

Inside The Glamorous Life Of A New York City Matchmaker

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Shopping at Whole Foods on a recent Sunday afternoon, Lisa Ronis spotted the perfect additions to her business's inventory.

But Ronis was not a chef scouting fresh produce or a sommelier seeking a rare Chardonnay. As a professional matchmaker, Ronis had her eye set on two men in their late 20s, whom she thought could be perfect for one of her many female clients.

After observing them silently for a few minutes, Ronis approached the men. She learned one was visiting from San Francisco, and alas, that the New Yorker had a girlfriend. Still, she got their e-mails and is hoping the man from San Francisco will agree to be added to her extensive dating "inventory."

"I know it's random," she told us. "I don't stalk, but in this business you have to be out there. Out there, but not like psycho."

Ronis would know. She's been in the professional matchmaking business for more than a decade after making a career switch from a high-profile fashion industry job in 2000. Since then, Ronis has built a [lucrative business](#) around helping elite professionals, both male and female, willing to spend thousands of dollars in their search for love. At any one time, Ronis has as many as 100 clients, from both New York and beyond, who all pay \$15,000 a year for her services.

Her success has been fueled by her willingness to work with female clients — a specialty that experts say sets her apart in the \$250 million matchmaking industry, which still mainly serves wealthy male clientele. And currently she is looking to expand her business to serve younger women as well, which Ronis says is an untapped market.

"I think, 'why not help the women?'" she says. "The women in the city are the ones that are everywhere."

Yet while she spends most of her waking hours looking for lifetime matches for her clients, Ronis herself has not remarried since getting divorced at the age of 27. To critics who question how a matchmaker could be single, she maintains that she is still "very much a relationship person" and that her own extensive dating experience is a big plus for her business.

"I say to my clients, 'I'm not this married lady sitting in my bed eating chocolate covered cherries,'" she says. "I'm in the sandbox with you."

As Ronis's business has expanded, so has the matchmaking industry — spurred on by the explosion of online dating services and reality television shows like Bravo's "Millionaire Matchmaker."

"With the growth of the online dating market, matchmaking became more popular, partly because it became normal to use a third party to find matches," says Lisa Clampitt, a New York City-based matchmaker and founder of the Matchmaking Institute, which provides guidelines and training for aspiring matchmakers. "From 99 and on, people were really excited and got sort of burnt out and wanted to have more privacy, more verification and screening process, and really sort of a personalized touch. And now it's super, super hot because of all the shows out."

Ronis herself dabbled in reality television, hosting a reality dating show titled "[Manhattan Matchmaker](#)" that aired in 2006 in Canada.

According to Clampitt, the industry has grown from roughly 1,200 matchmakers nationwide in 2006 to 1,800 today. Yet few of these professionals are willing to work with older women, says Clampitt, so Ronis has little competition in that market.

"The fact that she takes women is a big deal. Because really very few people do," she says. "A lot of matchmakers don't want to go into working with women, especially older woman because you get above 55 or so and it's like three single men to every ten single women. It just starts getting really really difficult."

Working with women clients makes sense for Ronis, who comes across in many ways as a "girl's girl." Impeccably groomed and decked out in designer clothing and sparkly jewelry, she keeps her handy iPad in a bubblegum pink case. A self-described lover of shopping and party planning, she talks with a girlish cadence. To Ronis, middle-aged clients are still "girls" and "boys" and her discussions are peppered with squeals of "oh my god" and "how cute!"

A lifelong New Yorker, Ronis spent more than a decade working in the fashion industry, working her way up to the role of vice president of design for fashion



Courtesy of Lisa Ronis

accessories at Liz Claiborne, the position she left to become a matchmaker. She is also a regular presence on the New York charity scene.

Former clients say that Ronis's success as a matchmaker comes from her great listening skills and social awareness as well as the massive social network that she has built over the years. She describes both her clients and the men and women she sets them up with as "high-end, ambitious, successful and interesting."

"It's like having this friend that keeps trying to set you up only that actually she knows a ridiculous number of people," says a former male client who worked with her shortly after moving to Manhattan. "She's kind of like the social chair of your college who knew everybody."

Ronis herself says that constant networking is a huge part of her business, joking that a friend recently called her the "mayor of the Upper East Side."

"I always love networking. It's all about networking and sharing," she says on a recent Tuesday afternoon, while meeting with 27-year-old Tierney Model, a real estate associate for Sotheby's and a potential match for one of Ronis's male clientele.

After questioning Model on everything from her height and pet preferences to the college she attended and her favorite places to travel, jotting it all down in a red leather notebook, Ronis pulled out her iPad to show Model a few men she already had in mind, including her nephew, a medical student.

While many matchmakers are notoriously harsh to potential female "inventory," Ronis has a kinder and gentler demeanor. "She's beautiful," Ronis says of Model to her assistant Emily, who had silently observed the meeting. "You absolutely will get scooped up right away," she says to Model.

And Ronis says she takes the same approach with both male and female clients and the men and women she sets them up with.

"In many cases, they're vulnerable," she says. "I want to make them feel good about working with me, not barking at them to lose 20 pounds."

Still, she isn't afraid to give tough love to clients. As part of the year-long process, Ronis provides image consulting and constant coaching and feedback to her clients, which she says helps them put their best self forward.

Unlike most businesses, Ronis says she believes she has found a career that is recession-proof. According to her, her business continued to thrive during the recession and grows roughly 10 percent each year.

"Every year, it gets better and better," she says. "People just don't want to be alone."

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