

HOME INC.

Domestic Employees Can Make Life Easier for Those With More Money Than Time

JENNY B. DAVIS

LIFE IS VERY COMPLICATED IN 2006,” Peter Mahler says simply. And he should know. For nearly two decades, he has specialized in making life better for those long on money but short on time. And a key component of his customized solutions involves hiring household employees—think nannies, house managers, drivers, cooks and personal assistants.

“There is a class of people who have achieved a high degree of financial success who are so committed to their responsibilities that they are finding they have no time to enjoy the fruits of their labor,” he explains. “So they come to us to put a team in place to allow them to enjoy life so they can go on a date on Saturday night, have friends over or take their children to a soccer game without having to spend their time going to the dry cleaner or waiting to meet the cable guy.”

Household staff still isn't as common as it was in the 1920s and 1930s, says Mahler, who heads Mahler Private Staffing, a national firm based in Milwaukee. But he believes it's never made more sense than it does today, with the increase in standard house size, the prevalence of families headed by two professionals and the increasing complexity of kids' schedules. “A good staff,” he says, “provides you leverage and relief.”

Often, that means never having to sweat the small stuff. Take light bulbs, for instance. “Houses today have an abundance of bulbs. Even the most basic house can have between 20 and 30 types, including the oven, the refrigerator, low voltage and exterior lights,” says Leland D. Stone of Stone Standard in San Antonio. “So wouldn't it be nice to have one supplier who knew all of these light bulbs so all you had to do was say, ‘I need a bulb for the tree in front,’ and it was taken care of?”

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Stone is renowned for creating individualized organizational systems for his upper-crust clients, and it's one of the many and diverse management services—from supervising construction to training staff and winding down residences—that he offers to private homes and small hotels. A trained butler and graduate of the Cornell School of Hotel Administration in Ithaca, N.Y., he has managed a 20,000-square-foot home in Palm Beach, Fla., and worked for families with multiple residences as well as yachts.

TAKING A BUSINESSLIKE APPROACH

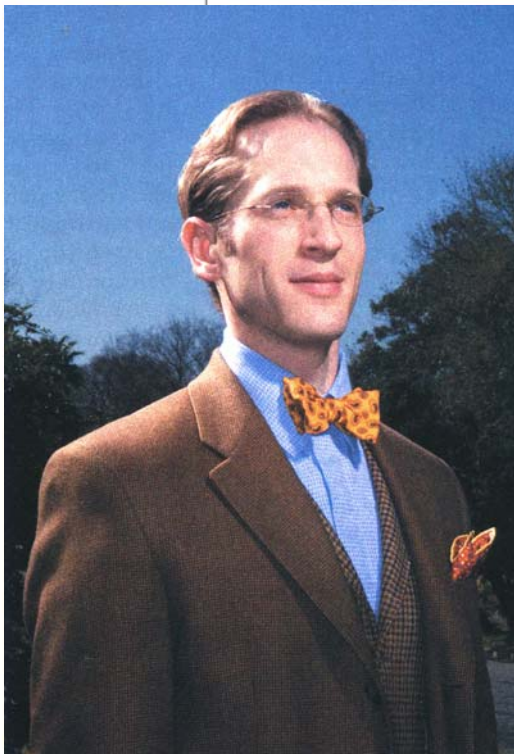
STONE APPROACHES A HOME AS IF IT WERE A SMALL HOTEL, open from a certain time in the morning to a certain time at night. A few of his tricks? While working with staffers at a home that had 17 bathrooms, he recommended folding a corner of the toilet paper after a cleaning to show at a glance whether a facility had been used, thus reducing the number of unnecessary cleanings. He also recommends mapping out every staff member's schedule on a master calendar to ensure the right number of people are on call during times when coverage is crucial.

But hospitality is important, too. “Having a house in Aspen that you visit four times a year costs you more, but the reason you have it is because you don't want to stay

in a hotel,” he says. “You want to have your own things organized and decorated the way you want it.” That means favorite shampoos are always available, the heat is on and refrigerators are stocked when residents arrive. Or it may mean party hosts can entertain without having to leave their guests.

For Stone, it all boils down to priorities.

“Everyone defines luxury in different ways—some people want more stuff, some people want more staff,” he says. “I want to show people that, with some organization and by setting a few standards—and they can be their own personal standards—they can really run a house in a way that they can entertain, have a beautiful property and enjoy being at home.” ■



Leland Stone: Domestic bliss requires organization and standards.