

No Business Knitting!

by Genevieve Chornenki

“NO KNITS!!!!”

Why is the image consultant yelling at me? We’ve only just met.

I’d never hired such an expert before, but when my 7-year-old head shot become fictitious, I decided to update my photo. Hell, why not redo my entire website? I’d recently earned a certificate in editing and publishing from Ryerson University, and the exercise would force me to redefine myself professionally. Do I present as an editor, a mediator, or knit the two together?

“Whatever you decide,” said Annika, a fetching young author whose book manuscript I’d edited, “pay someone to do your makeup and hair. It’ll be money well spent.” I trusted Annika and wanted to look as approachable as she did on her website.

And so, I hired Annika’s consultant Dax, short for Daciana. Dax streaks her hair green, paints her lips red, and wears sneakers.

Dax’s mandate was to provide an up-to-date look for professional photographs, and the first step in her process was a one-hour Skype session to scrutinize my wardrobe.

“I’m going to be pushing you,” Dax warned.

“Bring it on,” I replied.

I anticipated Dax outfitting me in a business suit—jacket and trousers—but I also imagined a few shots in garments that I had knitted. I’ve always had a domestic side; I knit, make my own yogurt, grow vegetables in a city garden plot, and keep an orderly household. And as a sixty-something woman I was tired of being guarded or apologetic about those pleasures. Case in point: when Dax told me to create a list of five words that described me personally and five that described me professionally, I said, “Forget two lists. There’s only one.”

So, I fancied this liberated persona being photographed in the tunic that I improvised from Japanese yarn with its surprising colour transitions, or the cabled jacket of North Ronaldsay wool from the coats of seaweed-eating sheep, or the Donegal Tweed knit skirt that marries so well with my leather jackets. And what about the sweater knit side-to-side from Manos del Uruguay yarn, with its faced neckline and Elizabeth Zimmerman after-thought pockets? The one a business colleague asked me to replicate for her.

Nope.

In preparation for the first session, I draped my outfits—including a few hand-knits—on my dress form (yes, I sew too) and emailed Dax the photos. Her response was immediate. “NO KNITS!!!!”

“What’s with the no knits?” I ask as we meet up on Skype the next day.

“Because,” says Dax, “when women get older they start to get ‘craftsy.’ And then they start to wear flowy garments that they think make them look good, but they don’t.”

“Craftsy.” Dax thinks that’s an adjective instead of a website for makers. Chances are she doesn’t know about Ravelry either with its 7 million members worldwide, most of them young. Would Dax be more open minded if I showed her the \$1,300 price tag on a Josh Bennett hand-knit, limited-edition sweater or—let’s do Europe—the \$9,775 cost of a Brunello Cucinelli cardigan?

Ah, well. When you hire a dog, you don’t do your own barking.

“Got any scarves?” Dax asks.

Sure. I hold one up to the webcam.

“Ugh. Too close to your skin tone.”

I show another.

“Still too close.”

I try a few more.

“Don’t you have anything with colour in it?”

Next, Dax trashes my shoes. The first pair—Valleverde, handmade in Italy.

“No. No. No!”

I offer others.

“Yuk. Those last ones, throw those out.”

Then she asks, “Do you really have to wear glasses?”

“Afraid so.”

Dax scrutinizes my face. “Humph.”

I change glasses.

“Oh God! Throw those out.”

Then a third pair, my favourites, round and in a perfect shade of green.

“No,” Dax says. “They make your eyes look beady, and people won’t trust you.”

The day of the photo shoot—I’m determined to carry on—Dax supervises the makeup artist. She monitors my outfits and makes sure the cuffs are turned up and out, just so. She pulls one side of my shirt out and leaves the other tucked in. She laces my shoes as she thinks they need to be laced, even though my feet aren’t likely to be photographed.

Part way through the shoot, I’m in a grey jacket that Dax selected on our shopping trip.

“Hmm,” she says. “This jacket needs a pin.”

“Check the ledge upstairs,” I say.

I’d set out two brooches: knitted flowers that took hours to make. One pale pink with a beaded centre, moss green leaves, hunter green tendrils. The other knit in blue-based reds. If I couldn’t wear a knit garment or a cowl of baby alpaca yarn, perhaps a little knit accessory?

Dax holds my pins against the jacket, one at a time and grimaces. “Too crafty.” Then she opens a carrying case and pulls out a small free-form ribbon rosette. “We’ll use this.”

“Tell me again,” I say. “What’s the issue with knits?”

“They don’t photograph well,” Dax says. “But I dunno. Maybe it’s just a prejudice I have from living on the west coast and watching old women get crafty.”

Now we’re getting close.

After the photo shoot, I send my pics to Annika who generously offers to create my new website. “Wowza!” she says. “You look great.”

So does the emerging website. But something’s missing. Not a hand-knit in sight. I feel sad.

I leaf through the latest issue of *Vogue Knitting Magazine*, consoling myself with its featured knits. And I wonder: Did I defer too readily to Dax? Or is she right that I’m a frowsy has-been with no sense of style?

Then a book review in the magazine catches my eye. *Craeft: How Traditional Crafts Are About More Than Just Making*. Hey! Why not add a knitting page to my website, and why not call it “Craeft,” the Old English word that archeologist Alexander Langlands explores in the book?

I compile amateur photos of my knitted garments and work up draft text that I email to Annika. She’ll understand; she’s a knitter, too. And her site has a page for her paintings even though she’s no professional artist.

“Hey, Gen,” Annika replies. “Your site has such a professional vibe. Not sure you want to dilute that with knitting.”

So, a knitting woman is both crafty *and* unprofessional? No matter that Margrethe Vestager, the European Commissioner for Competition, knits. The hand-crafted toy elephants she’s known for don’t stop her from taking on Apple or accusing Google of anti-trust violations.

A few days after Annika’s deflating note, the *New York Times Style* magazine arrives. Four pages in, a Gucci model with a fringed knit cap poses in a room full of wigs. She wears a pin-striped suit. And on her lapels? Can’t be. Not one, but two, knitted flowers, studded with pearls. I study the page. Again and again. Are they flowers or lion heads? Hard to tell. But, still.

I leaf ahead. Three pages in, Calvin Klein models wear balaclavas knit from variegated yarn at a gauge that looks like three stitches to the inch. One page on, they've turned their balaclavas inside out. All of the knits in the magazine seem to have photographed perfectly well.

I don't need more prompting.

I text Annika. "Hi, there. The Craeft page stays in."