

Sunday Times Money & Careers

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MY BRILLIANT CAREER

Projecting the image you want

AN image consultant helps her clients establish a polished image they are comfortable with based on their skin tone, body shape and lifestyle. "Most clients actually don't know what image they want to project, so it's my responsibility to guide them to make the right choice by asking key questions," says Romano. "When the world sees you, what would you like it to see?" is one of the questions I ask. If the response is 'classic, chic and elegant' a certain image comes to mind, but if the response is 'dynamic, sexy and adventurous' a completely different image comes to mind. In today's competitive world it is important to differentiate yourself and to stand out from the rest. The trend of personal branding also fuels the need to align your personal image with your professional one — an image consultant can help you to do this."

What are the tools of your trade (the things you can't do your job without)?
I call them the triple Ps — passionate, polished and professional. In my career you also need empathy as you have to really listen to your client's needs. When I train my consultants, the two words I use the most are "tune in" to what your client is saying. Today many people simply don't listen, but it is amazing the results and the response you receive when you do.

What are the biggest mistakes women make in terms of their appearance?
Focusing on their concerns not their assets and wanting to look like someone else instead of highlighting their best features. My motto is: how you look is how you feel. It is not about aspiring to become someone else — it is about knowing how to make the best of yourself!

Most women want to look

Chata Romano is an image consultant and author as well as the president and founding member of The Complete Image Solution and The Chata Romano Training Academy. She speaks to MARGARET HARRIS about helping people to look their best

great, but not everyone is a model. Are there some basic things women can do to look their best no matter their age and appearance?
Yes, establish your assets. It is nearly impossible for a woman to find these assets herself. They can be revealed by changing her hair parting, the shade of her foundation, the length of her skirt, the width of her collar, the shape of the jeans she wears, the height of her shoes, how many bracelets she wears, the colour of the lenses of her glasses and the list goes on.

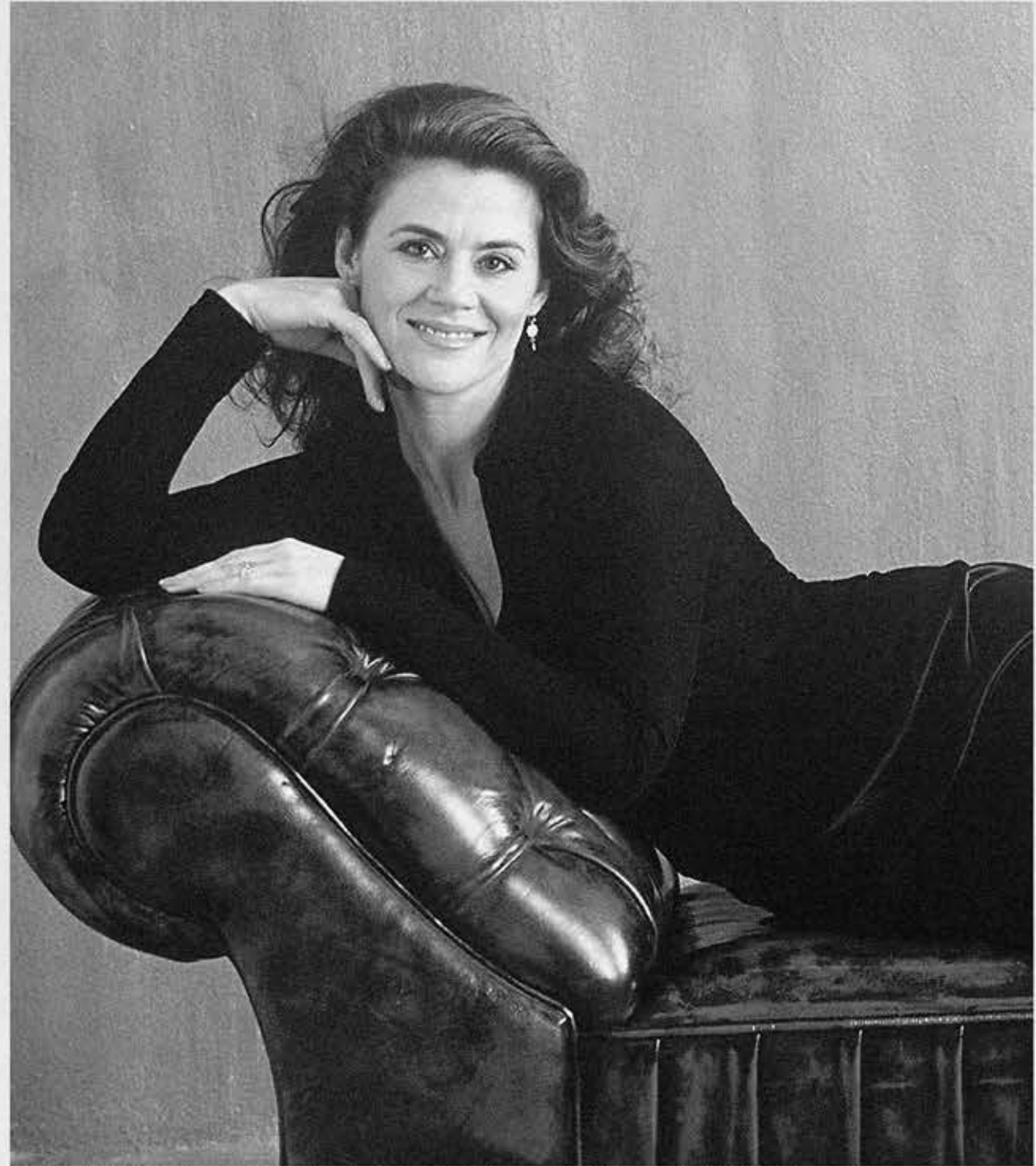
Money is tight for many people. Can you look good on a budget?
Yes. Whatever you buy should coordinate with three other totally different items. For example, a white shirt paired with a black skirt, a black pair of pants and black jeans does not count as three totally different items because all three outfits look the same. However, a white shirt with a black skirt, stone trousers and blue jeans are three totally different items.

What basic items should every woman's wardrobe contain?
A few must-have items include a perfectly fitting pair of jeans, a functional little black dress that you can dress up or down, a crisp white shirt, a comfortable pair of shoes and a classic black blazer.

What did you want to be when you were a child?
My love for fashion goes as far back as I can remember. Not in the traditional sense, though. I was never fascinated by the tall, thin models who graced the covers of fashion magazines. I've always been intrigued by what I could do with real women.
When I was eight years old I was standing outside "helping" my father wash his car. I saw our neighbour walking across the road, and said to my father: "That lady looks much thinner than she did yesterday."
The 24-hour weight loss was impossible, of course, but somehow I intuitively knew that she was wearing an outfit that made her look thinner.
This illusion struck a chord in me, and so the passion began.

You also do personal shopping for clients. How does that work?
After the personal consultation (done at the client's home), I establish what she needs based on what she has. We make a list of the missing items and then shop for them accordingly.

Do you have a brilliant career? Write to letters@businesstimes.co.za



■ PASSION: Chata Romano specialises in personal branding and builds images for high-profile people
PICTURE: SHELLEY CHRISTIANS

HOW TO ...

be a working mother

WHETHER you work full time or part time, are the sole breadwinner or provide a second income to help ends meet each month, being a working mother is not easy. Kim Meszaros, a working mother and marketing executive for personnel company Kelly Group, has some advice to help women strike a balance between their home and working lives:

- Being organised is crucial — if you are always tripping over toys, losing homework or running late in the mornings because your children can't find their gym kits, then something's got to change. Ensure that all the important things are kept in special, logical places;
- Follow the same routine each day so your children know what to expect every morning and what is expected of them;
- Mornings can become a special kind of hell, so spend some time getting the most out of them. Do everything you can the night before: for example, put out your children's uniforms and your work clothes;
- With the days getting shorter it's even harder to get out of bed in the morning, but waking up an hour before your children means you have time for a cup of coffee, to get dressed, to take care of your pre-work tasks, and to have breakfast organised before the kids get moving;
- In today's depressed economy, you need to be the best you can be at work. No matter how many times you had to get up in the night to attend to a sick child, you have to present your best you in the office. It's also best to keep personal soul-baring to a minimum, as this will ensure you are seen as competent and on the ball rather than unable to take on additional pressure;
- Keep your work and family lives as separate as possible. This can be difficult, but try not to schedule a doctor's appointment during work time. Instead, use lunch breaks for this; and
- Try to maintain a social life. Take the time to make plans and spend time with your friends.