

DEPARTURES

OCTOBER 2002



To be in it is merely a bore," remarked Oscar Wilde of that thing called society, "but to be out of it simply a tragedy." So awfully British—and frankly, very American as well—is the need to be part of that inner circle with access to everything and everybody. No need to worry. These days, what personal assistant or BlackBerry can't solve, the bright young talent on these pages can. Sophisticated, aggressive, and armed with clout and contacts, they—and the agencies they head up—are part of an elite new British service class for the post-Jeeves generation. Meet The Insiders.

CONCIERGE LONDON

"When I was a child, I loved sitting with the housekeeping staff during their mid-morning break," says LADY COSIMA SOMERSET, half of the posh blonde duo that heads up Concierge London, a high-end troubleshooting service she founded with NINA NORMAN in 1999. "I would take tea and biscuits with them, enthralled by how methodically they went through the house." Not that Somerset is completely at ease playing Jeeves. "I don't like being treated like a member of staff," she says. That's one reason that their roster of clients will be capped at 200; the other is that Somerset prefers direct relationships. Besides, many of the requests that she and Norman get need to be kept very discreet. "How can you even think about matching the right colorist with the right person if you don't really know the person?" she jokes. After all, Concierge London does everything from the mundane to the extraordinary. That can mean helping American families find the

right school for their children (starting with the differences between Harrow and Eton) to furnishing an entire apartment within a six-week deadline.

Though both women are immaculately turned out and have a keen eye for shopping (honed, no doubt, by years of walking Bond Street for their own pleasure), this is not a company of "It girls" for wannabe socialites. Says Somerset: "If a client wants us just for booking a table at The Ivy, we're not interested. We're interested in long-term relationships. We know everything about our clients' lives." Says Norman: "They have our mobile numbers; we have theirs. It's almost like being a therapist."

Concierge London (44-20-7849-3855; www.concierge-london.co.uk). Approximately \$775 for an annual frequent visitor's membership, plus \$37 per hour.

EARTH

GLEN DONOVAN, a 36-year-old Welshman, recently flew from London just to make sure that the villa on Ibiza was absolutely perfect. Unfortunately it wasn't: Half a mile down the road there was a small ruin that would have been a perfect hideout for paparazzi trying to catch his client in her bikini. That's the sort of attention to detail that sets Donovan and his high-end travel agency, Earth, apart.

Right now, Donovan has fewer than 100 clients, served by a small staff. "Alice does the lords and ladies. Dennis does the petroleum wives. And I," he says, slightly tongue in cheek, "do the pop stars and the actors." But anyone in need—with means—is welcome, despite the fact that Earth's telephone number is unlisted (prospective members can approach the company by sending an e-mail).

Twenty-five percent of Earth's clients, he says, are American, including quite a few who live in London. Donovan says that he ignores conventional takes on the modern luxury market, eschewing, as he puts it, "what the brochure photographer saw." The ultra-expensive is not his sole business (though one recent trip did come in at \$250,000), but he does look for the rare, the unexpected, and the exotic. The chic little beach house in St. Tropez or über-luxurious riad in Marrakesh is far preferable to the larger, gold-taps-in-the-bathroom type of hotel. "To me," says Donovan, "luxury is about having one-of-a-kind experiences that come only with insider knowledge."

Contact Donovan by e-mail through Earth's Web site, www.earthlondon.com. No membership fee.

QUINTESSENTIALLY

BEN ELLIOT, cofounder of the concierge service Quintessentially, has racked up a heady count of glitterati in the past eight hours. Last night it was Brit belle Annabel Goldsmith's party. It's 10 a.m. now, and he has already breakfasted with Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith. This social maelstrom is as much a part of Elliot—a hip Savile Row, old Etonian type—as it is of the company he has created with former film producer AARON SIMPSON and the eternally tanned LUCA DEL BONO, from a family of Italian hoteliers (which is presumably where his impulse for service originates).

Quintessentially will help with last-minute hotel or hard-to-get restaurant reservations, find tickets for sellout events like the Chelsea Flower Show, and make the "right" recommendations on where to go and what to do. (To our way of thinking, it's the hippest London service of its type). Other pluses include a weekly newsletter-cum-e-mail of-

ten written by Tom Parker Bowles (son of Camilla, with contributions from some of the most plugged-in journalists in London). There's everything from the scoop on London's nocturnal haunts and invitations to opening-night parties and book signings to front-row seats during London Fashion Week. "A bigwig in New York may not necessarily be a bigwig in London," says Simpson. "We get them the access they need." *By membership only; 800-850-8002; www.quintessentially.com. Approximately \$775 per year.*

OUTER SANCTUM

JAMIE WOOD is reeling off the pop stars for whom he once carried cases, built stages, and furnished dressing rooms. But that was then and this is now. These days, the 29-year-old son of the Rolling Stones' Ron Wood is one of London's premier party planners. With partner DONNA WORLING he launched the London-based Outer Sanctum after organizing his father's 50th birthday party. It was a cowboys-and-Indians fete complete with backyard barbecue staged in the rock star's London garden.

When model Kate Moss wants a dinner soirée, she calls Wood, as does Sony Play-Station, which hired him to do a party for 5,000. Deutsche Bank recently booked him for one of its biggest conferences of the year next spring in Miami. "They like us because we give a business conference that rock-'n'-roll element," says Wood, who used Van Morrison not too long ago to heat up festivities at an annual banker's symposium in Spain. "It's all about creating an environment. It's about not being boring."

Outer Sanctum (44-20-7928-1270; www.outersanctum.net) will arrange events accommodating anywhere from 20 to 20,000 people. Prices available upon request.



SHOES BY GIEVES AND HAWKES. ON JAMIE: SUIT BY TOM FORD FOR GUCCI. SHIRT BY PRADA. ON NINA: SWEATER AND SKIRT BY TEMPERLEY SHOES BY PAUL SMITH. ON COSIMA: DRESS BY DIANE VON FURSTENBERG. SHOES BY GINA. ON DONNA: TOP BY CHLOE. BELT BY JAM DAVIDSON. SHOES BY CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN. ALL JEWELRY BY EC ONE.

MISSIONS: NO LONGER IMPOSSIBLE

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR TOUGHEST REQUEST TO DATE?

"At 4:30 p.m. on a Friday, Madonna requested 'Throat Coat,' an herbal tea bag. It's very rare in England. We sourced it within an hour, from a Chinese woman in Kilburn, in northwest London—and delivered it to her door. I took it to her personally on my Vespa."

—Luca Del Bono, Quintessentially

PREFERRED ROUTE FROM LONDON TO L.A.?

"In seat number 1A or 1K on British Airways First."

—Glen Donovan, Earth

HOW WOULD YOU HELP GET MY SON INTO ETON?

"First we'd get him the proper tutoring so he would be able to pass the exam. Then we'd book you at the villa right next door to Eton's bursar when we knew that he would be vacationing on the French Riviera."

—Nina Norman, Concierge London

I'VE MISSED MY FLIGHT TO MYKONOS BUT HAVE TO GET TO VALENTINO'S BOAT THIS EVENING. CAN YOU HELP ME?

"I'd get them a membership to the Marquis Jet club, which supplies planes on a very short notice. You can normally have one within four hours."

—Glen Donovan, Earth

WHO SHOULD PERFORM AT MY DAUGHTER'S SWEET 16?

"Robbie Williams. He's a Brit, and a phone call away."

—Donna Worling, Outer Sanctum

THE BEST PRIVATE VILLA IN EUROPE FOR NEXT SUMMER?

"Casa Isabella on Ibiza is one of few places where it's a privilege to part with the \$30,000-a-week fee. It has wonderful, wild gardens, a fabulous terrace overlooking fields of lavender, original Warhols hanging in the hallway, and the pool, quite frankly, even beats an Aman resort."

—Glen Donovan, Earth

WHAT'S THE BEST POSSIBLE LOCATION YOU CAN SECURE FOR MY WEDDING IN ENGLAND?

"Burgh Island. This is an eccentric Art Deco-style house on a lovely private island off the coast of Devon—the kind of place you'd expect to find in an Agatha Christie novel."

—Donna Worling, Outer Sanctum

I WANT TO DO ASCOT BUT DON'T HAVE A HAT.

"Get yourself to Pip Hackett, in London. She's something of an up-and-coming name. Her designs are refreshingly different from all the feathers that have recently been the thing for Ladies' Day. And if you've left it until really late, Pip can turn around a hand-made masterpiece within 48 hours."

—Nina Norman, Concierge London

WHO CAN GET ME A ROYAL CELL PHONE NUMBER?

No guarantees here but . . . Quintessentially's cofounder, Ben Elliot, is the nephew of Camilla Parker Bowles, who is the girlfriend of Charles, who is the future king of England.