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SHOULD YOU OUTSOURCE YOUR SEARCH FOR A SOULMATE?

How a new breed of matchmakers is
changing the dating game forever

The *meteoric* *rise* of modern- day *matchmakers*

In a time when dating has never felt more draining, a new love affair is emerging with the resurgence of professional matchmakers. So, can subcontracting our search for a soulmate increase our chances of romance? *Body+Soul* swipes right...

BY ALEX DAVIES



*Cinqe Matchmaking
Director of Australia,
Lauren Hunter*



he screen lights up as a message appears on Lauren Hunter's phone. "Are jeans and a black top OK for tonight? Hair up or down?" She taps back a reply and words of encouragement, knowing she's already

confirmed the restaurant reservation for dinner. But this isn't Hunter's date and she's more than just a bestie hyping up a friend. Hunter is a professional matchmaker, and she'll have to wait until later to find out if sparks flew over the entrées. "When I work with someone, I'm the ultimate wing woman," she tells *Body+Soul* with a smile.

While the Melburnian – who is Director of Australia for elite global matchmaking service, Cinque – has been in the business of bringing people together for nearly a decade, her phone is busier than ever lately thanks to a surge in interest around professional matchmaking. "The demand is out of this world," confirms Hunter. "I represent singles in Gold Coast, Brisbane, Melbourne, Tasmania, Adelaide. My database spans 21 to 85. It's just booming."

There's no doubt pop culture has a hand in igniting this candlelit conversation. Earlier this year, Dakota Johnson and Pedro Pascal lit up cinema screens in *Materialists*, about the world of high-end matchmaking in New York City, while the recent final season of *And Just Like That...* saw Sarita Choudhury's character Seema enlist a pro for her own (unsuccessful) romantic set-up.

Google searches for 'matchmaker Australia' have skyrocketed by 90 per cent in the past 12 months, and the global premium matchmaking service market – valued at \$1.8 billion in 2023 – is predicted to surpass \$4 billion by 2032, as more of us look to skip the swiping and outsource this part of our personal lives – sometimes at a pretty eye-watering price tag.

So, in an era where terms like 'ghosting' and 'the ick' appear in dictionaries, and dating can feel more exhausting than electric, could this longstanding practice be just what our love lives ordered in 2025? We enjoyed a meet-cute with those in the know to find out.

WHY INTRO INTRIGUE IS RISING

The art of matchmaking has a vast history, which sees it woven into various cultures, literature and beyond. But experts believe its recent renaissance is fuelled by two major factors: a desire for convenience in our always-on, time-poor society, as well as a modern dating culture that's left many connection seekers feeling disillusioned, overwhelmed and just, well, over it.

That last part ringing a less-than-romantic bell? Nearly 70 per cent of Aussies have experienced a sense of burnout from dating fails and disappointments, according to The Choozi Swipe Right Modern Dating Report 2023. A recent UK survey of 2,000 singles revealed that 53 per cent would happily ditch dating apps in favour of meeting someone IRL, while two-thirds of Gen Z'ers said they use online dating mostly to relieve boredom. Who hasn't swiped between train stops or on the couch during a *Real Housewives* recap?

"You get a dopamine rush when you match on the apps, but then a crash if conversations stall or ghosting happens. It's an emotional rollercoaster," explains Shuktika Bose, clinical psychologist and mental health consultant. "Matchmaking feels different because it brings a steady human touch. Instead of juggling endless chats, you're guided towards a few meaningful introductions. That reduces overwhelm and allows your nervous system to stay calmer, which is the state we need to connect and bond."

Bose is seeing more and more of us lean towards this sort of curated, intentional encounter. Just think about the refreshing rise of experience-based, face-to-face mixers, from singles run clubs to speed dating, and even the recent wave of apps connecting users around specific values and interests – whether it's fitness, kink or personal growth – rather than just a postcode.

If you're pining for something serious, matchmaking also swerves some of the guess work around being on the same page. As Isiah McKimmie, a relationship counsellor and sexologist who works with individuals and couples across Australia,

points out: "You know someone has invested time, money and energy [in the process]. They've really had to have intention behind signing up and saying, 'Here's what I'm looking for.'"

The prospect of a lighter mental load is attractive, too. "I work exactly like executive recruitment; I just do it for my client's relationships," shares Amanda Harrigan, who is the founder of Hytch, a premium matchmaking agency across Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. "We have an extended network of people that we're able to vet and screen on their behalf. We save time and make it less emotionally exhausting by putting the ones in front of them who may genuinely be a potential match, based on compatibility."

After all, we turn to PTs for help with our training goals, and accountants to soothe the headache of tax returns – why not streamline our search for a soulmate?

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

For Marie*, a Melbourne-based account manager in her late 30s, it was that desire for a more bespoke experience that sparked her to seek Hunter's help. "I had spent two years on dating apps like Raya and Hinge, and while those platforms can be entertaining, the overload and 'paradox of choice' can become numbing and emotionally disengaging," she says. "What I craved was something more

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personal and considered; someone who knows me well enough to introduce me to my kind of person."

So far, Marie has met up with two matches, and though the first didn't go further, "the second has been wonderful and continues to grow. For me, the appeal of matchmaking isn't about finding someone with a certain job title, car or tick-the-box qualities. It's about meeting someone kind, funny, inspiring and family-oriented, who makes life feel lighter and more joyful."

Much like that trainer championing your lifting PB, there's a comfort that comes with having your own cheerleader in the pursuit of connection, especially since the oversaturated dating sphere can actually feel quite lonely. McKimmie agrees: "Having someone in your corner, to cheer you on and help you think outside of your normal box, could be really valuable." It also offers a rare opportunity for kind, constructive post-date feedback and direction, instead of potentially awkward convos or the sting of being left on read.

Science further hints at the power of a fresh external perspective. According to research in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, what we say we want in a partner doesn't always align with who we're drawn to in reality. While Hunter finds her intuition is an MVP in the matchmaking process, there's also deep diving to get to the heart of what somebody really wants or needs. (It's no coincidence she has a background in holistic health coaching and that Harrigan is a certified life coach.)

"I don't match two people just because they're single or they're both five-foot-seven," says Hunter. "I look at dreams, goals, values, similar hobbies, attachment styles, timing of life – even things like if they're a morning person. The better I get to know someone, the better I can match them."

When Rebecca* met her now-partner through Harrigan, she felt that below-the-surface connection from the jump. "It just felt initially really comfortable; I remember that I could instantly imagine we'd banter and be great friends," shares the Perth-based entrepreneur in her 40s, who turned to matchmaking in part because she'd moved cities and was re-establishing her social scene.

"I wasn't sure if that romance piece would come, but it really did very quickly. We're quite different but at the core very similar, so it's a nice balance. If I'm the kite flying in the sky, he's like the string." The two have now been



together for eight months, with future plans for travel on their horizon.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Such stories can almost make this seem like a sure-fire route to a hard launch, but be mindful of rocking rose-tinted glasses. Any matchmaker worth their pink Himalayan salt (including those in this article) will tell you that, of course, there's no guarantee of a happily ever after.

Wondering about other possible caveats and cautions? "There's a risk of passivity," suggests Bose. "If you hand over all control, you might stop reflecting on your own growth, boundaries or dating patterns. A matchmaker can guide

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you, but healthy relationships still depend on communication, self-awareness and vulnerability. Guided introductions may also narrow your options too much, which could reduce the spontaneity and diversity that can spark unexpected connections. The healthiest mindset is seeing matchmaking as one part of the toolkit, not the whole solution."

Then there's the matter of money, with some services asking more of a bank balance than others. In Australia, a Cinque membership starts at \$15,000, and Hytch's 12-month membership starts at \$6,600 – with both figures are tailored to the level of service required and include guaranteed intros. Bonus intel worth a

Dakota Johnson and Pedro Pascal star in matchmaking movie, *Materialists*.
BELOW RIGHT: Clinical psychologist Shukta Bose (left), and counsellor and sexologist, Isiah McKimmie



NO MATCHMAKER? *No worries*

From rethinking fireworks to diving deeper, here are top dating tips from the pros — minus the price tag

RECRUIT YOUR SQUAD

Teamwork makes the dream work, so rally a trusted crew for support along the way. "There's also value in asking for advice from family, friends or even a therapist," tips McKimmie. "Ask them: 'What qualities do you think I should look for in a partner that would serve or compliment me well? Is there anything I might need to look at in myself that may help me to have happier relationships?'"

THINK COMPATIBILITY OVER CHEMISTRY

Don't feel instant sparks? Take a beat before you bolt. "A lot of people think they've got to have fireworks, but when you're looking for a long-term relationship, it has to be compatibility first," shares Harrigan. "It's your values, lifestyle, future goals. Because the more you connect and enjoy spending time with somebody, the chemistry can grow."

MOVE ON FROM MESSAGING

Constant texting and app DMs can create a false sense of intimacy, so Hunter encourages taking a connection to Facetime, voice note or IRL meet-up as soon as you feel comfortable. Dates don't have to be sexy, either: "Some matchmakers say a person needs to show [they care] by spending money, but they don't. A picnic, walk or coffee can be beautiful."

GET CREATIVE AND CURIOUS

Spent the past hour of a first date talking about your jobs? Think outside of the question box. "What do they love doing, what inspires them, where do they feel most alive; that'll tell you more about the person and if you see alignment," says Harrigan. A shared sense of purpose is attractive, found a 2024 US study, whether it's creativity, giving back or just similar life goals.

you might miss someone who could be a great fit," says Bose. "See it as a process. Each introduction is a chance to refine what you're looking for, test how you show up and build confidence in dating."

As for green flags in a service, over to Harrigan. "Transparency and clear communication. A good matchmaker will be upfront about their process, fees and the types of matches they offer, and open to feedback," she explains. "You want to have a connection with them and feel comfortable; someone who seems genuinely invested in your happiness is a good sign." Walking red flags include high-pressure sales tactics, disrespecting boundaries, over-promising and "guaranteeing a fairytale outcome". McKimmie advises asking about things like vetting and safety, too.

INSIDE THE CRYSTAL BALL

Matchmaking might still seem like a luxe niche in the juggernaut dating landscape, but evolving tech is on a mission to change that. Take Keeper, for example, a new digital platform making waves with its AI-assisted service for those seeking 'serious introductions to vetted matches'. There's even future talk of AI-powered concierges who would go on virtual dates for you, sifting through whole cities to find your shortlist of potential unicorns.

Both Harrigan and Hunter agree that while AI has an exciting, supportive role to play, it simply can't replace the human side of matchmaking: it's that empathy, instinct and personal touch that clients come to them for. Meanwhile, Bose

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 plenty of beautiful
 people out there.
 You've just got to be
 introduced to them

— LAUREN HUNTER

hopes to see this space become even more accessible across diverse demographics and communities.

Because at its heart, the renewed spotlight on matchmaking reflects our collective slow-burn shift towards a more intentional, bespoke dating scene. One where the quest for connection doesn't drain your energy or headspace, and quality really does reign over quantity. As Hunter puts it, "I want you to never lose hope that there are plenty of beautiful people out there. You've just got to be introduced to them." Jeans and a black top, at the ready? It's a date.



CLICK DISCOVER THE COUNTRY'S BIGGEST DATING DEAL-BREAKERS, PLUS WHAT WE'RE REALLY DOING IN BED, WITH THE RESULTS OF OUR SURVEY AT [BODYANDSOUL.COM.AU/SEXCENSUS](https://bodyandsoul.com.au/sexcensus)

heart-eyes emoji: many companies, including these two, offer complimentary options, where you can upload your details and potentially be matched with paying clients. "If I was single, I would join every free database," encourages Hunter, who is soon releasing a behind-the-scenes book about the matchmaking world. "It's confidential and people get matched off that every day, so you never know."

So, tempted to put your heart in expert hands? Tune into your values and deal-breakers, but be open-minded and prepared to loosen the reins on lengthy checklists (*ahem* 'man in finance, trust fund, tall, blue eyes'). "Chemistry often surprises us, and if your list is too rigid,

