



Bright young thing

Once she was the woman in black. Now Sarah Hatfield has lightened up to become a personal colour image consultant. **Vivienne Rudcenko** meets the Esher lady putting colour in Surrey cheeks

As with all her clients, she starts by explaining that individual colourings fall into one of four categories, labelled as seasons. Spring and autumn people suit warm colours, while summers and winters suit cold. In addition, spring and winter folk need bright colours, while summers and autumns require more muted tones.

To discern my category, Sarah sits me down in front of a mirror and drapes me in a white dentist's cape, so as to create a blank canvas. What we are looking for is the effect of each colour on my skin tone, as well as on my lips and teeth and the whites of my eyes. A bad colour might make my skin look pale or grey and my teeth yellow, while a good one should make my skin glow and the whites of my eyes shine bright.

Next, Sarah places scarves beside my face, starting with dark neutrals (blacks and browns) and then proceeding to light neutrals (bright white, ivory and so on). Then she begins to incorporate real colours – blue, green, purple, red. She starts with a cool and a warm version of each, and then – as my membership of the warm club becomes clear – compares bright with muted warm colours.

In the end, I emerge as a fully-fledged spring, bright and warm, suited to colours that are vivid, youthful and clear. The fact that my birthday falls on the first day of spring, Sarah assures me, is more poetic metaphor than relevant biological fact.

At the end of the session I receive a colour wallet containing samples of all the colours from which I should build my wardrobe, plus a booklet. Like the notes of a musical scale, all the colours in the wallet can be harmonised. By gradually ridding my wardrobe of alien shades, and replacing them with friendlier hues, I should ultimately assemble a collection in which everything will mix and match.

Sarah supplies locally sourced jewellery, clothing and lipsticks too, all catering to specific seasonal colourings. And, if her own reinvention is anything to go by, the process as a whole clearly works.

"My friends say how different I look," she enthuses. "They think I must spend so much on clothes, but I don't! I buy about three things each season, just by looking through my wardrobe and seeing what I need. I'm very keen on sensible buying."

It's Saturday night and you've spent the afternoon in a self-indulgent frenzy, painstakingly working through a beauty regime of exfoliators, moisturisers and masks. Tonight you're going to feel like a million dollars. O so you hope.

When it comes to it, however, you feel more like a counterfeit fiver and your self-confidence is deep in recession. Looking good, it seems, takes more than an effort of the will.

But might there be a simple solution? Could it all be a question of tone? Esher based colour consultant Sarah Hatfield certainly thinks so – and she has the personal experience to prove it.

"Five years ago I was working as a PA for Harrods," she explains over a cup of impeccably beige Earl Grey. "I used to wear a black suit to work every day, thinking that was just what one did in a corporate environment. Yet it never seemed right. Then I met a lady at a hen weekend who looked amazing in everything, and she said that it was all down to having her colours done."

So Sarah arranged a consultation for herself. It was like the break of dawn. With her natural tones, she learned, she should avoid wearing black like the plague.

"For all those years I'd worn that suit and thought I was anaemic! I'd look in the mirror in the toilets at work, and there would be this pale lady with big bags under her eyes. I'd be putting bronzer on constantly. I just couldn't work out why I looked like that!"

So dramatic was Sarah's epiphany that she decided to retrain and set up *Inspired By Colour*, the personal colour image consultancy that she's been running for the past year from her home. And here, today, was her latest challenge: *moi*.



Photos by Alex Norman



Spring chicken: Vivienne Rudcenko

"People think getting something from Primark is cheap, but if you have to buy a whole new outfit to go with it, it isn't that cheap at all. Short-lived fashion fads are fine if that's you, but my personality suits more classic, longer-lasting looks."

Many of Sarah's clients, she says, are women over 50, whose children have flown the nest and who now have the leisure to indulge in a little 'me' time.

"I love building relationships with them. I'll pop over to keep them stocked up on lipsticks, or they'll call me for impromptu colour advice on a top they've spotted in M & S. Seeing them come out of the shells into which so many of them have crept, that's genuine job satisfaction."

■ To book a personal colour image consultation (£90 for 90 mins) call: 07970 938635. Gift vouchers available. For reader offer: p39. Visit: www.inspiredbycolour.com