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The Wealth Report

Robert Frank looks at the lives and culture of the wealthy.

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Farewell Jeeves, Hello Alice

By Robert Frank

Even though the wealthy are cutting back, there are some things they simply can't live without: like household staff.

Yet rather than employing the high-price armies of the boom times—the chef, maids, chauffeurs, gardeners, security guard, household managers, estate managers—the wealthy are combining the jobs. Jeeves and Mr. Belvedere are out. “Alice,” from the *Brady Bunch* is in.

“We’re getting a lot of requests from clients saying ‘What we want is someone who can do it all from cooking, cleaning, to paying the bills and watching the kids,’” said Steven Laitmon, co-founder of [The Calendar Group](#), a Connecticut staffing and consulting firm for wealthy households. “They want their own ‘Alice.’”

This may sound obvious—but who wouldn't love an Alice in their home?

Such requests mark a big shift from the runaway growth of the past decade, when the wealthy staffed their mansions with all manner of highly trained specialists and then found themselves overwhelmed by the management headaches, huge payrolls and occasionally poor, institution-like service. “People wanted to staff their homes like boutique hotels,” said Nathalie Laitmon, Calendar’s other founder. “That’s very different from a home.”

Today’s wealthy want a much smaller staff—preferably one person—that can make life simpler, not more complicated. Some are making the shift to save money. Others are doing it to project a lower-key image at a time of status-backlash.

The Laitmons said a Greenwich, Conn., client recently hired a chef who also could be their cleaning person, so the family wouldn't be seen by their peers as “the family with a private chef.”

The new all-in-one house staffer is called various things—family assistant, or the old term “household manager.” The Laitmons prefer “domestic assistant,” since it connotes someone who is hands-on but also BlackBerry savvy.

So what does an Alice cost these days? The Laitmons say the average salary for an Alice is anywhere from \$60,000 to \$80,000, but it can go even higher.

“What people are really looking for is a return to homespun caring and comfort,” Nathalie Laitmon says. “Alice represents a return to those values for them.”

What would you pay to have an “Alice” in your home?