

A Plus Buyer's Guide: Women's Wear

Every piece in your closet has a story. The cotton dress you bought in Saint-Tropez that summer you spent walking along the Plage de Pampelonne, silver sandals in your hand, watching the sunset every evening. Those jeans with the perfect wash that got soaked in a cloudburst when you walked down Broadway as you were coming home from a perfect date and couldn't help but laugh in the thunder. That faded sweatshirt, softer than down, that you've had for years and couldn't ever part with: a set of memories that can't be washed away. Those are your stories: the moments that belong to you, only you. But your clothes don't just have stories: they also let you tell stories to the people who see you. That you can wear a sundress and make it seem as impervious as steel...or as permeable as French Riviera sand. That you're confident enough to walk into any restaurant, any club, and past any velvet rope...or out of the world of anyone who takes you for granted for a single second. That you know what to hold onto, know what to keep...and what to let go of. That you know what matters to you.

You're going to be seen. You can't control that. You can control what others see so that you can tell the world whatever story you want.

Dresses:

The LBD

A Little Black Dress is iconic, timeless style. The LBD is a cornerstone of every woman's wardrobe, and as versatile as it is elegant. Worn with a piped blazer and kitten heels, it can be stylish office outfitting or streetwear, while at night, diamond drop earrings, a simple clutch, and the sound of your stilettos clicking on the sidewalk maximize its chic minimalism. Sleeveless, it's as captivating with a knee-length hem as it is as a slinky sheath. The unbroken lines of the shoulder and arm will make your arms look longer, more slender. Strapless LBDs look amazing in silk, while chiffon adds sheer, gauzy layers and intriguing details like belts and bows or startling one-shoulder designs. Jersey dresses cling, hugging every curve and contour. Have at least two LBDs: one sleeveless with straps, and one in a dramatically different length or--if you're daring--with cap or shoulder sleeves: they'll draw attention to the bustline and with a necklace or pendant, you'll set hearts aflutter.

Drinks, ladies?

Even at parties preceding the poshest dinners, cocktails are just props. They're liquid gems that catch the light and accessorize the real jewels in glittering short dresses, sleek satin gowns and tea length hems. Although cocktail parties are often formal affairs, a cocktail dress can--and should--still be fun. The right dress

will have envious and admiring eyes drinking up your presence from the moment you walk through the door.

Cocktail dresses are where you should feel most free to experiment with style. Flutter sleeves and ruching create a layering, draped effect that adds excitement to solid color silk and chiffon. Draped backs and cut-outs offer beguiling glimpses of bare flesh. Mesh and lace overlays create a seductive air: their diaphanous, delicate look hints at lingerie. Accessorize according to what's most bare: call attention to the length of your arms in a sleeveless dress by wearing bracelets and earrings: their presence will command the eye to trace the path between them. In an off-shoulder or cup sleeve dress, a simple pendant or a strand of pearls will call attention to your neck and bustline. If you wear your hair up, dangling earrings will frame your face and the curve of your neck and shoulders. A strand of pearls is always a sophisticated option, especially with a midnight blue or anthracite gown. When you're out for drinks, you'll be intoxicating.

Living in Paradise: Sundresses

For those late spring and long summer days--the days where the ocean air is warmed by the smell of coconut tanning oil, or the lake is perfectly still, or you're sitting with friends for brunch and ice-cold bellinis--nothing feels more at home in the soft heat and breeze than a sundress. Floral patterns in bright pastels were popularized in the 1960s by Lilly Pulitzer, whose name remains practically synonymous with summer. A Lilly dress is still a part of the classic summer ensemble. Cotton is the preferred fabric, but ivory or sand colored linen, matched with strappy sandals or wedges feels breezy and classically casual. For a cute, careless variation, try a shirtdress with an open button collar and drawstring waist. For something a little more street and a little less beach, a solid color a-line dress with contrasting belt looks great with a hat and oversized sunglasses. The sundress will add light and life wherever you go.

Swim where?

Poolside, lakeside, on deck, or wave-watching, you want to look your best when you're near the water. **Swimwear** isn't about having the "perfect" body. It's about demonstrating the confidence you have in your beauty and accentuating your best features. With swimwear, let this sink in: whatever you wear should be the best for you. That's what'll make waves. If you're self-conscious about curves and a big bust, try a one piece with a high neckline and supportive underwires...or a two piece with a higher cut bottom to elongate the body. A two piece with full cups offers more support than first appearances suggest: the straps provide different points of contact. If you want to show off, a plunging v-neck will boil water when you take a dip. If you're thicker through

your hips and legs, try a bottom with side ties or narrow sides and deep necklines to lengthen the appearance of the torso. If you've got a bit of a tummy, cut-out side one-pieces are sexy. High, foldable waistbands draw attention away from the waist as do two pieces with horizontal stripes and retro cuts. One-piece ruched swimsuits accomplish the same thing while adding a flattering texture. Petites can find fuller looks with tops with molded cups and under-padding, patterns, and a wider cut bottom on two-pieces. A bandeau with a contrasting bottom or retro pattern is a frisky and fun alternative to the boring bikinis that will surround you.

Shirts & Blouses

Every type of cotton used in blouse or shirt-making has its own characteristics and visual tactile appeal. Poplin and broadcloth are tightly woven and very dressy. Oxford has a coarser weave and is considered the most casual: it's often seen in button-downs and other informal shirts. Pinpoint is a combination of poplin and Oxford and is fine for daily workwear: a happy medium. Then there are silks. Wearing a silk blouse is like wearing a whisper. A dry-clean only whisper, but a whisper nonetheless. A split neck, wrap, or peasant-style blouse all look great with jeans, creating a flowy, relaxed look that's also achievable with a sleeveless blouse and shorts. A button up pairs perfectly with a pencil skirt and can be dressed up with a blazer for a more business-like effect or casualized with a light v-neck sweater or vest and sunglasses. Options are the best part of women's clothing. Ruffles, ribbons, sleeves, cuts, colors, collars, patterns, pockets: there is a universe of fabrics, textures, designs, and details that can be not only tried but personalized. Sheer chiffons that drape the shoulders while pressing attention to the neck, contrasting cuffs and collars, playful Peter Pans, every style of shirt and blouse represents another element, another voice in your story. Beauty loves to perplex: it thrives on paradox and intricacy. Just as a chef mixes sweet, sour, and salty elements to create complexity, so can you take contrasting elements and mix them to give depth and dexterity to your outfits. When a conservative cotton button up shirt meets a full, silk bubble skirt, it's not imbalance, it's polyphony. When you pair a sleeveless, tiered collar chiffon blouse with shorts and sandals, you merge dissonance into harmony. Beauty keeps the eye guessing, luring it to unexpected places. So should you.

The Other T-zone: T-shirts

The t-shirt sometimes gets a bad rap even though it can be a great wrap. Oversized and baggy, it can be more comfortable and carelessly sexy than any negligee. Fitted and with a simple, sharp graphic, they're a vital part of urban streetwear. They can also raise social consciousness and serve important causes: Marc Jacobs' "Protect the Skin You're In" tees were an instant hit in New York when they were first introduced, selling out at his Manhattan boutiques with the

proceeds going to the NYU Skin Cancer Institute. Graphically edgy AND socially concerned? *Hot*. Gold and silver foil prints are perennially popular: check out the cheeky designs by L.A. designer Brian Lichtenberg's BLTees. If graphics aren't your thing, a simple solid tee looks great and can be paired with just about anything. Hint: a slightly shorter sleeve will elongate the arms and torso and an oversized sleeveless tee with a scoop or mock turtleneck in a bold solid color looks fantastic with white jeans or capris.

Jackets

Blazers are a staple for women's wear. Lightweight wool for business wear can be worn in the steamy summer months and still stay comfortable. For casual wear, go for cotton, silk blends, and linen. Lightly padded shoulders slim the waist, as does buttoning only the middle button (on a two button, just button the top one). While notch or peak lapels are considered the most traditional, a shawl lapel over a scoop neck t-shirt is a lax look that easily transitions from office to happy hour. Long, narrow lapels slim and lengthen the torso. Wide lapels slim the waist and accentuate the shoulders. A dark blazer can be brightened with piping along the skirt hem and lapel edges: a light-hearted, fun look borrowing from the prep school uniforms of the 1960's. It works as well with jeans as with a skirt. Seersucker and unlined jackets look wonderful rumpled and show that you know when to take time for yourself. A maroon velvet blazer is great for year-round evening attire and paired with the right LBD can be fabulous. Try soft tweed and muted gray jackets with a crisp cotton henley in the fall for an equestrian look. A well-fitted tan trench is a must-have. The belt narrows the waist and super-wide lapels create an aura of mystery around the wearer. They'll also protect you against inconveniences like spring showers. Try not to go much lower than the knee with a trench. Waxed cotton jackets are also great protection against the elements and come in a variety of weights and styles. Pockets and belts create edgy, fashion-forward looks without being trendy, whereas the original olive versions with large pockets symbolize town and country elegance and cosmopolitan style. Even more so than shirts, jackets alter the appearance of physical proportion. A short jacket will lengthen the legs. A blazer with a longer skirt--the part of the jacket's body that extends from the waist area--will make the upper body seem longer and leaner. Belted waists and light shoulder padding create curves and angles. Double-breasted casual coats in fleece or wool blends, especially with fur cuffs and collars, are practically a necessity in snowy regions. Sporting jackets--windbreakers, soft and hard shells, parkas etc.--usually come in solid dark colors or combinations of bright neons. Detachable hoods and zip pockets are desirable, as are removable liners for warmth. As for leather jackets, length usually determines the level of formality. Short, motorcycle jackets are the most casual: wear a lethal lipstick to heighten the effect. Full or 3/4 length jackets are less casual, especially with buttons, but they're still a strong, but relaxed, choice.

Good Jeans

Skinny, fitted, dark-washed jeans have been *de rigueur* for the last few years, but other fits are re-emerging as less emphatically narrow options. Boyfriend, or relaxed, jeans are everything that skinny jeans aren't. They sit higher on the waist than skinny jeans and have straight, rather than tapered, legs. There's a certain unpretentious authenticity found in loose denim that feels as good as it looks. It's not slouchy, it's laid-back. Like straight-leg jeans, boyfriend jeans look best with a very casual shoe: flats or low sandals work well. Since they're so casual, they look great with a lighter dye or distressed wash. For wedges or heels, try a stretch or regular boot cut with a slight flare. Nothing pairs better with tall boots than skinny jeans since they're so easy to tuck in and mold perfectly to the leg. Skinny jeans typically have a low rise, which lengthens the upper body, but if you already have a long torso, go for a slightly higher rise. And remember to wear low rise underwear with low-riders. Big seat pockets are flattering for every shape and small pockets emphasize curves. Use these details for maximum jeanetic expression.