VOGUE

SEPT

FALL'S TOTAL LOOK

JUST CUT IT!
The Bob Is Back

688 pages of SUPER STYLE

12 Fashion Makeovers

WHO MADE THAT DRESS?
Designers & Their Tribes
by Annie Leibovitz

BUY OF THE MOMENT
THE PRETTY LITTLE COAT

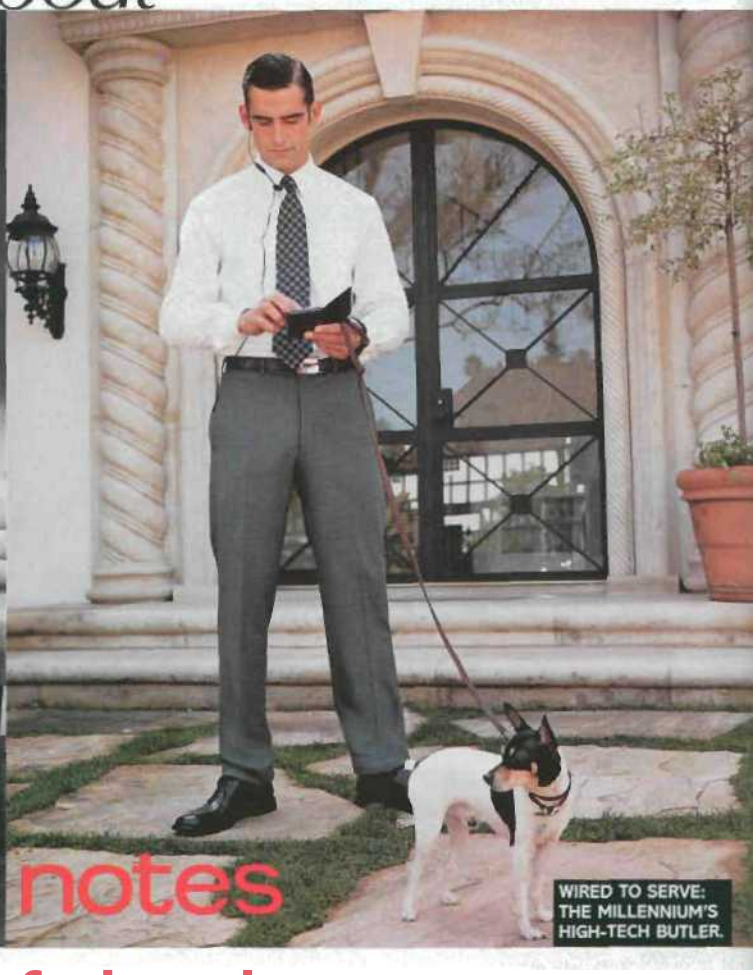
plus

CHRIS ROCK
Hollywood's Wild Card

BJÖRK
A Style Maverick

U.S.A. $3.95
CANADA $4.95
FOREIGN $4.95
09>
08449
0 753324 0

WILLIAM POWELL AS THE CLASSIC FAMILY BUTLER IN *MY MAN GODFREY*, 1936.



WIRED TO SERVE: THE MILLENNIUM'S HIGH-TECH BUTLER.

social notes

the new man of the house

Say goodbye to Jeeves. **Penelope Green** finds the latest in high-end help—a butler for todays millionaire.

he is tall and elegant in his gray suit pants, subtly patterned blue shirtsleeves, and gray tie. The interlocking *Gs* of a silver Gucci belt buckle wink from a trim waist. And the house, oh, Lordy. his house: It is a kind of Zen temple--a plush Zen temple, if thai isn't an oxymoron on the easternmost edge of the island of Manhattan. You can see the East River swirling angrily many, many stories below, a vivid backdrop for the Art Deco and antique Asian pieces that sit solemnly in each room. The art collection is museum-caliber. The phone rings every[1] three minutes.

"I knew I had arrived." says Richard (not his real name), deftly offering me a chair while dispatching one phone call, from a contractor, "when I woke up one day and said, 'It's my birthday. I think I want a Porsche!' And when I called the office to ask for $87,000--$87,000!-nobody questioned me." Richard, who is 47, runs this house, but he doesn't own it. He works for a self-made Wall Street guy, a divorced hedge-fund manager who came looking for Richard almost six years ago and hired him with these words: "I need you to run my life." In leaner years, when the money wasn't so fresh and new—or so abundant-and the accoutrements of wealth so vast and complicated, Richard might have been called a butler. Instead, he's a *house manager,* a term that reflects a new paradigm that he embodies, one where the domestic world mimics the corporate and vice versa. Party planner, staff manager, executive assistant, surrogate self: A house manager will buy birthday presents for your children and your lover(s), plan your New Year's Eve party, oversee the renovation of your country properties, and maybe even get you a drink at the end of the day. This is a life designed to make you more "you" than you were or could ever hope to be. A superyou!

"I just got a job order for a house manager from a young hedge-fund manager who plays music on the weekends," says JaNiece Rush, who owns Sterling Domestics in New York Cily. "He wants somebody to run his houses *and* book him into gigs on the weekends *and* help him with a foundation he'd like to start. So it's not just about answering the door and polishing the silver anymore. You need someone really sharp."

Helen Lee Schiller, a young Manhattan socialite, says her house manager used to be her housekeeper--the promotion was marked by a uniform change, from "a French blue dress with a little pinafore to khakis and a turtleneck," says Schifter—but that in the homes of her friends it was just as likely to be someone *social notes* >**440**

People are Talking about

"fun and preppy and blonde who could have worked in lite corporate culture but decided not to." Hers is responsible for paying vendors, making sure the baby-sitter is happy, and keeping a computer inventory of the contents of both houses "I'm borderline obsessive-compulsive." says Schifter—tracking the supply of paper towels, and so on. "The good ones run your house like a ship," she says. Top domestic agencies like Sterling and Pavillion in Manhattan are getting more and more requests for house managers with all sorts of eclectic skills. "We've placed twelve in the past year," says Keith Greenhouse, president and co-owner of Pavilion, "up from maybe eight the year before. This is a lot when you consider that the position pays somewhere between $60.000 and $135,000, with full benefits and perks. There's so much money now, and people are overwhelmed with their wealth and their new responsibilities."

So many millionaires! *The New York Times* reports that in 1997, the last year for which Internal Revenue Service figures are available, the number of returns reporting an income of $1 million or more jumped to 142,500 from 87,000 two years earlier. Such huge houses! While the average American home has passed the 2,000-square-foot mark, the new rich are rattling a round in 20-to 50,000 square-foot "smart houses," filled with aromatherapy systems—AromaSys!—and waterfalls and movie theaters and high-tech security, sound, and air systems. We are becoming a nation of San Simeons, Somebody—a very special Somebody—needs to know how to flick all those switches.

"The average house being built out here is 10,000 square feet," says Frank Newbold. senior vice president and manager of the East Hampton office of Sotheby's International Realty. "Bigger is better, of course, for Wall Streeters who want to make a statement—and that entails the services that go with the house. For ex-ample, we work with someone who owns 40 acres with six separate properties. For this you need the war room at the Pentagon: You've got florists and window cleaners and pool cleaners and landscapers. And you've got to decorate the house for the holidays. House managers are here to stay."

Some people are collecting staff like porcelain. "They need a partner," says Rush, "but they've never had staff and aren't quite sure how much they need. I know one woman who just keeps hiring advisers; it's like she collects them. I'm not exaggerating when I say that I think she has fifteen advisers." Dashing to claim a new professional niche is the Starkey International Institute for Household Management, a school and placement agency for high-end domestics in Denver. At Starkey, courses like Time Management, Computer Technology, and Finances and Records share the curriculum with more traditional domestic arts like Haute Couture, Conservation of Fine Arts, and Cleaning a Bathroom. It is here that you'll find the language of the New Order. The institute offers The Starkey Household Management System as well as Household Manager's Software. Its brochure promises that it will teach you to "organize a service delivery structure." Its founder, Mary Louise Starkey, even claims to have coined the term *household manager.*

"I didn't feel the word *butler* worked in the United States," Starkey says. "Clients were asking for bright, educated people with culinary skills, home-technology skills, finance skills. That wasn't what was out there. So I went back to the drawing board. I spent four years creating this curriculum-creating this *profession*-so that we could train college-educated men and women to manage households." Whether or not you believe Starkey's ownership of the concept, the trend is palpable: If you have the money, you can now buy a nice, tidy efficient life buzzing around the smart house you call home.

"Now that everybody works, you can imagine how the metaphor of the office can muscle in and push aside any notions of-domesticity," says Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr., the author of *Old Money: The Mythology of Wealth in America* (Allworth Press). "'Working from the theory that the house is no longer a haven from a heartless world, which made the office a haven from the heartless home are you following this?-it would be intuitive to have a house manager running this heartless system to minimize the brutal, bruising contacts of the members of the household. Or something like that."

Richard's office looks pretty much like offices do everywhere, with a desktop computer, fax machine, printer, and so on. (He's also got a laptop.) There are binders for all five of the houses he manages, and file cabinets filled with files after files of vendors of every description: wine merchants, caterers, cabinetmakers-like the one who is here today, fitting a wide-screen plasma television into an antique Deco armoire. Richard's bookshelves boast all the right cookbooks. Etiquette titles by Miss Manners. Emily Post, et al. keep company with *The Estate Manager's Handbook* and *Environmental Management: Guidelines for Museums and Galleries.* Richard was trained in the home of an ambassador, "when staff was staff," he says, in a manner so formal and Old World that he learned to walk backward out of a room so that he would never turn his back on the lady of the house. This is why he can iron a napkin so that it's as stiff as a plate of glass—a point of pride. He is courtly and self-deprecating and so fundamentally gracious that moving through the house with him is like dancing. If you ask him whether he considers himself a business associate or a servant, he says "servant," most emphatically. Yet he's so totally in charge here I wonder how his boss might answer the question. They E-mail each other all day long, says Richard,

He is courtly and self-deprecating and so gracious that moving through the house with him is like dancing

He says his Palm Pilot has about 1,000 items filed away, things like his employer's Social Security and credit-card numbers; the food and drink preferences of every executive with whom his employer has associated (like the guy from Hong Kong who visits only twice a year and has hot water and cereal for breakfast); "madam's" shoe size-the boss has a girlfriend--and the color stockings she favors; his employer's son's favorite scotch. Two weeks before last Christmas, Richard marshaled bags of wrapping paper and ribbons, in gold and ocher and silver-he trained as an interior and floral designer and is very, very good at this sort of thing--for the moment the final count of Christmas presents would he given to him, for presents he would choose and wrap himself. He would also decorate the tree, with antique Deco ornaments.

OK, so he is a paragon of both chilly efficiency and fuzzy domesticity. He doesn't just manage the household. In some ways, he is the household. He reminds me of another paragon, a 35-year-old MBA who works as a house manager. S., who speaks four languages, is so skilled that his employer's friends keep trying to hire him away. "Look, what I do is rare," he says. "But it's appealing to people who have worked very hard for their money. They respond to a certain level of sophistication. They want somebody who can talk to the maid as well as [to] the president of a company. Also, they are eager to make more money. I can help them." □

pata>446