



Fair Vanity

Magazine-worthy portraits
for non-model clients

By Amanda Arnold



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Jai Mayhew

"I don't like my pinky." It was an unusual pronouncement but nonetheless pertinent information for portrait photographer Jai Mayhew as she settled into a session with a client. "I got you," she assured the woman, thrilled the client felt comfortable enough to share this little nugget of negative self-perception. "Knowing those things enables me to shoot [clients] in

a way they're going to love," Mayhew says.

It's all part of the customer care Mayhew provides. Mayhew, who also photographs editorial work, produces editorial-style fashion shoots for non-model clients who crave a concierge portrait experience. Getting the scoop on which facial features or body parts a client isn't crazy about is one thing Mayhew

does to provide exceptional service and pleasing results.

"I learned that pretty early on—making sure you know what *they* want, not just what *you* typically do."

FASHION FORWARD

Mayhew began her career in fashion photography; her images have appeared in a slew of publications, including *Vogue Italia* and *Papercut*. After



she gave birth to her daughter and couldn't travel for fashion assignments, she began making portraits of friends as a creative outlet. She didn't think of it as a career move at the time, but it morphed into exactly that.

"I fell in love with creating this editorial fashion portrait for women who have nothing to do with the modeling world. It was just this beautiful transformation—I would

say self-love—that women walked away with. I still do fashion work, but the bulk of what I do is what I call luxe portraits."

Mayhew's luxury portrait sessions include an hour and a half of hair and makeup with a stylist, five wardrobe changes, champagne, German sweets (as a nod to her childhood home), and posing guidance from Mayhew that her clients can easily mirror.

Here's what else we learned about her sessions:

Hitting the target. Half of Mayhew's clients are expectant mothers in search of a high-end look. The other half are typically women in their 30s and 40s who simply want to celebrate themselves—a milestone birthday, a career move—by having a pampered day in the studio. "They're taking ownership of their life and they're celebrating it,



and I'm so lucky I get to be a part of that," Mayhew says.

She cultivated that clientele by networking with businesses that cater to clients who want top-of-the-line concierge service—wedding planners for high-dollar events, stylists, owners of high-end salons. "I wanted to find people who already had clients who appreciated service because if you appreciate service and I can give you a beautiful product, then you're going to be drawn to me," she says. "They don't want to do the work; they just want a beautiful end result. And that is really what I give my clients—stress-free, beautiful, concierge service that [results in] beautiful pictures."

Welcome packet. After her initial phone consult and booking with the client, Mayhew mails a luxurious wax-sealed welcome packet with information to prepare the client for her session. An introductory letter describes what to expect the day of. A beauty and style guide includes a timeline advising when to get a wax, cosmetic injections, or a cut and color in the time leading up to the session if the client so wishes. Example images of a woman wearing different clothing styles, cuts, and fabrics "show what variety looks like," she says. "I've been told that the welcome packets are really appreciated."

Wardrobe consult. Mayhew's goal is to remove any stress points for clients, the biggest of which, she's found, is selecting outfits for the session. She heads off that concern by offering to visit the client's home to help select wardrobe possibilities. Cli-

ents often don't understand that an outfit might look terrific for a ladies' outing but not so great in a photograph, so it's beneficial for her to provide input. An added benefit of the home visit is that it creates intimacy.

"How many people that you've known for 15 minutes are in your closet? Right off the bat, you're getting into girlfriend mode because you're experiencing their world differently than most photographers do. It helps them to meet me face to face and to get a little bit of camaraderie." Sometimes a client has clothing they've overlooked that Mayhew knows will be amazing in a photograph. The home visit also allows her to assess whether the client needs to borrow clothing from her studio collection. For example, not everyone owns a formal gown, and Mayhew keeps a stock at her studio for formal portraits.

Customer service plus.

Delivering a luxe experience means paying attention to the tiniest details so the session is worry free. Mayhew always meets the client at their car so she can carry in their wardrobe bag. She provides their favorite brand of champagne and preferred music for the session. Her makeup artist has been known to rub lotion on a client's feet, and Mayhew steams clothing to remove wrinkles. VIP clients receive a Tiffany's gift after their reveal. "I want to make this an all-inclusive experience."

Five looks. She always wants to capture at least five looks in an editorial shoot, says Mayhew. Not just five wardrobe changes, but five changes of makeup, hair,



ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

ASK QUESTIONS. An early client hired Mayhew for a session after seeing and liking her friend's portraits. Because she'd come through that friend, Mayhew photographed her in a similar romantic style. But it turned out that the client wanted to be photographed more like a body builder—a completely different look—and was unhappy with the results. "I remember thinking, Why did you come to me? But then I was like, You know what, that's my responsibility," she says. Now she gets as much information as she can from each client before their session so she understands exactly what they have in mind. Each client completes a questionnaire that asks for specific likes and dislikes as well as past experience in front of a camera.

NORMALIZE THE NUMBERS. After a phone consult, Mayhew sends the client a document that stipulates a minimum cost and outlines pricing and product options. She follows up with another call to speak with them about those numbers. "A lot of clients who haven't experienced this kind of photo shoot are used to a photographer who charges \$300 to \$400," she says. "If that is your point of gravity, then I am going to seem extreme." Speaking with them about her range and telling them what other clients typically spend helps normalize her pricing, she says.







location, and lighting. While Mayhew's in-studio sessions don't have quite the level of production value as a true editorial assignment, she still sets a five-look goal. "At their reveal I want them to feel like they're sitting down and looking through pictures from five or six shoots. I don't want them to feel like, Oh, these are great but they all kind of look the same. I want them to feel like they got this amazing variety. That has definitely shaped the way that I approach the styling."

"I tell my clients I see women as multifaceted," she says. "You are a mom, a sister, a daughter. You're viewed in different ways," she explains. To that end, a client might want a sexy look for her husband, something soft and sweet for her daughter, something classic for her business profile, and something casual for social media. Even a client who says she only wants sexy looks will get a five-look variety at her session, Mayhew says. "There are still degrees of sexy."

Therapy sessions. "Every once in a while, you have someone who is scared of being in front of the camera,"

Mayhew says. But those can be some of the most rewarding sessions as she helps the subject open up. "I love shooting fashion. I love editorial work, but a beautiful young model is going to look beautiful no matter who shoots her," says Mayhew. "A client who doesn't have that same sense of worth, who is entrusting perhaps their self-worth or self-value to you, to be able to turn around and give them something that gives them pride and joy in themselves, that is an amazing experience. To be a part of that is incredible."

The reveal. Mayhew does her sales meeting one week after the photo session, presenting the client a slideshow of 50 to 60 images, three of which she's edited to show how a finished product would look. For out-of-town clients, she does the reveal the day after the session. She provides wine and allows the client to watch the slideshow as many times as they want until they're ready to make selections. It usually takes an hour to an hour and a half. "There are a lot of happy tears," she says. "That is my favorite part." •



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