSHOP (nationwide)
The lowdown: Your 'style adviser' leads you to a large private changing room where a rail of clothes (according to the looks you specified over the phone) is waiting to be tried.

Best for: Hassle-free shopping. Anyone who has tried to negotiate the vast flagship store will appreciate the little piece of heaven that is the private changing room. And it's so refreshing to be able to take in more than six items at a time.
Worst for: Getting an appointment. Try the smaller branches, because their larger counterparts are booked up weeks in advance.

Would suit: Style chameleons. With so many different trends to choose from, why stick to one?
Rating: 8/10
Contact: 0800 7318294

SELFRIDGES (Manchester Exchange Square and London) The lowdown: The stylist goes through different aspects of your life to determine your style and will ascertain your favourite designers before leading you around the store.

Best for: Choice. Selfridges is a huge playground of brands, ranging from the high-street giants, such as Warehouse and Topshop, to their 'super-brand' such as Dolce & Gabbana and Alexander McQueen.

Worst for: Beginners. The service is heavy on personal style and the inexperienced might find the store a little intimidating.
Would suit: The fashion-conscious who are in the know. Also good for the time-poor — once you develop a relationship with the stylist, she will call you whenever something suitable arrives.
Rating: 7/10
Contact: 0870 8377377

DOROTHY PERKINS (nationwide)
The lowdown: The service has been running for a year and, while it hasn't enjoyed the press attention that Topshop has, it is still proving a favourite among high-street shoppers looking for guidance.
Best for: Shoes. They have recently launched V by Victoria Fox, a collection with beautiful detailing on sexy black boots and kitten heels.

Worst for: Creativity. While the style advisers are happy to travel the shop floor, they are rather short on innovation and I was disappointed by the lack of ideas.
Would suit: Lazy shoppers who would rather relax in a private changing room than fight the crowds and rummage through rails (though wouldn't we all).
Rating: 6/10
Contact: 0870 1228801

JOHN LEWIS (nationwide)
The lowdown: The friendly stylist charts your colours before taking you on to the shopfloor to search. They do not suggest many new ideas, the service is a time-saver and is very popular, so book ahead.

Best for: Low-key basics from brands such as Coast. Affordable cashmere and chunky knits.
Worst for: Those desperate for inspiration and anyone under a size 12 — the smaller sizes sell out very quickly leaving little choice. The stylist was charming but didn't really understand what I was after, so a lack of ideas might deter those looking for inspiration.

Would suit: The more conservative sensible dresser who's generally happy with their current style.
Rating: 6/10
Contact: 0845 6049049

DEBENHAMS (nationwide)
The lowdown: The stylist is armed with a clipboard and a host of questions and, once satisfied that you are both on the same wavelength, shop while you put your feet up.

Best for: Anyone on a budget. Debenhams is a treasure trove of designer concession lines such as G2 by Gharani Strok, Rocha by John Rocha and Star by Julien Macdonald.

Worst for: A makeover. My shopping trip everything I said literally and didn't offer any style advice of her own. Warning: if you are bent on your image, you may find this service uninspiring.
Would suit: Reluctant shoppers — if you would rather be anywhere than in a busy department store, you might find some solace in a private changing room.
Rating: 5/10
Contact: 020-7408 4444

