

## out & about

### Interview With A Matchmaker

Heather Buchanan

➔ The "it" girl is now the IT girl in the age of Internet dating, text messaging, and a new Blue Tooth technology which will sound a mating call on her cell phone when a man whose dating profile matches hers is within 500 feet. The notion of a flesh and blood matchmaker seems incredibly low tech, and that's exactly what makes it attractive. What is more human, after all, than love?

Lisa Ronis is the polished presenter of opportunities for love and romance, entering her sixth year as a professional matchmaker. "Business has been great, mostly word of mouth since I don't advertise," says the Manhattan based diva of dating who also has a presence in Toronto and the Hamptons. You may have seen her on the "Gastineau Girls" being Brittany and Lisa's matchmaker or in USA Today picking a mate for Ben Affleck or giving advice on how to be a smart cupid in Redbook. Her newest venture is a reality TV series on the Canadian W network where she and a male cohort take on the relationship challenged and set out to find them a mate. "Manhattan Matchmaker" airs this spring with hopes of landing a home in the U.S.

After a successful career in fashion as the VP of Design and Accessories at Liz Claiborne, Lisa left corporate America to turn her hobby into a profession, attributing her success to a true love of the job where her friendship and caring, even if it is a moneyed transaction, are genuine. As she points out, "I'm the one who offers hope." She has over 100 clients but as they quickly get involved, she always has room for more who want to take advantage of her sixth sense. "I just know it," she snaps her fingers, "like that." Her client base of successful professionals, age 30 plus, often doesn't have the time or inclination to meet a lot of new people and online dating can be like "finding a needle in a haystack," so in essence, she's doing the romantic legwork for you.



Here's how it works. You start with an hour and a half, one on one consultation for \$300. First she gets to know you: where you went to school,

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what's your relationship like with your parents and friends, what do you do in your spare time. The second half is devoted to what you're looking for; age, look, personality, desire for children, religion, even pausing from the lunch of coffee to see if passers by are your type. "Most of the time the guys wants a pretty girl. Guys are visual. If they like tall blondes they like tall blondes." But these guys are looking for keepers so arm candy without substance won't cut it. "Women want humor, ambition, integrity, edge." But the one thing, which overrides everything, is values, "their sense of family and their trustworthiness."

Ronis has no qualms turning down potential clients. "If someone is absolutely gorgeous and wants to pay me double but they're not nice or open I won't waste the time." If she takes on a client her fees range from \$5,000 and up per number of introductions over the course of a year (the same price for men and women and far less than some of her competitors.) This includes not only the pre-screened dates but also feedback, image consulting, and private party invitations to the high-end singles events she throws for charity.

Lisa tells clients that they have to date smart. "If you want to get from A to B, don't go to C." For example if a man is older and doesn't want children but still wants a young pretty girl, he has to be realistic. Even if it's fun in the moment, the end goals need to match. When you employ Ronis, you have a personal dating consultant to help you reach that goal. Her services include a test date and even homework such as a shy person taking improv classes. And sometimes it's tough love, "I told one girl her fake nails were like claws, they had to go."



"There are lots of steps to my business, like repackaging the client," explains Ronis, "They must feel good when they start this process. After all who will like you if you don't like you?" These changes are on the outside and the inside ranging from the proper hair cut to therapy. Lisa tries to get to the heart of the situation, "You can't have chemistry with a heavy heart." Bringing the hurt and anger of the past relationships into the present won't work, and she can end up as the punching bag of disappointment. But there's still a mystery to this science. Sometimes a client finds a match on the second fix up and sometimes it will be after a few rounds or maybe even a break or maybe never.

Not for lack of trying. Not only will Ronis go through her Rolodex of clients, she will also go out and scout for your Mr. or Mrs. Right, approaching men and women at charity events, in clothing stores, and even at stoplights. With confidentiality a priority professional set ups are often posed as meeting a "friend." When describing the date, Lisa also will downplay rather than oversell, and describe rather than show a photo, eliminating a knee jerk reaction. Once she hones in on a client's type Ronis tweaks it. "Maybe a little younger, a little older, a little funnier or more athletic."



Her services don't end, however, when the sparks start to fly. "It's not only finding a match, it's coaching them through," she explains. One client liked the date Lisa set him up with but commented he wanted someone a little prettier.

Lisa said, "Shut up and go out with her again," and now they're blissfully in love. Another woman thought the man was a little too old but with Lisa's encouragement gave him a try and now they're married with twins. Her success stories may include a toast to her at the wedding or it may be a quiet note, as some clients do not want others to know they met through a matchmaker. Although why be embarrassed, even Paula Abdul uses one.

So what are her tips for women: be feminine, don't talk on the phone longer than 10 minutes with a man before the first date, let there be some mystery, and long silky hair – guys love it. After the first date let the man make the next move. For guys chivalry isn't dead. Pay for the first few dates, pick her up and escort her home, and have a plan for the date. She has a host of recommendations for both sexes including dermatologists, nutritionists, cosmetic dentists, and personal shoppers. Ultimately she asks her clients to trust her and let her take them on a journey. After all, if they've been doing it their way for fifteen years and it hasn't worked maybe they need a change.

The recent surge in matchmaker popularity has even led to the Matchmaker Institute or Cupid U as it is called where people take courses on matchmaking for profit. Lisa isn't sure it's something you can teach, crediting her sense of "just knowing when it's right," in addition to her extensive database.

In the end Ronis practices what she preaches, healing her own heavy heart, putting on her ultra feminine best, and opening her soul. The results have been amazing with a boon in her personal and professional life. Keep an eye out for her in the Hamptons this summer where she hopes to put together a rockin' charity event for singles.

And her advice to the IT girl, "Step away from the computer, gussy yourself up, and go out and flirt like crazy!"

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Lisa Ronis

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