

You can get the staff

Blue-chip wives are employing a new breed of top-flight domestic secretary, says **Caroline Phillips**



INSIDER KNOWLEDGE

BUY:TIME'S BLACK BOOK

Cleaners: Municipal Corporation, 105 Tooting Bec Road, SW17 (020 7720 0048).

Nannies: Platinum Maternity, 65 Thurleigh Road, SW12 (020 8673 5771; www.platinumnannieservices.co.uk).

Handyman: John Emery (0777 978 8038; email: john.e@lineone.net).

Personal stylist: Anna Braithwaite (0797 386 1042; email: annabraithwaite@btopenworld.com).

Personal trainer: Gym and Tonic, 73 Norfolk House Road, SW16 (0780 285 3293; www.gymandtonic.net).

Finance, tax and accounting: Francis Lee & Co, 62 Ainsdale Road, W5 (020 7381 0586; email: francislee@lineone.net).

Property maintenance: Aspect Maintenance Services, Unit 20, Battersea Business Centre, 99/101 Lavender Hill, SW1 (0800 316 5700; www.allaspectsltd.co.uk).

Specialist IT and computer services: J Woodward IT Services, Ashgar, Hawthorn Lane, Farnham Common, Bucks (07736 074731; www.geocities.com/jwoodward_itservices).

Carpenter/furniture maker: Paul McNaney Furniture, 1A Atheldene Road, SW18 (020 8874 0157).

THE FIXERS

A STRANGER whizzes around to my house with my shopping on her moped, opens my post, does my personal filing, conjures up upholstery cleaners to remove an impossible stain then books a life-saving operation for Ted through a teddy-restoration company. This human whirlwind of efficiency is a lifestyle manager: a personal assistant for your home life.

The rich once again want someone to run their large homes and private lives in the style of a domestic secretary. It was with this in mind that Claire Brynteson (a former Goldman Sachs banker) set up buy:time in 2002. Now she has eight lifestyle managers, working from Battersea to Islington and in second homes outside London.

Buy:time charges £35 an hour (which includes phone bills, congestion charges and parking) or less if you bulk book. Travel costs are capped at half an hour each way and there is no membership fee. Jobs vary from a one-off, such as finding the perfect party venue, to providing a full-time assistant. The company has a database of preferred suppliers and tradesmen or works from client referrals.

A lifestyle manager will handle your staff and diary, return your videos, organise your tax returns and liaise with schools. She'll purchase your artwork, find you a holiday, deal with tenants or hire a chauffeur to take you to your country home when you're too tired to drive. Is there anything they won't do? "Nothing as long as it's legal and moral," says Claire. They can spring into action with as little as an hour's notice.

"One client wanted a wardrobe clear-out, told me to chuck anything that was unfashionable and then left for work," laughs lifestyle manager Sophie Appleton. Another asked her to be a witness at his wedding.

Buy:time's domestic angels all come from blue-chip backgrounds. After gleaning budget information and gauging the time required to meet the client's objectives, they will establish when they have permission to make judgment calls. Progress is discussed in weekly conference calls.

Sophie has 24 clients. American Catherine Southwell is one. "I was pregnant, working 50-hour weeks,



Under control: a lifestyle manager discusses the day's work with the nanny and housekeeper

hadn't finished my house and had just been ripped off by a roofer," she explains. "That's when I employed Sophie. She saved me from working until 2am to get everything done."

What was Sophie's worst assignment? "I had to get a client's flat finished on a particular day," she says, blanching. "The carpet fitters walked

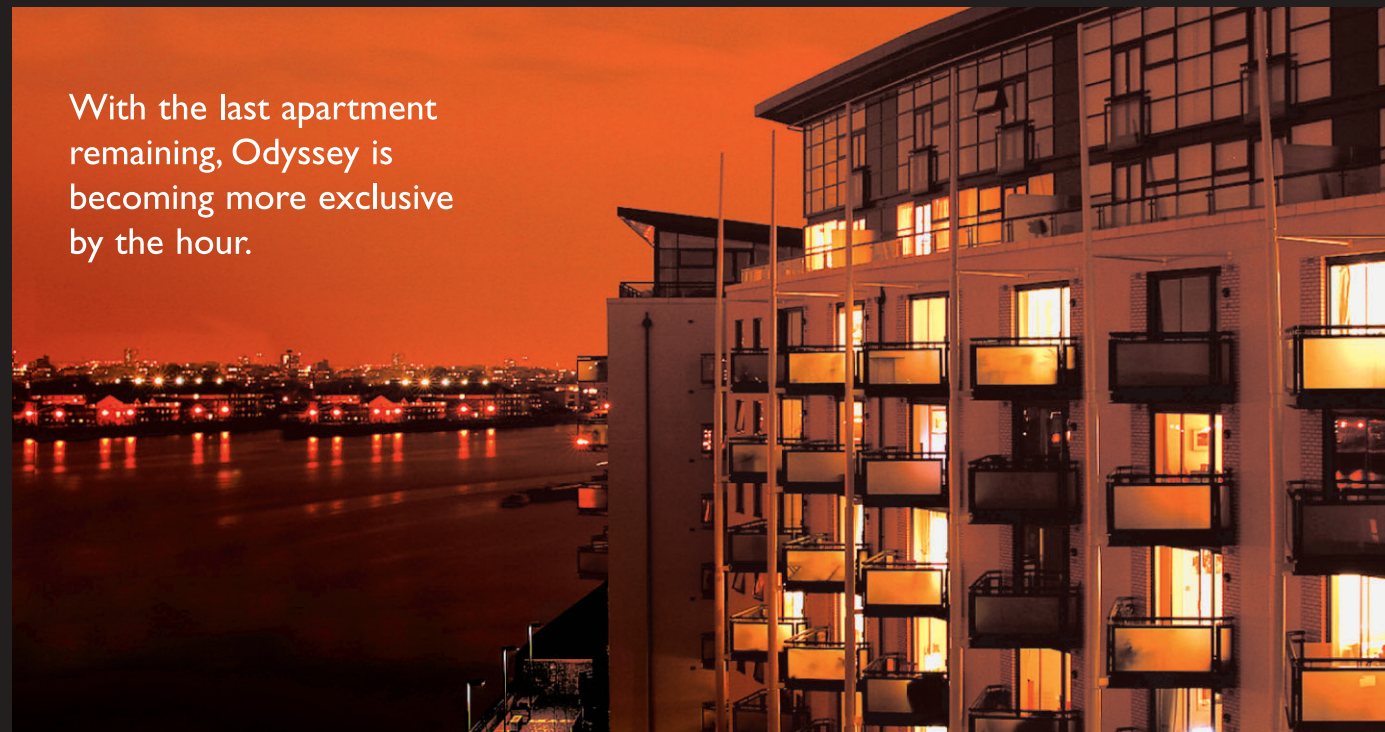
out, the cleaners had a fight with the other tradesmen and the builders took the client's key. It was horrific, but I got it all sorted."

Who wouldn't welcome handing over a project like that?

buy:time: 70 Dinsmore Road, SW12 (0870 486 2624; www.buy-time.co.uk).

'A lifestyle manager saved me from having to work until 2am to get everything done'

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