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The Hired Guns!

The savvy set behind Style For Hire aims to arm a band of personal stylists for the masses

| By Aimee Agresti | Photography by Dorothy Hong |

Every girl knows the ultimate accessory is an honest pal with a great eye. So when stay-at-home mom—and former fashion exec—Cindy McLaughlin decided to get back to work in 2008 and needed a new wardrobe, she called her most stylish confidante, Stacy London, co-host of TLC's *What Not to Wear*. It had been two years since McLaughlin left her job as CEO of fierce New York fashion label Abaeté to relocate to San Francisco for her Google staffer husband and to raise their two boys. Her closet had gone from chic to meek—think yoga pants and flip-flops. “I couldn’t make the psychological leap from being a mom covered in banana to being in an office,” laughs the now-Georgetown resident, clad in a sleek, navy Nanette Lepore dress. “With very little money, Stacy helped me find pieces that were professional and comfortable. It was transformational for me.”

Transformational and inspirational. More than just a new look, London gave her a whole new purpose. The chic pair had met six years ago while on a double date; they hit it off instantly. Style for Hire (*styleforhire.com*) was born more recently, when McLaughlin, 40, and London, 41, got together during those style sessions over a glass of wine. “I do lots of appearances around the country,” says London, “and the thing I hear most is, ‘How do I get someone like you to help me in a not-made-for-TV way?’” A light bulb went on. “We had an ‘a-ha’ moment on Cindy’s porch—she started the business plan that night,” London says of Style for Hire, launching in DC this month.

The co-founders have amassed a cadre of local stylists and put them through fashion boot camp, training them in everything from dressing different body types to handling sensitive customers. For an average of \$100 an hour, the sartorially challenged get a pro for a wardrobe overhaul and all the personal shopping and pep talks they need. “It’s a hurdle to leap outside your norm,” says McLaughlin. “A good stylist is also part therapist.”

Some might say Washington, with its age-old rep for frumpiness and crimes of fashion, is just the place to debut such a service. But it was more serendipity than strategy that brought McLaughlin here: The family moved east last spring when hubby Andrew became deputy chief technology officer for the White House. Since then, Cindy has begun to see glimmers of the Michelle Obama effect across the city. “Women here care very much about being credible in their jobs and I suspect they think wardrobe detracts from

that,” says the Massachusetts-native, who grew up on a tree farm. “But the first lady has set a new bar—now, you can be incredibly smart and incredibly stylish.” Indeed, months before launching, they already had hundreds of inquiries from prospective customers. They’ll soon go national, opening new markets in New York, L.A., Chicago, Houston and Miami.

While starting a business can be as treacherous as breaking in a pair of stilettos, it helps that these two gal pals are a fine fit. “Stacy’s a very astute business woman,” McLaughlin says. “It’s a wonderful partnership because I don’t love the spotlight, so I can be hunched over my laptop and she can be out representing us.” London agrees. “Cindy thinks big and makes it happen. We’re aligned in our vision, but our strengths are in different arenas so we’re a weirdly powerful team.”

That supportive spirit is at the heart of the company. “My hope is that we help change the conversation in America about body, present our customers at their best no matter their shape,” says McLaughlin. “It’s not about hemlines—it’s about self-esteem.” Such confidence is always in vogue. ■



WHO, WHAT, WEAR!

From left: Stacy London, star of *What Not to Wear*, teamed up with DC's Cindy McLaughlin to launch a style-on-demand service that helps women sharpen their sartorial edge.