

THE NAKED TRUTH

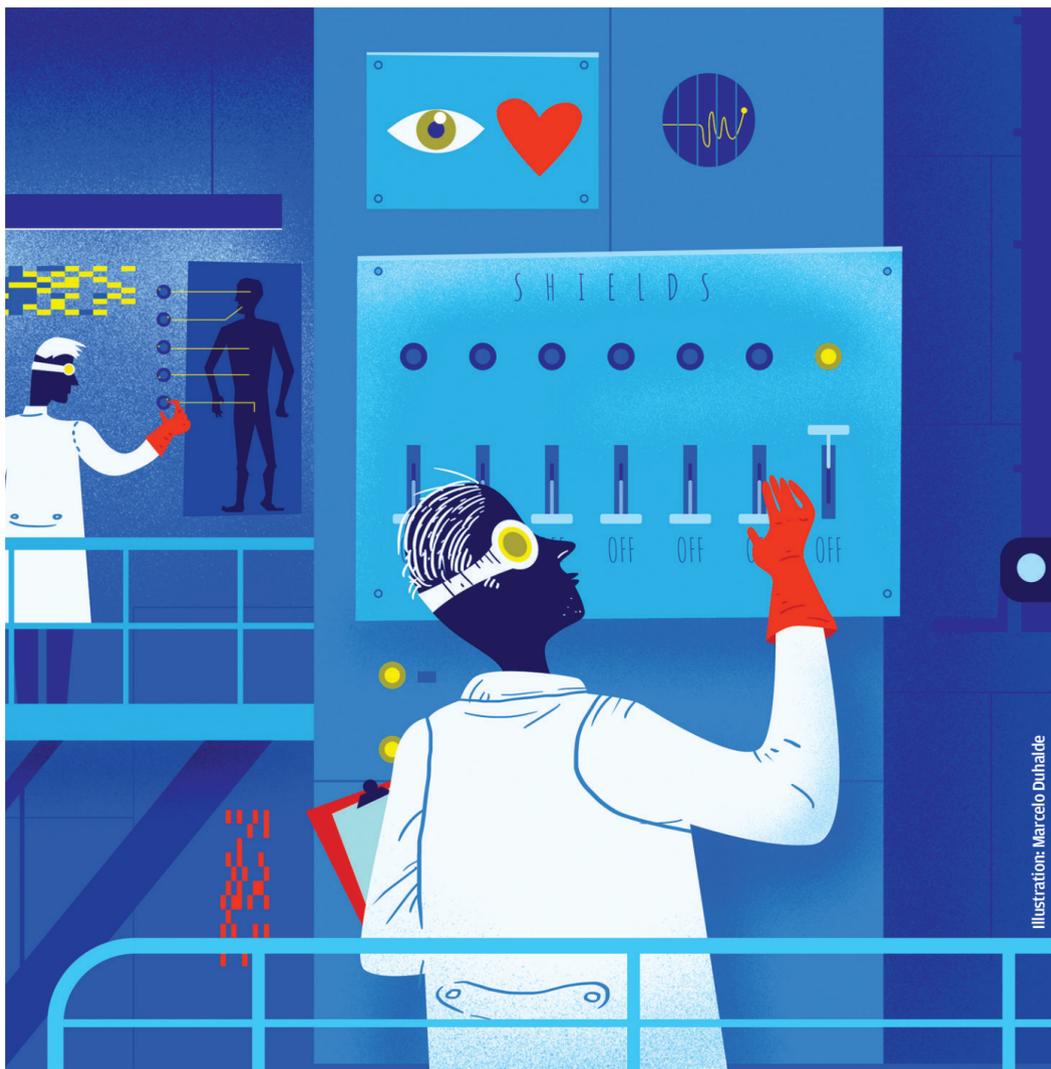


Illustration: Marcelo Duhalde

A user's guide to conscious dating

Honesty, integrity and common sense are the keys to success, expert says

Luisa Tam
luisa.tam@scmp.com

Timing is everything either for a relationship. In the pursuit of love, and perhaps even great sex, the right timing puts us in the right space to meet, to court, to explore, to experience, and consequently to be connected with someone.

When the timing is off and one or both parties are simply not ready to be in something deeper, no matter how hard you try, your efforts are likely to be futile, not to mention heartbreaking and soul-crushing. The fundamental issue is to nurture a healthy relationship, we need to strike a balance between give and take, which means both sides have to contribute physically and emotionally in equal terms.

A lot of times, even when we know deep down the person we are with is incompatible, or may not even deserve our love, we tend to ignore the signs and carry on, hoping the problems will fade over time and everything will miraculously fall into place.

In fact, if you are unsure of your relationship, you need to make a conscious decision on the way forward, and whether it's worth fixing or even repairable; if not, you need to call it quits.

According to Sonia Samtani, a

Hong Kong-based clinical hypnotherapist and life coach, people are increasingly realising that the conventional way of dating does not necessarily produce promising results. "We are getting tired of wearing masks that hide our personalities to please others so as to avoid rejection."

We are getting tired of wearing masks that hide our personalities to please others so as to avoid rejection

SONIA SAMTANI, LIFE COACH AND CLINICAL HYPNOTHERAPIST

She says the new way of dating focuses more on awareness, hence it's called "conscious dating". Conscious dating is both refreshing and authentic because it is dating with a greater level of self-awareness, truthfulness, and integrity.

The benefits of conscious dating are many: you get to be more comfortable with yourself and feel

less influenced by others, so you can develop a greater connection with the person you are dating. Ultimately, a deeply forged personal connection opens up many new positive avenues into a relationship, including productive conversations, mutual growth, and even better sex.

"When you are dating consciously you are more aware of who you are, what you are looking for, and have enough self-confidence to say what is acceptable and what is not. Being more conscious in dating also allows you to recognise what makes you feel good and what triggers you, while understanding your date may not operate in the same way," she says.

This awareness makes a "conscious" person develop greater self-esteem and able to take responsibility for their choices without feeling like a victim, she adds.

One obvious benefit is that people who are consciously dating are more true to themselves, but can also be vulnerable without the fear of being judged, and are able to confront issues instead of avoiding them, she points out. "In some cases, this would mean a shorter courtship since the parties are able to say 'no' to what they don't want, and move closer to what they do."

However, the difference between conscious and normal dating is relative because there is no clear boundary between the two. Basically, the more aware and authentic you are, the more you are dating consciously, Samtani says.

To get started, you need some "inner" work done, such as understanding the difference between what you actually want and what society or conditioning dictates are your needs. You also have to overcome the fear of "not fitting in" if what you want is different from the norms.

Ultimately, you need to step out of your comfort zone. Even taking baby steps is fine – it is a good start to make one small shift at a time, Samtani adds.

You also have to accept that there is no universal "right" or "wrong". This is because each person has a unique filter of perception based on their experiences. Be willing to work on differences and not try to change your partner's mind; you must truly believe that a conscious relationship works.

When you practise conscious dating, it makes a big difference if both partners have made the choice to do it together.

Practising conscious dating can also heal past issues and traumas because of your attitude and ability to take responsibility for your life.

Luisa Tam is a Post correspondent

TIPS AND TOOLS TO HELP YOU FIND, AND KEEP, THE PERFECT PARTNER

- Be clear of what you want.
- Communicate with honesty and clarity but it doesn't need to be harsh or rigid, you can be considerate and yet firm about where you stand.
- Come from a space of mutual respect and be willing to listen and honour your partner's opinions, even if you disagree with them.
- Understand that relationships cannot complete

- you, but are a complement to your own journey of self-completion.
- Have the courage to say and hear the word "no", and treat it simply as feedback rather than associating it with rejection or failure.
- Accept being conscious is not a one-off decision, but a way of life.
- Operate as a responsible adult and understand

- that you are responsible for your own choices and consequences.
- Trust in the process that you will be OK on this journey no matter what.
- Be in the moment, without evoking the past or worrying about the future.
- Ask yourself "if I were operating at a high level of consciousness right now, what would I do?"



The Hog Dog Bus in TST; and an odd photo of a German museum director taken by Erwin Wurm (below left). Photos: Handout, Jonathan Wong



ART

Overweight Hot Dog Bus makes you the medium

Fionnuala McHugh
life@scmp.com

In 2012, local transport fans mourned the passing of the old, non air-conditioned double-deckers, popularly known as "hot dog" buses. This week, however, a hot dog bus has appeared in front of Tsim Sha Tsui's K11 Musea.

It's bright yellow, it's a Volkswagen and it has just one class of fare: hot dogs.

It is an artwork by the Austrian artist Erwin Wurm. Last summer, Hot Dog Bus spent its weekends feeding the 50,000 in Brooklyn Bridge Park. It will now do the same for Hongkongers.

Wurm, 65, a slender, handsome man, shivers in K11's air

conditioning. Twice within half an hour he refers, unprompted, to his size. "I was always slim," he says at one point; and later (of the need for assistants' help to create large works in his 12th-century Schloss outside Vienna), "I was always skinny and not very muscular."

His shape is relevant because Hot Dog Bus is part of Wurm's on-going fascination with distortion. Volkswagen began manufacturing the Microbus in the 1950s; with the help of polystyrene and putty, Wurm's version has grotesque late-middle-aged spread. The hot dogs it serves are intended to add layers to humans. It's an interactive performance: you, bloating as you gorge on calories, also become a sculpture.

RETAIL

LOCAL LABELS ARE BEACONS OF HOPE AMID THE GLOOM

While ongoing social unrest in the city hits retail sales hard, small independent shops are using their agility to adapt to the changing landscape

Divia Harilela
life@scmp.com

As Hong Kong nears its fourth month of civil unrest, the effects can be felt across all business sectors – but particularly retail.

In the past few weeks, international luxury brands and designers have cancelled or delayed high-profile events and openings in the city. Some have even closed stores, particularly in hard-hit areas such as Causeway Bay (Prada is one of the latest to do so, announcing it will soon close its branch on Russell Street, the world's priciest shopping strip).

With tourists from the mainland snubbing the city, malls such as Harbour City in Tsim Sha Tsui have become ghost towns.

Such strife, however, can also bring opportunity – in particular, for independent retailers.

While Hong Kong is a shopper's paradise when it comes to global luxury brands, it also boasts a growing group of home-grown fashion and lifestyle businesses, many of which were founded after the 2008 financial crisis.

"Hong Kong is an amazing place for an entrepreneur," says Ariane Zagury, founder of Rue Madame Fashion Group.

"I arrived without a network and without retail experience and now my company operates nearly 30 stores across eight brands."

Zagury believes small- to medium-size enterprises and independent retailers are crucial to Hong Kong. "We are bringing an original flavour, things that cannot be found everywhere."

Zagury, whose portfolio includes multi-label boutique Rue Madame and international brands such as Whistles and Phase Eight, has, like many retailers, experienced a slowdown in sales since the anti-government protests escalated in July.

However, it is not all doom and gloom.

"We've seen walk-in customers putting off purchasing decisions because they lack hope and desire," says Melinda Wong, who owns a boutique, Vein, in Causeway Bay, which stocks independent fashion brands from Scandinavia.

"On the other hand, we've seen faithful customers show their support by buying new season items no less than usual."

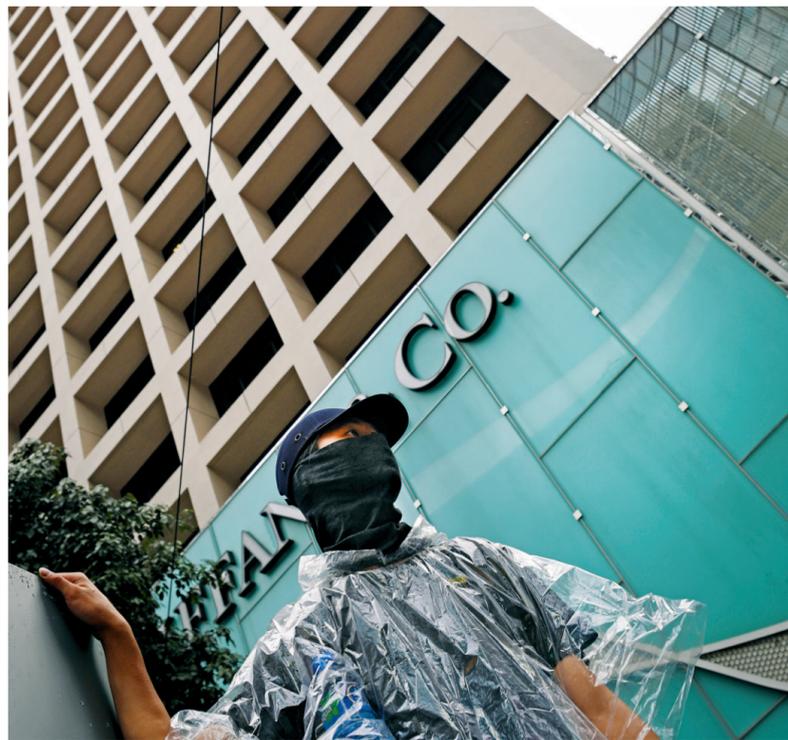
Unlike major brands that rely heavily on mainland tourists, independent retailers tend to have a bigger local customer base. And many of them, as Wong attests, are still willing to spend despite the hard times.

At a time like this, it is more important to go out and shop local

FASHION EXECUTIVE CATHERINE KU

"At a time like this, it is more important to go out and shop local," says fashion executive Catherine Ku. "Hong Kong is an economic hub – when we stop supporting our own businesses it becomes problematic."

A recent Saturday visit to newly opened K11 Musea luxury mall in Tsim Sha Tsui showed it was business as usual there. Families lining up to visit new boutiques such as the Moma and Kapok, another local lifestyle retailer, which recently opened a 2,800 sq ft flagship store there, including a shop-within-a-shop for French homewares brand Astier de Villatte.



A protester outside Tiffany and Co in Central, scene of much trouble since June. Photo: James Wendlinger

"Harbour City is dead but here it's crowded, not only because it's new but because most of the shoppers live in the area," said a Hong Kong-based consultant for luxury brands.

"Having local customers is the only way a brand can survive."

Over at prestigious Landmark Prince's in Central, flanked by Chloe and Chanel, is Tabla, an Indian-inspired lifestyle brand that launched in 1999.

Founded by local entrepreneur Tania Mohan, the boutique has survived tumultuous times including the 2008 financial crisis and the last major period of pro-democracy protest in Hong Kong: 2014's "umbrella movement", which saw major roads in Admiralty, Causeway Bay and Mong Kong occupied for 79 days.

"Even though we have a strong presence globally, people in Hong Kong have always been our biggest supporters," Mohan says.

"One change we've noticed since the protests began is people's shopping habits. Rather than go out during the weekends, they tend to do their shopping during the week when there is less disruption to transport."

Unlike international luxury brands, local retailers may not be able to rely on business in other markets to recoup their losses. But what they do have on their side is the ability to be agile and flexible.

"As a small company, we are a lean team with a lean process – everyone is empowered to make certain decisions," Wong of Vein says. "We have the advantage of higher sensitivity and are able to respond quickly to customer preferences to shifts in the market."

Zagury, meanwhile, is hedging her bets and is planning a number of store openings and extensions later this year, including the debut of athletic wear brand Sweaty Betty in the IFC mall in Central.

"We believe that in this kind of market, we have to be even more opportunistic," Zagury says.

"Being smaller, you can step in quicker if you spot an opportunity such as a good store location becoming available."

The *One Minute Sculpture*

Hot Dog Bus will be outside K11 Musea, Salisbury Rd, TST, until Oct 27. Hot dogs are sold from 12pm to 7pm daily