

**Search for Low Fares Now.**

FROM:  TO:  DEPART:  RETURN:  GO

**Our Lowest Fare Guarantee**  
always on [continental.com](http://continental.com)



NYTimes.com > Fashion & Style

### Are You With Him? Why Yes, Want to Date Him?



Rahav Segov for The New York Times

Allison Frenkel, center, a paid "wingwoman," introduces her client Evan Rock to newfound friends at the Cabanas.

By **ELANA BERKOWITZ**  
Published: October 10, 2004

**D**ANIEL BLUMBERG, a 38-year-old filmmaker, arrived at a party on the roof of the Gansevoort hotel on a Thursday night with a young woman named Allison Frenkel. The two had met just a few minutes before, in front of the hotel in the meatpacking district, but after a peck on the cheek and a few pleasantries they were already familiar. So much so that halfway through their first drink they were circling the roof deck and discussing which women caught Mr. Blumberg's eye.

Ms. Frenkel discreetly tilted her chin toward a blonde in a white dress and asked, "Do you like her?"

Mr. Blumberg shook his head no. "Well, let's keep circulating," Ms. Frenkel said.

When he expressed no interest in the next woman she pointed to, a brunette in a preppy sweater, Ms. Frenkel shrugged. "He's the man, whatever he wants," she said. "It is not about me." Then Mr. Blumberg gestured toward the bar area. "What about that Kylie Minogue look-alike over there?" A moment later the couple headed over.

Ms. Frenkel was not on a date with Mr. Blumberg, in pursuit of a kinky threesome; she was on the clock. A 29-year-old graduate student, she is one of a dozen women who work for a New York-based Web site called [Wingwomen.com](http://Wingwomen.com), earning up to \$30 an hour to accompany single men to bars and help them chat up other women. The Web site's founder, Shane Forbes, a computer programmer, started it in December after realizing he had more success with women when he went to clubs with female friends. "Every time I was with them, I would meet women," he said.

The wingwoman is the latest twist on the wingman, that devoted male sidekick who helps a buddy pick up women at bars and clubs. Originally a "Top Gun" kind of term that referred to a pilot flying protectively behind his squadron leader, its more recent meaning entered popular culture around 1996 through the movie "Swingers," about two men road-tripping to Las Vegas, serving as each other's wingmen in attempted conquests.

More recently a commercial for Coors Light helped popularize the wingman, with its portrayal of a guy who is left talking to a dull female investment banker while his grinning pal grinds up against her beautiful friend on the dance floor. A male voice sings: "So buy her a beer. It's the reason you're here, mighty wingman. You're taking one for the team, so your buddy can live the dream."

Wingmen are typically close friends of the men they help, and — whether they accept their support role at the outset or have it thrust upon them — they are expected to suffer in the job. "You have to give up some happiness or comfort for the vision of your friend," said Jordan Carlos, a 25-year-old advertising copywriter who recently optioned a screenplay about an advertising executive turned professional wingman. "You always get roped into a conversation with the hot girl's annoying friends, which they always seem to have."

To be sure, not every wingman's duties weigh so heavily. At an East Village rooftop party on a recent Saturday night, Jeff O'Neill, 25, seemed pleased by the role. "I have had a golden wingman experience tonight," he said. "We were at a bar, and this girl accidentally spilled her beer on my shirt. I made a joke about it and introduced her and her friend to my two guy friends, and now all five of us are here."

Standing alone, surveying the two couples, he said: "I won't be happy till the job is done and they go home together. I want to be the best man."

But Mr. Forbes of [Wingwomen.com](http://Wingwomen.com) says the traditional wingman's effectiveness is in decline. "Women are used to guys and their wingmen hitting on them," he said. On his Web site, he argues that women "have developed reactive strategies to counteract the wingman's pickup mission." In response he sends women — hired on the basis of photographs, essays and interviews, and with no special training — to do what has long been a man's job. He said that he has had more than 200 customers, and that his wingwomen have a "conversion rate" of 65 percent, meaning clients end up with phone numbers.

Brian Patterson, 28, an investment banker, tried [Wingwomen.com](http://Wingwomen.com) twice, paying the \$50-an-hour fee, and said he was pleased with the results. On his second night out he collected several phone numbers and ended up dating one woman for six weeks.

At the Gansevoort rooftop party, Ms. Frenkel proved her skills, tirelessly approaching one woman after another on Mr. Blumberg's behalf. Her method was to strike up a conversation without identifying her true role, and she never used the same line twice. "Wow, is that an Armani dress?" she asked one woman. "I saw that in the store window and love it. It looks great." To a woman in finance, who said she was interested in focusing on fashion design, Ms. Frenkel said: "Oh, you're interested in switching careers? You should talk to Danny, he made the switch from business to film."

Within 45 minutes, Mr. Blumberg and Ms. Frenkel had spoken with three different women. Mr. Blumberg, who had been skeptical from the start — he agreed to accompany Ms. Frenkel at a reporter's request and was not a paying customer — took his successes in stride. When asked about the women he had met, he shrugged. "They are all nice and cute, but two were in insurance, and the other one is from New Jersey."

An hour later, as his evening with Ms. Frenkel was ending, he had spoken with a handful of other prospects and had been invited by a leggy Ukrainian model to join her gaggle of friends for drinks at Spice Market (which he regretfully declined in the interest of continuing his research). He was a convert. "There is emphatically no way I would have met so many women so quickly without Allie," he said.

Ms. Frenkel's success seemed due to factors beyond her gregariousness. Mr. Forbes said women like to compete and are "more attracted to men who have other women surrounding them because they want what they can't have."

More fundamentally, a wingwoman serves as an icebreaker, because, as Mr. Forbes put it, women see men with women as "having a seal of approval and being less hostile." Ms. Frenkel agreed, saying, "Women are so used to men hitting on them, they just turn the other way, but they will give me a chance."

Is Ms. Frenkel troubled by setting up her sisters, whom she never informs of her role?

"I'm purely an introduction tool," she said. "I am a service to help guys who have difficulty in approaching people, who don't want to shoot out another pickup line. I do not vouch for people, but people sometimes jump to that conclusion."

Mr. Patterson, the banker, said he never told the woman he dated for six weeks that they had met through a paid wingwoman. "It didn't really come up," he said. "Why would it? She never asked and I definitely didn't offer to explain."

After saying good night to Mr. Blumberg, Ms. Frenkel caught up with Bachelor No. 2, Evan Rock, a 25-year-old law school student who had also agreed to go out with a wingwoman for this article. Their evening began around 11:30 at the Cabanas, the open-air bar at the Maritime Hotel, where things did not start auspiciously. There were few prospects and Mr. Rock seemed uncertain. Twenty minutes ticked by as they reminisced about summer camps.

Then they decided to penetrate a tight clique of women decked out in gauzy tops, miniskirts and stilettos. Ms. Frenkel jumped into the middle of the conversation with a flimsy excuse about looking for acquaintances from work. The women, who work in fashion, opened their circle, and soon Mr. Rock was at its center, being peppered with questions.

In a corner of the Cabanas, Ms. Frenkel spotted the ultimate prize: Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen. She and Mr. Rock decided to go for it. But when Ms. Frenkel charged in their direction, the twins got up to leave. Flustered for the first time that evening, Ms. Frenkel trailed after them, asking lamely, "So, which one of you is Mary-Kate?" The twins barely broke stride.

Mr. Rock and his wingwoman moved on to Max Fish on the Lower East Side, a hipster-packed bar that is grimmer than the upscale spots where Ms. Frenkel normally works. They pushed their way into the crowd. Mr. Rock wondered if Ms. Frenkel would be too clean-cut to work here. Tight clutches of people stood around nursing beers and playing pool. With whispers and pantomime, Mr. Rock indicated the one woman he was interested in, an auburn-haired beauty who stood six feet tall in turquoise heels. She was leaning on the bar chatting with three men. Ms. Frenkel squared her shoulders and inched toward her quarry. "Is your drink as strong as mine?" she asked. The woman nodded. The two started talking.

Twenty minutes later Ms. Frenkel, exhausted, left the bar and folded herself into a cab. As the door closed behind her, Mr. Rock and his new auburn-haired friend stood with heads bent close together, clutching drinks that would not be drained until 3 a.m.

**Subscribe Today: Home Delivery of The Times from \$2.90/wk.**

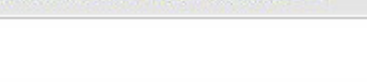
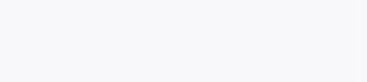
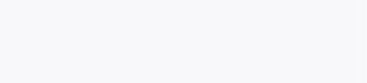
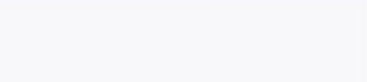
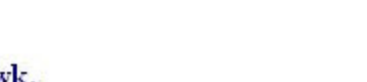
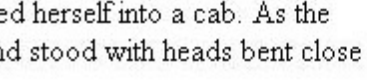
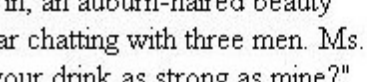
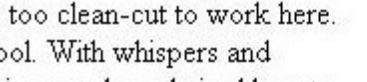
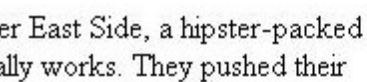
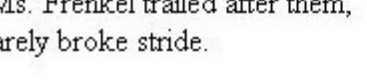
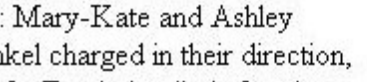
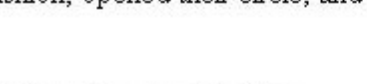
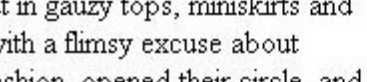
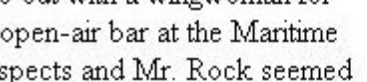
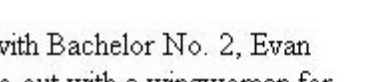
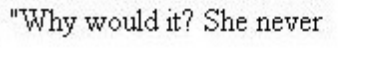
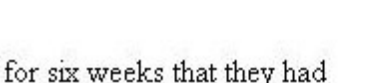
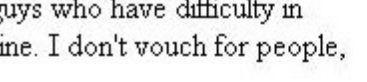
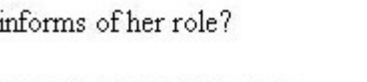
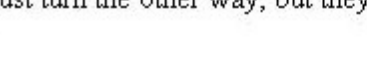
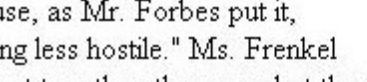
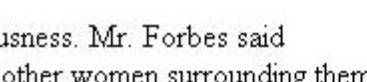
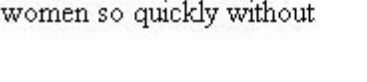
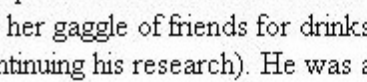
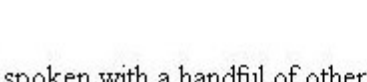
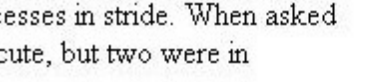
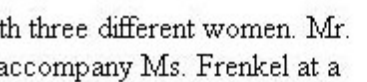
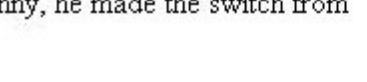
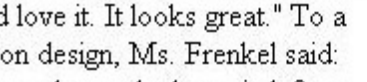
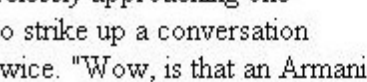
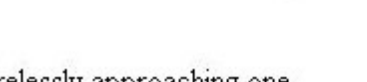
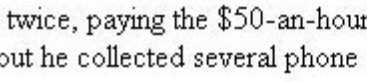
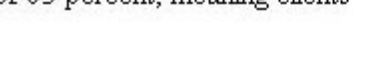
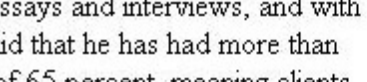
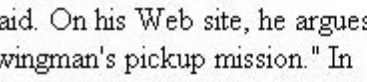
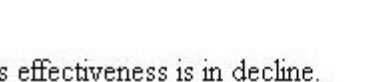
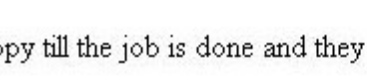
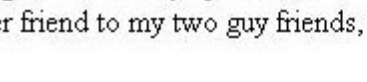
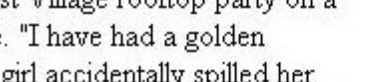
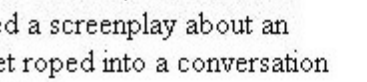
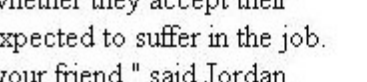
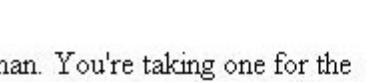
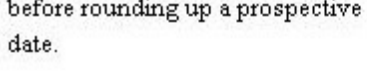
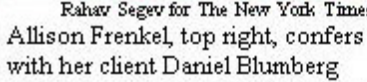
**ARTICLE TOOLS**

- E-Mail This Article
- Printer-Friendly Format
- Most E-Mailed Articles
- Reprints & Permissions

ARTICLE TOOLS | huckabees  
SPONSORED BY IN SELECT THEATERS NOW

**TIMES NEWS TRACKER**

Topics	Alerts
Bars	Create
Men	Create
New York City	Create
<a href="#">Create Your Own</a>	<a href="#">Manage</a>
<a href="#">Most Popular Alerts</a>	<a href="#">Take a Tour</a>
<a href="#">CLICK HERE TO SUBSCRIBE</a>	



Advertisement

**SONY**

Taking the concept of a PC to brave new heights.

MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

Click Here