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In Search of a Soul Mate
Never mind the Web, these women hunt
dates
the old way: with intuition - and lots of
cash

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Compatibility has been reduced to an algorithm on Web sites like eHarmony and Perfectmatch. But computers lack a personal touch, so people in one of the most wired regions of the country are turning to an age-old, decidedly unscientific method to find partners: professional matchmaking.

Jill and Amber Kelleher

On this sunny day, Amber Kelleher-Andrews, co-owner of the boutique matchmaking firm in Sausalito, is reviewing 97 applications from across the country and will accept fewer than nine.

They're only as successful as their clients are matchable, Amber tells me over a lunch of endive salad and caprino at Poggio.

Translation: Kelleher International will take you only if you're accomplished, passionate, physically fit, free of addictions to tobacco, alcohol and drugs, clinically sane, marriage-minded, realistic about yourself and your prospective partner and in possession of a good attitude.

"If someone's rude, it's not worth it. If a woman's set in her ways, she'll never be satisfied. Why bother?" Amber says.

Amber lets me glance at two profiles in the database. The women look like models, but they're young doctors. Other matchmakers may provide clients with extra services, such as image consulting, but Amber tells me her customers are such A-list entrepreneurs, entertainers and socialites that she'd never match them with someone who needed such coaching.

"It would be a little off kilter," she says.

Amber herself doesn't need image consulting. The former actress has appeared on "Baywatch" and "Melrose Place," and comes off as both beautiful and accessible. "She doesn't have many weaknesses. Her strengths are intelligence and empathy," says Nico Andrews, Amber's husband of eight years and father of their three children. He adds that Amber is so intuitive that if she's not around when one of the children falls, she'll actually sense it and call home.

Amber got into matchmaking through her mother, Jill. The elder Kelleher got a job photographing clients for a singles company in Marin in 1980 and found she had a knack for matching people, so she opened Kelleher and Associates in 1986.

Amber studied anthropology at Santa Barbara City College, but left school early to pursue Hollywood dreams. During her 20s, she acted, earned a degree from the American Conservatory Theater and opened a branch of her mother's company in Beverly Hills. When she was planning her wedding, she became overwhelmed. The matchmaking business was soaring, so she quit acting.

Amber made a wise choice. The company says it's the largest privately owned matchmaking firm in the country. It employs 38 people and brings in \$5 million annually. The company plans to go global and triple its revenue in two years.

"Amber has a lot of business savvy," says Lori Picou, a national client liaison. "Amber's very focused."

Business is strong because they get it right. Amber tells me story after story that sounds just uncanny. One time, a woman told Jill that she dated frequently but didn't have chemistry. After listening for a while, Jill asked if she'd considered one particular man, Mr. X. The woman was in shock because he was her ex-husband. Another time, a CEO wanted a tall blond younger than 35. The match who kept popping into Amber's mind, however, was an older, petite brunet celebrity. When Amber called the CEO to tell him, the line went silent. He told Amber that of all the celebrities, he'd always imagined himself with just one - the petite brunet.

"It's not like we're psychic," Amber says. "My mother's interviewed 40,000 people. I've interviewed 20,000. Everyone wants the same thing. We get off the paper and read between the lines."

They're highly literate.

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