

Tomorrow's Life

Finding the right nutrition to fuel your workout **Indulge**

Ross Lovegrove's designs combine logic and beauty **Interiors**



Intimacy rules at the city's boutique hotel restaurants **C7**



SCREEN FOOD GIGS DIVERSIONS ON AIR GOING OUT

Life

SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2007

www.scmp.com

C



Dating consultants such as Tammy Chan and Kenneth Tsea teach clients how to make a good impression when on a date. Photo: Oliver Tsang

People

Photos: AP

Reality check for Hilton in Rwanda

Paris Hilton's ambition to change her party-girl image by visiting war-torn Rwanda has taken a celebrity turn with the news the trip could help launch a reality show. Hilton (left) will travel with the children's charity Playing for Good, a group that helps businesses and celebrities get involved in philanthropic work, but with a camera recording it all.

"She's using her celebrity and the cameras that follow her for the good of humanity," said Scott Lazerson, the charity's founder.

Lazerson will film the trip in the hope of selling it as a reality show called *The Philanthropist*, featuring celebrities on drives to help the world's poor.

During her stay in Rwanda, Hilton, 26, will visit schools and health-care clinics. "I'm scared. I've heard it's really dangerous," she said. "I've never been on a trip like this before."

The hotel heiress said she was a changed person after spending three weeks in jail in June for violating probation in a drink-driving case. *Reuters*

Pop singer's death stuns Macedonia

One of Macedonia's biggest stars, singer Tose Proeski, has died in a car crash, leaving a nation in mourning.

In the capital, Skopje, thousands of sobbing fans gathered in the main square, lighting candles and leaving flowers, teddy bears and posters of the 26-year-old pop singer in makeshift shrines.

The government announced the day of his funeral would be a day of national mourning. "We all couldn't help but love Tose Proeski," said

Macedonian President Branko Cervenkovski. Parliament was cancelled for the day and a delegation was sent to Croatia, where the accident happened on Tuesday, to recover his body.

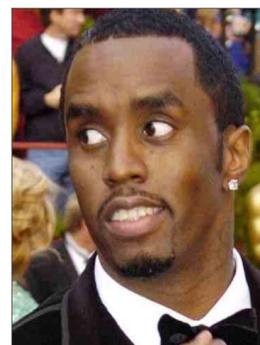
Proeski began his pop career at 15, releasing his debut album at 18, singing in Macedonian and Serbian. His good looks and passionate delivery made him a regional favourite, with hits such as *Cija si* (To whom do you belong?). *Reuters*

Combs investigated in nightclub brawl

Hip hop singer Sean "Diddy" Combs is being investigated for an alleged assault in a fight over a woman at a New York City nightclub.

Steven Acevedo, 31, has accused Combs, 37, of punching him twice in the face on Saturday, according to police, who said Combs (right) could face a misdemeanor charge of third-degree assault. The New York County District Attorney's Office said no charges had yet been filed.

"We're hopeful this matter will be resolved without the filing of any criminal charges as this was a disagreement among acquaintances, not a criminal assault," Combs' attorney Benjamin Brafman said in a statement. *Reuters*



Struggling to find a date, or unsure of how to act when you go on one? Ask a professional for advice, writes **Katie Lau**

Only the lonely

Ron Lee has had several failed relationships. The 31-year-old IT professional remains optimistic about being able to find the

woman of his dreams, but realises he must first survive the dating game. Lee decided a little expert help wouldn't hurt and signed up for a crash course on dating in April.

"I didn't really know how to be with a woman. I studied in a boys' school and there are only guys at my workplace," he says. "Sometimes you just need someone who can tell you what you are doing wrong and how to fix it."

Lee is among more than 30 people who have turned to the "dating consultants" of 214dating.com, which launched the dating classes last June. The clients, their ages ranging from the early 20s to the 40s, pay HK\$560 for a two-hour session with two consultants.

During his intensive two-on-one session, Lee was told about some of his quirks that could make a poor first impression: he talked too quickly, stammered a little and dressed too casually for dates.

Often called "dating coaches" or "date doctors" in the west, these consultants draw on their own experience and knowledge of relationships to provide personalised advice in such areas as verbal and non-verbal communication, psychology and dress sense.

"We've seen men and women fail to get dates after taking part in our speed-dating events although they're attractive and successful. So we started this service to help them," says dating consultant Tammy Chan Wing-sum. "We localise the advice and consider cultural differences. For instance, splitting expenses might be done differently here."

Fellow consultant Michael Tse Chi-ho adds: "We get to know a client's background and personality, then figure out what they want in a partner. Every case is different."

Many local men who seek help are stereotypical nerds: introverted,

inattentive and incapable of expressing themselves. "They don't know how to woo women and end up scaring them off," Tse says.

Women clients are just as clueless, albeit in other ways, he says. "They don't know how to respond to a suitor and have no idea what to do on dates. You might think that it's just a matter of common sense, but many are surprisingly inexperienced."

The team also recruits stylists to help with clients' wardrobes and an interpersonal skills trainer to offer social insights. "I teach them how to read the nuances of a person's expression and behaviour so they can act accordingly to build rapport," says trainer Kenneth Tsea Tin-hang.

"Date coaching is a very niche business in the west and the consultants have to be professional," says Peter Lee, who runs Amingle.com, a speed-dating website.

"One has to be very confident about their abilities in order to charge for such services, because we are not talking about general or basic tips here."

Demand for date coaching remains limited, however, as most Hong Kong people are reluctant to sign up for organised dating, let alone seek advice. Few single people are prepared to admit to being romantically challenged.

"I've met cocky clients who never consider if the fault may lie with them when a date doesn't go well," says Peter Lee.

"There's so much work involved [in a relationship]. Their sense of self-importance makes them undesirable partners."

Pia Mugerud, a life coach who

also advises on dating as a part of her holistic approach, says the unwillingness to seek help for something as visceral as dating occurs in all cultures.

"It's not just the Chinese," she says. "Dating is generally thought to be fairly easy. In Hong Kong, people are focused on making money, so it seems more natural to seek advice on career and finances. They think things like love will fall into place effortlessly after you achieve success."

Unfortunately, that's not likely to happen with overworked urban professionals in gender-orientated jobs. "Professions such as IT and engineering are dominated by men and teaching and nursing by women. It's hard to meet new people," says Chan Sze-chi, a philosophy lecturer at the Baptist University who teaches a module on romantic love.

The difficulties of local singles are aggravated by a warped view of romantic relationships, he says. "Dating is a social custom that originated in the west, but Hong Kong men and women just annoy each other because many don't know how to act when they go out with someone," he says. "Women behave like spoiled, graceless princesses. Men feel particularly intimidated by assertive career women because of their rising social status."

Mastering the art of dating isn't a panacea for romantic woes but "it can minimise conflict and enhance communication on both sides," says Chan. "You learn how to be a gentle, thoughtful person and understand the psyche of the opposite sex."

Despite their cosmopolitan veneer, many Hongkongers are socially conservative. "The reality is many people find it hard to find a partner, but there's a stigma against those who venture out to seek love by alternative means," says cultural commentator Bottle Shiu Ka-chun.

"There's still a sense of shame associated with dating," says Lawrence Wong of speed-dating club Cinderella. "Many still prefer to leave it to fate to meet their significant other. Some clients are afraid of being seen, so we ensure the event is a discreet affair. We

assume people are embarrassed to be there."

Chan adds: "Chinese people hate losing face and exposing their weakness. They think you can't find a girlfriend or boyfriend if you join a dating event or seek advice. Organised dating needs a more positive image in Hong Kong."

The stigma apparently extends to dating agencies, especially speed-dating services, which tend to be small operations that publicise their services on websites and through small print ads.

"We'd like to shake off the underground image but can't afford to spend more money on publicity," says Wong.

Dating agencies are only responding to the social reality and catering to a need

Chan Sze-chi, Baptist University lecturer who teaches a module on romantic love

Hong Kong singles can do with their help, says Chan. "We're too busy working and hardly have time to make new friends. Some people might still believe in finding a partner the old-fashioned way, but in this fast-paced and alienating society, that's only getting harder. These dating agencies are only responding to the social reality and catering to a need," says the lecturer.

Ron Lee reckons he has benefited from his coaches' advice, although he still hasn't found a girlfriend. "I'm more presentable and have learned to be more attentive to details; girls like that," he says.

More importantly, "I understand myself better and know what I want. I understand the difference between fantasy and reality. Now I won't rush into a relationship with someone I'm physically attracted to without finding out whether we're compatible."

Watch the video and hear what the experts say about the dating game at www.scmp.com/multimedia



Speed dates. Photo: Ricky Chung

LLADRO®

Lladro Shops Hong Kong :
Pacific Place
Prince's Building
Ocean Terminal
Festival Walk
Sogo

For enquiry, please contact
(852) 2341 0386
www.lladro.com

As long as there is serenity

© Nisawa Kenichi photograph for Lladro