

For casual wear, there's the Oliver Pease 100 percent cotton washed denim stripped overalls (\$76), pull-on sweatshirt (\$60) and matching jacket (\$90) at Lady Madonna.



STEVE CANTRELL/staff photographer

# Baby chic: Looking your best

By Rebecca Haynes  
staff writer

Being pregnant no longer means you have to look frumpy. And if you've got money to spend, the selection of high-fashion maternity wear is large enough to keep you looking like you just stepped off of the fashion pages the whole nine months.

"The fabric market kind of dictates what will be shown, but generally whatever the regular lines are showing appears in maternity as well," said Lisa Joseph of Birmingham's Lady Madonna maternity boutique. "There's nothing really unique with maternity anymore, except for the fact that the clothes are made to accommodate a growing tummy."

"We have short skirts, long skirts and we use belts and sashes to accessorize."

Joseph recalled one couple who came into the store. "I remember that the husband was looking around and he said to his wife the only thing she had to show off was her legs, so she might as well," she said. "Then they bought a couple of mini skirts."

Most of the smaller boutiques, such as Lady Madonna, 325 S. Woodward, and West Bloomfield's Expecting the Best, 6907 Orchard Lake Road, operate on a philosophy of personal service.

"WE TRY TO build a good rapport with our customers, and our company really believes that you should dress them from the inside out," said Linda Tucker of Expecting the Best. "We're all trained to be knowledgeable about our products and to know what's out there."

"We have to be teachers, not just sales people." Joseph said the Lady Madonna philosophy is to always let the customer know they're there and ready and willing to help, if needed.

"We love to work with our customers and find out what types of things they do so we can help them pick the clothes they'll need," Joseph said. "Our customers really run the gamut — from people who have very conservative tastes to people who like things that are far out."

"After a while you get to know the customer and you can lead them right to the things you know they're going to like."

Tucker said she likes to look at her store as one-stop shopping.

"All of our salespeople take classes on how to fit bras, which is really sort of a lost art, and we stock a large selection of undergarments and lingerie," she said. "We also have a community dressing room that the women seem to like. I think it helps them expand their ideas of what they might wear because they see more things on other pregnant women."

Large, oversize tops and skinny skirts are the most flattering for a ballooning tummy, both Joseph and Tucker agreed.

"Shoulder pads are an absolute must," Joseph said. "They help to put everything in proportion."

The amount of money you need to spend depends on your lifestyle.

"DRESSES CAN be more economical because you can dress them up or down and get more wear out of them," Joseph said. "If you need to get evening clothes it can get expensive and the same with a lot of career wear."

"We do have some hard-line suits but we always try to soften them up because the corporate women seem to be wearing more feminine things."

Both Expecting the Best and Lady Madonna also operate outlet stores in the area. Each carries some of the same items the smaller boutique features, as well as a large variety of maternity wear at moderate and lower prices. Maternity Ltd., associated with Expecting the Best, is in Westland's West Ridge Shopping Center on Warren. The Lady Madonna outlet is at 3019 Orchard Lake Road in the Orchard Place Plaza, Farmington Hills.

Although some maternity styles still feature panels, more and more the clothes are being made the same way as regular fashions.

"We have jeans with zippers and buttons," Joseph said. "We usually recommend that a woman buys two pairs of jeans, one pair smaller and one pair a little larger. It's virtually impossible to buy one thing that's going to fit you the whole pregnancy."

Knit pants are still popular and Joseph said Lady Madonna has ordered a lot of corduroy since it's been coming back for regular wear. Slip dresses are also popular because women don't always like to wear a lot of material around the waist.

THE JAPANESE Weekend line takes off on this philosophy. Designed by a dancer, all of the waistbands go underneath the tummy, lending support.

"We sell a lot of that line," Tucker said. "We also have a large selection of very dressy dresses and we have some silk tie-dyes that are all hand done and one-of-a-kind. All of our acid-washed denim sell very well too."



STEVE CANTRELL/staff photographer

Lady Madonna calls it the taxi cab group — 100 percent cotton knits. On the left, it's a polka dot slim skirt (\$48) paired up with a reversible sweatshirt (\$74) and striped jacket (\$90). On the right, it's a gray jumpsuit (\$120) with a gold turtleneck (\$46).



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

Career dressing for the mother-to-be may call for a black and red two-piece Channell dress (\$154), designed for Expecting the Best.



Steve Cantrell/staff photographer

For the work day, the mother-to-be can wear Lady Madonna's two-piece outfit with faux vest in antique gold sand-washed silk (\$300), topped off with a purple scarf.