

Romance and the rich



Susie Ambrose is instantly striking; a slim blonde in a figure-hugging dress, she walks down the stairs of her office in Waterloo Place, St James's to meet me at reception. A female client is being "date coached" upstairs, she explains, so we slip next door to the bar at W'Sens and find a settee in a quiet corner.

Start at the beginning, I say, and Susie launches full tilt into the story of her life. She speaks rapidly, with lots of laughter, in an attractive East European accent that I realise will not translate to the page easily. (Think Russian, and it'll be close enough.)

"There are lots of people who have been detached from real world while building business," she says at one point, "and they don't know the trendy place, they don't know where is good to eat now."

Born in Ljubljana to an Austrian father and Jewish mother, Susie studied forensic psychology in Slovenia, working for a while with Yugoslav police on the drug route from Turkey through Macedonia, Bosnia and Serbia up through Slovenia into Western Europe.

But the situation in communist Yugoslavia was "bad", and Susie fled to England 15 years ago to pursue her interests in Freud, Jung and psychoanalysis. She arrived with few words of English, but then she says she just fell in love with London.

While she was at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Studies, she worked as a babysitter, looked after the elderly and did some work for Jewish families in London – anything to make ends meet. After the foundation year, she began working with addicts and alcoholics.

She met, and married, her husband, an English-born Greek Cypriot, and it was he who encouraged her to set up in private practice as a psychoanalyst. It was scary, Susie says, waving her hands, but also exciting.

"Five years ago," she remembers, "I worked with a guy in psychotherapy who was successful, single and good looking..."

"I was interested by the fact that he was single. It was really bugging me. He was so determined that there was no woman on the planet for him, that one day I suggested 'OK, why don't I try to help you?'"

Susie's client rejected a dating agency because it "lacked structure as a business", and he couldn't see how it would help him. So, Susie advertised on his behalf, and then interviewed the applicants – matching, as she does now, background, lifestyle, sexual attraction

and relationship goals. She quickly rejected seven out of 12, but she says she was pretty sure she had found Miss Right. And that's the one her client married.

Shortly afterwards, one of her client's wealthy friends rang and asked her to do the same thing for him. "It's not what I do," she protested. He insisted. And she did it again.

"I had to have this little meeting with myself," Susie says. "What do you want to do? Do you want to leave your private practice? Or do you want this?" The beauty of matchmaking, she says, is that it's caring work with a quick return. It takes years to wean addicts off drugs or alcohol, and then they have a depressing habit of slipping back into a life of abuse just when you think they're clean. But a successful matchmaker can change people's lives for the better quickly and often permanently. The feedback is much more positive.

On February 17, 2005, Susie founded Seventy Thirty, a matchmaking service aimed at high net-worth individuals.

Seventy Thirty is not a dating agency. It arranges for people to meet, but only after their intent to find a lifetime partner has been clearly identified, and the incoming applicant has been positively vetted by psychoanalysts. The aim is to make a match, not to provide a serial dating service.

The business is targeted at millionaires – because that's where the gap in the market was, and where the profit is. So, if you haven't made your first million, don't bother applying. You won't get in, and you probably wouldn't be able to afford it anyway – membership costs between £12,500 and £60,000.

It's a truism that, in a meritocracy, anybody can be what they want to be as long as they're prepared to put in the effort, and bear the cost.

But the cost for many high net-worth individuals is a social life so depleted that work becomes everything and social skills are lost or remain undeveloped. A successful City businessman's support systems are often in his business, and beyond that business he is vulnerable. On a date for the first time in years, he can feel almost phobically exposed.

Equally, the recently-widowed rich have difficulty connecting with other people after relationships that have often lasted decades. What do they talk about except their dead husbands, or the past? And the

very wealthy often have a fear of gold-diggers that can make them seem mean and withdrawn. Millionaires don't always want to find other millionaires as partners, but they don't want to be taken to the cleaners either.

In the end, money really can't buy you love. But Susie believes she and her team can help, by profiling – determining a client's needs – and headhunting.

The Seventy Thirty network is large, and growing. The word is out. Every week, there are 20 or 30 phone calls identifying potential partners, male and female. Those contacted by Seventy Thirty rarely hang up.

The seekers, Susie's clients, are encouraged to be specific. One might insist that she's looking for somebody from the financial services sector. Another, that his potential partner speaks French. It's fine, Susie says, they're not being picky, they're profiling.

"These are people looking for a proper, steady relationship, but they don't have time," Susie says. "They're cash rich, time poor. And they don't know how to do it, they just don't know how. They don't want to pick anybody up in bars. They don't want to date anybody from the business, and to be honest how many people do they meet who are actually single?"

Occasionally, Seventy Thirty will be approached by someone who Susie or one of the other psychoanalysts suspects is a womaniser. It's a challenge, she says. And she will only accept their application on the understanding that Seventy Thirty "works" with them first. Where appropriate or necessary, therapy is on offer – as is coaching and a makeover service. Software millionaires often need a little help with their dress sense, apparently.

So, where is it going, this booming business? Members who opt for the premium Black Star service can already get a matchmaker to work with them worldwide. And there are several other members – mostly male – based in New York. International expansion is on the cards, then.

But Susie also wants to provide a service for those who haven't quite made millionaire yet. She's looking to the internet for a solution.

Meanwhile, the core business is growing rapidly. In the first two weeks of this year, Susie says the company received 42 calls from millionaires interested in the service.

FIVE YEARS AGO, SLOVENIAN PSYCHOANALYST SUSIE AMBROSE HELPED A RICH AND ARISTOCRATIC FRIEND TO FIND THE WOMAN OF HIS DREAMS. TODAY, HE AND HIS WIFE ARE BRINGING UP THEIR CHILDREN IN A HAPPY MARRIAGE, AND SUSIE IS THE HEAD OF A MATCHMAKING BUSINESS WITH A GROWING LIST OF MILLIONAIRE CLIENTS. ERIK BROWN REPORTS



**MATCHMAKERS TO THE MILLIONAIRES:
(L TO R) PSYCHOLOGISTS
RACHEL MACLYNN, TRUDY
HILL & SUSIE AMBROSE**