



Debbie O'Hearn launched her business, Debbie O'Hearn Personal Styling, in 2010 to help customers with personal shopping and styling.

In Transition: From Retail to Closets

Debbie O'Hearn's long career in the fashion industry leads to a business editing clients' wardrobes

BACK WEB ONLY FEB 20, 2020 By Bethany Crouch

A passion for styling her childhood dolls, and later her friends, paved the way for **Debbie O'Hearn's** decades-long career in the fashion industry. Today, this former fashion buyer for Weinstock's department stores in Sacramento has repurposed her sense of style for use in a more intimate way: one-on-one inside closets. Ranging in age from 18 to 89, O'Hearn's clientele includes women of all career paths and lifestyles. "I help them breathe new life into their wardrobes," she says; and in doing so, she elevates their personal style and self-esteem.

"My soul is completely full when a client texts me and says that I have changed their life, they feel better about themselves, they received a compliment from a co-worker or a friend or their spouse," she says.

O'Hearn creates a personal lookbook for her clients. She recalls a client she styled in Napa, creating some 60 outfits from items within the woman's closet. "We identified gaps in her wardrobe and made a list for her with the pieces needed," she says. O'Hearn photographed every styled outfit. Six months later, the client's home was destroyed by the Tubbs Fire. "She lost everything," O'Hearn had saved the pictures of the clothing, accessories and jewelry in the client's closet. "I thought, in the very least, these pictures from our style session could help with replacing her wardrobe and help with insurance claiming. She was beyond appreciative."

Through her business, Debbie O'Hearn Personal Styling, O'Hearn offers style consulting, personal shopping and other fashion-related services to clients in Northern California and Los Angeles, tailoring her offerings to each client's needs and budget. O'Hearn says her clothes-buying days and knowledge learned while working for big-name fashion brands helped her transition into her current role as an entrepreneur who strives to help people look and feel their best.

Start in Fashion Came Early

A Kansas City native, O'Hearn tapped into the fun side of fashion early on. "My parents were married in 1952 in New York on the 'Bride and Groom' (TV) show," she says. "I was fascinated that mom's dress was borrowed and had to be safety pinned everywhere and that my dad's tux was four inches too short on him." As a child, she learned how to sew from her mother.



Debbie O'Hearn frequents shops selling vintage and resale clothes to find items for her customers.

In seventh grade, O'Hearn started sewing wild-printed palazzo pants for friends. "Remember, we are talking '70s, baby," she says. "The joy my friends felt when they wore those pants is forever imprinted in my mind." While in high school, she worked in the junior clothing department of a Kansas City department store. "My mentor was my manager. She even lent us her convertible for me to sit in for our homecoming parade around my high school's neighborhood," O'Hearn says. "She was a pretty cool, classy lady and dresser." Earning best-dressed accolades during her senior year convinced O'Hearn to follow her fashion dreams.

In 1983, O'Hearn earned her bachelor's in fashion merchandising from the University of Arizona. She started her career at the May Company in Los Angeles and later moved to Sacramento to work at Weinstock's. "My (former) offices are now where the new Golden 1 Center sits," she says. "I was buying millions of dollars of clothing where our Sacramento Kings now play. So surreal."

While her professional life embodied everything she hoped for, O'Hearn says it was taxing. In her mid-20s, she was working 60 hours a week and flying multiple times a year to New York. "I got paid to shop for my blouse and knitwear departments," she says. "I loved learning how the retail world worked, how being a buyer versus a manufacturer worked, learning how important the quality and workmanship of fabrics and materials are to the end product."

In 1990, Christian Dior Cosmetics hired O'Hearn to be its account executive for Northern California department stores. "This was especially sweet," she says, "because I was calling on the (Weinstock's) stores and I knew most of the managers." Having those established relationships proved instrumental in selling cosmetics and fragrance, and O'Hearn says she quickly grew the business, which led Lancôme to recruit her in 1991. The following year, while pregnant with her first child, O'Hearn says she was recognized as the company's account executive of the year. "I flew to Lancôme's sales meeting and met our model and actress Isabella Rossellini," she says. "We danced all night. I still have the picture of that night."



Debbie O'Hearn, left, with an executive from Lancôme and the actress Isabella Rossellini at a Lancôme sales meeting in 1992.

During the first stage of her fashion career, O'Hearn says she learned how to treat people professionally and with respect: "Everyone was important. From the company reps in New York, to my management back in Sacramento, to my assistants who worked so hard to help the office while I traveled, to my warehouse crew." She says the skills she developed during that time influence the work she does now as a personal stylist.

Growing Family Brings About Change

As a new mother, O'Hearn's intense travel demands weighed heavily. "I tried to do it all; I tried to be a superwoman, but it broke my heart to be away from my daughter," O'Hearn says. She decided to leave her career in 1995, when her first-born was 2 years old. Within five years, she had two more children.

In transitioning out of the workforce, O'Hearn was determined to hold onto her personal style even as she had to let go of everything else that came with the fashion career: "the expense account, a free car, travel perks, bonuses, and of course an income. I just had to be creative on how to continue looking and feeling my best on a budget." O'Hearn started shopping for vintage and resale clothes, and she realized there were a lot of women "struggling to find how to put outfits together for work and everyday life. So many clients say they are overwhelmed with their closet and are stressed with choosing outfits for the day."

"It wasn't long until I found myself editing a friend's closet, styling her from her own wardrobe, telling her what she needed to buy and what fabrics would suit her best," she says. A couple years prior to fully launching her own business in 2010, O'Hearn did a speaking engagement focused on top trends and how to dress for success at Madam Butterfly Boutique in Sacramento. A woman in the audience hired her on the spot, and they have worked together for more than a decade. "Then came referral after referral," says O'Hearn. In 2016, Sacramento's FOX40 hired her to help guide on-air talent for TV appearances and later tapped O'Hearn for its bi-weekly **Studio40Live fashion updates**.

Nita Vail, a longtime client, describes O'Hearn as an artist who blends taste with trends. "The first time I met Debbie many years ago, I knew we would be friends for life," says Vail, who serves as CEO for California Rangeland Trust, a nonprofit organization based in Sacramento. "I was coming out of a political appointment and (had) a closet full of suits. Debbie transformed mine into a practical wardrobe that continues today, my style consisting mostly of skinny jeans and tall cowgirl boots mixed with an occasional black-tie dress and fur coat."

O'Hearn's career is still transitioning as she continues to expand her services to fit client needs. "I'm now curating intimate travel excursions to Paris, New York City, Los Angeles and soon, Seattle. It's about finding unique, one-of-a-kind pieces that my clients will have forever." She says it's not the cost of an outfit that determines good personal style; it's about how the outfit makes a client feel about themselves. "Just making it a habit to dress a little nicer for date night or going out with friends will change the way you feel inside and out," she says. "Trust me on this."

COMMENTS

Jean Gubar (not verified) - 14 days ago REPLY
Way to go Deb! You were a trend setter back in Jr high and high school and you never left your passion! Well done!

POST NEW COMMENT

Your name: *

E-mail: *

Comment: *

Please type the numbers into the box below: *
4564 »

By proving you are not a machine, you help us prevent spam and keep the site secure.

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

Main Street: Family of Gems
Kevin Schimke Jewelers, a fixture on Stockton's Miracle Mile for 40 years, will continue for at least another generation
Kevin Schimke Jewelers is one of 171 businesses in Stockton's Miracle Mile Improvement District.
DEC 3, 2019 Tom Cousins

Getting to Know: Gabriel Diaz
How this Sacramento-based 'creative stylist' helps others elevate their lifestyles
Gabriel Diaz expects the quizzical expression that sometimes washes over people's faces once he tells them what he does for a living. He's a style and wellness influencer, or "creative stylist," as he prefers to be called.
AUG 23, 2019 Vanessa Loh

Styles to Strut
Fashion designer Richard Hallmarq
It's been an extraordinary couple of years for Richard Hallmarq, the 41-year-old Sacramento native who last year made his fashion debut on national television and is now gearing up for New York Fashion Week from his design studio inside the Sacramento Art Complex on K Street.
DEC 1, 2013 Kibbahe Araya

From Landscape Architect to Fashion Designer
How one Sacramento woman discarded the career advice of others to become her own boss
Amal Iqbal has years of experience with struggling to understand how work plays into her identity as a Muslim-American woman, and challenging cultural expectations when necessary. This experience informed her decision to launch her own business that incorporates fashion, interior and graphic design into one shop.
AUG 21, 2017 Jennifer Neuman

Copyright © 2020 Comstock Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited.
TERMS OF USE & PRIVACY POLICY | CONTACT US | ADVERTISE

Comstock Publishing Inc.
2335 American River Drive, Ste 301
Sacramento, CA 95825
info@comstockmag.com
(916) 364-1000

About
Subscribe
Issue Archive
Newsletter
Advertise
Contact Us

All the Hits
How-To
State of the Sector
Out of Office
Events
Special Sections
Cap Cares

Get Social
f t in