

# profile

by Dustin Garrett Rhodes



## Beauty From the Inside Out:

### An Interview with Ginger Burr

*Ginger Burr is the founder of Total Image Consultants, a Boston-based firm that helps women of all ages uncover a style that inspires “confidence, well-being and joy.” With respect as their keynote, Ginger’s make-overs have been publicly featured through CNN and many other media outlets, and Ginger has won the accolades of clients and creative peers in the business world alike.*

*Ginger is also an active member and supporter of Friends of Animals, and a champion of our ultimate mission: to end animal exploitation. Ginger offers workshops, online courses and one-on-one consultations, while simultaneously championing vegan values and environmental awareness. We caught up with Ginger by telephone in October.*

**FoA: What inspired you to create Total Image Consultants?**

**Ginger:** Who would think that a music major who was very shy and retiring as a teenager would choose a career in fashion? I'm here to tell you it can happen! Although you wouldn't have known it to look at me then (keep in mind that I grew up in the 1970's), I always had an interest in the art of fashion design. I also knew I wanted to own my own business.

And I had no idea how to make that happen.

Not knowing what else to do—don't laugh—I went to modeling school and learned pretty much nothing useful (except that I'm too short to be a runway model), but I had a life-altering experience. There was a girl about fifteen years old in the class who was, by model industry standards, maybe fifteen pounds overweight. Nearly every day they commented on her weight and made her feel so terrible about herself that I vowed I would somehow find a career where I could empower women to feel good about who they are inside and out. Although it took me another eight years, I finally discovered image consulting and never looked back.

**FoA: This brings up the preoccupation of fashion magazines—maybe society's obsession in general—with making women feel that they aren't enough: not good enough, not pretty enough, not stylish enough, not thin enough. In the 22 years you've been running Total Image Consultants, have things changed? Or do your clients deal with the same struggles?**

**Ginger:** Our society is still obsessed with youth and thinness; so, in many respects, things haven't changed. What has changed, however, is that there is more of a backlash. Perhaps it is because the baby boomers are maturing or maybe it's just because I am, but I see women—those not in Hollywood, and, in particular, women over 40—less tolerant of being told what to wear and how to look.

That said, many are frustrated by the fashions they find in the stores which are often totally youth-oriented and so they retreat into wearing shapeless, uninspired clothing because they don't know what else to do. That's where I come in!

**FoA: What's a simple thing a person can do to, as you say, "learn to be kind to one's self"?**

**Ginger:** Women are bombarded by negative comments about their appearance and are expected to meet some ephemeral and unattainable standards of beauty. Who sets these ridiculous standards that make it easy for women to focus on what they don't like about their bodies? So many women are hopelessly lost when it comes to fashion and need help disentangling themselves from the preconceived notions of how they should dress. It is for this reason that I created my new fashion home study program "Who Taught You How to Dress?" I think it's true that when people feel hopeless, everyone suffers. When they feel good about themselves they are more inclined to help others.

**FoA: Essentially, you are a life-coach, stylist and therapist all wrapped up into one.**

**Ginger:** You've got it!

**FoA: On your business website, I noticed that you integrate vegan information and ideas seamlessly into the rest of the content on your site. What responses does that bring?**

**Ginger:** I have found, from those who talk to me about it (I'm sure there are those who just click off the site at the mere mention of veganism) that my clients either find veganism intriguing or totally ignore it. My experience with feminist activism has taught me not to confront those who have zero interest. It serves no purpose other than to entrench them further in their own limiting beliefs. I choose instead to respond to people who do not feel threat-

ened by the concept and are genuinely inquisitive. Then I can sense at least a smidgeon of hope that there is room for change and new ideas.

As you know, veganism is not something you pick up by osmosis. The powers that be don't want the information to be public knowledge so you really have to be actively looking for or at least open to it.

**FoA: How do you integrate this message into a face-to-face encounter?**

**Ginger:** In consultations with clients, I might hear, "Oh, I never wear non-leather shoes. They are all cheap-looking and uncomfortable." In response, I will point to my feet and say something like, "Times have changed. I never wear leather, and my feet don't hurt."

Or perhaps someone will say, "Do you find that cashmere holds up well?" And, I'll say, "I'm a vegan and never wear cashmere, so I really can't say." In each case, they can ignore me, or they can respond, opening the opportunity for a dialogue.

Sometimes, after perusing my website, a client will strike up a conversation, asking me why I became a vegan. I always start by telling them how appalled I was to learn of the direct connection between dairy and the veal industry. Nine times out of ten they look perplexed and ask for more information.

**FoA: Were you a vegan when you started your business, or did that come later?**

**Ginger:** I gave up eating red meat almost 30 years ago but, at that time, no one ever told me about veganism. Oh, how I wish they had! Believe it or not—it still amazes me!—it wasn't until just a little over 4 years ago that I learned, by doing extensive research, about animal suffering in agriculture. As a result, I went vegan pretty much overnight. And I'm not talking about just the food I eat; I stopped wearing all leather and wool at the same time.

**FoA: How has veganism transformed you as a person?**

**Ginger:** I think I have been seeking veganism for over 30 years but I just didn't know it. The second I learned about it I felt a very deep connection, a sense of relief and purpose. There was never any question in my mind or second thoughts about what I needed to do. There is absolutely no way I can justify making a purchase that supports animal suffering. I also knew I had to incorporate it into my business in order to feel like I was living and working with complete integrity. It took a bit longer to figure out the logistics—but not much!

**FoA: Did you find it challenging to meld your interest in helping women and helping non-human animals? Of course it makes perfect sense in theory, but real life is always more tricky...**

**Ginger:** For a split second, I thought: Wow, how am I going to be a vegan and an image consultant? Then: I'll find a way. I'll make it an adventure.

I hear too many people (some vegans included) saying, "Oh, it's so hard!" No! It's only hard if you decide it's hard. I chose to prove that being stylish and vegan are not mutually exclusive and decided that given the type of work I do I can make a real (cruelty-free) fashion statement!

**FoA: How does this play with the average client?**

**Ginger:** My average client is a woman between 40 and 60 years old. It is a population of people who generally choose to live meaningful, purpose-driven lives. I've been amazed by how many women—sure, it's not the majority, but it's more than I initially thought it would be—who are intrigued by or drawn to the concept of veganism and want to know more. I have a few clients who are well on their way to becoming vegan. Each time a client says something positive about changes she is making, I feel a sense of hope.

**FoA:** I'm guessing it's a lot more difficult to find good cosmetics that are also vegan.

**Ginger:** You're right. Vegan cosmetics are much harder to come by—but infinitely easier than even four years ago. I have done a massive amount of research looking for vegan cosmetics. The hardest to find are lipsticks (I'm not talking lip glosses that the 20-somethings wear; I'm talking real lipsticks) that do not contain carmine or lanolin and that actually stay on your lips for more than five seconds.

Lip and eye pencils and mascara are the other challenges. Most contain beeswax. Or isopropyl lanolate, which comes from sheep. There are companies, like Arbonne, which are vegan; but Arbonne is a multi-level marketing company. This means that for someone like me who just wants to sell the products and not recruit downline, there is very little profit. Urban Decay is another one that has quite a few vegan offerings but they have no interest in small companies who want to represent their product. I tried contacting them and got no response.

**FoA:** What are you working with now?

**Ginger:** I now carry Sevi Cosmetics (an incredible, organic cosmetic company) and Beauty Without Cruelty (a more traditional cosmetic company), and have a selection of products I am proud of. In fact, I recently did a “before and after” photo shoot for my website with some of my clients, and I used those two cosmetic lines almost exclusively to do the makeup.

**FoA:** What else takes extra care to find?

**Ginger:** It is challenging to find a stylish winter coat. Living in New England means cold, snowy winters. A warm coat is critical. There are faux shearling and faux fur coats, but to get something more traditional has not been easy.

I just learned of a new company called Vaute Couture ([www.vautecouture.com](http://www.vautecouture.com)) that has beautiful, warm vegan coats. As the demand increases we'll see more companies like this popping up.

**FoA:** What's next for Total Image Consultants?

**Ginger:** Oh, there's a lot on the horizon. I am working on a fourth tele-class in the series of vegan classes I started last spring. The working title for this one is “Are There Animals Lurking in Your Makeup Bag?” It will address animal ingredients in cosmetics and personal care products. This is an area that most people are totally unaware of; and, with a little guidance, this is an easy way to make a difference. In addition, my partner Marion and I are launching a vegan radio show in November.

**FoA:** And for people who don't live in your area, what resources do you recommend? Do you work with people long distance?

**Ginger:** Until recently, I have only been able to work with women who live in (or are willing to travel to) the Boston area. That has all changed. I spent this past year creating my new do-it-yourself, body image, self-esteem and style home study program mentioned earlier called “Who Taught You How to Dress?” This offers all women the opportunity to overcome the inner and outer obstacles that are keeping them from creating a wardrobe they love. I offer monthly tele-classes to support and encourage them in their journey, and the best thing is that they can live anywhere and use this program. I've had people purchasing it from New Zealand, South Africa and Germany as well as the United States.

Every woman deserves to look good and feel radiant. And yes, it's doable for everyone!

**FoA:** Thank you, Ginger. You are a wonderful voice for both humans and non-human animals. Thanks for your time.

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