

From Opening Curtain to Encore Performance

BY LAURIE CHESBROUGH

Most of us have heard the famous show business quote, “The show must go on.”

My dear friend Lelee, long-time resident of Alexandria, understands those words all too well. This past year she lost a remarkable 100 pounds and sadly experienced the unfathomable loss of a child. While life will never be the same, she is determined to live her life (her show) as fully as she’s able, appreciating all experiences that come her way. I couldn’t think of anyone that deserved a complete makeover more than Lelee. I approached her with the idea and without hesitation she accepted with an enthusiastic, “I trust you, I’m all yours!”

As a personal stylist, I’m passionate about helping women and men re-invent themselves from the inside out...to show them how to maximize their attributes and minimize their deficits while rethinking self-defeating, unrealistic standards of beauty. It’s not about changing your clothes -- it’s about changing your life.

Change isn’t easy and it can be overwhelming, especially if old, self-defeating thoughts try to weasel their way back into our minds, particularly when we’re feeling vulnerable. Everyone is different, but when someone is ready for a style revival I encourage them to bust out of the gate. Lelee did just that. She was open to the experience and trusted the process, but it can be challenging when you’ve been working hard to stay behind the scenes. As Lelee points out, “When you’re overweight you become invisible.” Staying invisible is no way to take center stage in your life.

Lelee loves the arts and feels energized and alive while at the theater, so I determined that dressing her for an upcoming show at her favorite venue, The Arena Stage, would be the perfect setting for her return as leading lady in her own production of life. But getting from opening curtain to encore requires well-written scenes and a bit of choreography, so here’s how we set the stage for Lelee.

Lelee had one specific request for her new wardrobe, “I just want to wear a nice pair of jeans.” Theater dressing is more relaxed these days, so finding the perfect pair would also provide us the anchor piece for her night out. After measuring Lelee’s rise and true inseam, we dealt with fabric content – a “deal breaker” detail in terms of jean fit. Unfortunately, the only way to find the best fabric combination for your figure is through trial & error. So Lelee tried on every hot brand of denim offered at Nordstrom without much success. The jeans looked okay, but not great.

Through my prior life in the fashion industry and sourcing materials, I know that fabric manufacturers sell the same denim to a wide variety of labels and retailers from mid-tier to designer. What this means is that a higher priced jean doesn’t necessarily mean a better jean, so off to Target we went. Why Target? They offer a variety of denim styles and lengths that accommodate a wide range of shapes. As soon as Lelee tried on the Mossimo boot cut jeans, you could hear from the dressing room, “These are the ones, I can’t believe it...you’re kidding me, \$27.00!” The combination of correct rise, silhouette, and the 99% cotton / 1% spandex fabric content makes these jeans look like she paid a fortune.

I wanted Lelee’s look to be up-to-minute, modern, and comfortable, while being mindful of the fact that she was in uncharted style waters and that she is 50-ish. I chose a draped-front moto jacket by Trouve in a sumptuous, saddle-brown lambskin that showcases the waist (Nordstrom, \$298.00). Two features make this jacket stand apart from others; the raw edge lapel and clever knit insets along the full length of the arm that provide Lelee the ease of movement she requires. Underneath the jacket is a feminine, hi-low pocket blouse by Trouve in rose memoir (Nordstrom, \$78.00). Initially, Lelee was resistant to the idea of anything



What a difference. Lelee above before (left) and after.

bi-level; “I’ve spent so many years covering up.” Once she saw how flattering the polyester blouse skimmed the derriere, she was sold. The look was rounded out with a beautiful camel colored suede bootie by Audrey Brooke (DSW, \$49.94). The 3 ½ inch stiletto was a bit formidable for Lelee, but admitted that she loved the height. When it comes to accessories, there is strength in simplicity. The long linear drop earrings, moderately priced at Target, are both fashion-forward and tasteful as they quietly elevate her long, elegant neck and pull the entire look together. The look wouldn’t have been the same without them.

As Lelee stepped off of the stage of her makeover shoot, she said “This was such a gift, but now that it’s over I’m ready for it to begin again”... and then I knew that every day for Lelee would be an encore performance.

If you want a makeover, please write to Laurie Chesbrough at the **Zebra**, laurie@thezebra.org

