



Halston created a slim look that you can move in. His signature suit comes in charcoal gray flannel, and features his new elliptical sleeve, dirndl skirt, and leather bow. Renaissance World of Shops.

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Suit yourself

"I've had people stop me in the hallway to ask, 'What am I going to wear this fall?' A suit, of course, is my reply."

The speaker is Madelyn Coe, long Detroit's first lady of fashion, who is executive vice president of the Renaissance Retail Shops.

What is a suit this year?
"There are lots of variations on the theme," responded Ms. Coe. "All the suits are not skinny. The designers know that people are people. They don't all look like those mannequins in fashion photographs who make you think you are supposed to be 5 feet 8 inches tall and weigh 110 pounds."

"But," cautioned Ms. Coe, "be careful of the shape you pick in a suit. For example, in the Courreges' collection, he has narrowed his skirts down but they are tucked or pleated a little so they don't grab you under the seat."

"Halston also created a slim look but a look you can move in," she explained. "The body is balanced by the shape of the suit. When you widen the shoulder, and pull the waist in, you minimize what's below," she said. "That is one of the things that makes every woman suitable."

Many of the new suits feature the short jacket which is more becoming to most women, she said. "But, the jacket that ends at the hip is much more flattering to everyone."

Good designer collections are very cognizant of the human beings who are going to wear them, said Ms. Coe. They recognize that the great American credo is to look thin, she said.

"But there is a suit for everyone — even for people who are not running around exercising or starving to death."

THE NEW proportion of suits — wider at the top, narrowing down in the skirt — has caused the skirt length to creep up. "If it is long, it looks just plain dowdy. The focus is on the legs. Just below the knee is the fashionable length," she said, "but do wear it where it looks best on you."

"Modern, contemporary and understated at the same time best describes the season's look," said Ms. Coe. "I always like to wear my clothes, I don't want them to wear me. That is the kind of understated dressing that is coming around."

"True investment dressing, she said, reflects a look of sophisticated elegance and understatement.

"For example," she said, "with a good flannel suit, you can build an entire wardrobe by just adding pieces."

"I will wear a pair of beautiful black velvet pants, a white silk stock tie shirt, pearls and my grey flannel suit jacket for evening this fall," she said.

The antithesis of the understated daytime look happens at night, said Ms. Coe. "Then you can play drop dead chic but the look is not costumey. It is more studied and planned — kind of nifty attractive and more glamorous."

"One of the most fascinating evening contrasts to me was in the Halston collection. He dressed two models, teaming one in a pair of black velvet trousers with a satin stock tie shirt, loaded with pearls and topped it with a grey flannel jacket. He sent her out on the runway with a companion model dressed in his all-over sequined outfit."

Choices are plentiful this fall, said Ms. Coe. "I think we have all come to understand people so what has emerged is that you can be an individual within the frame work of fashion."

— Rustie Shand

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