



SECTION L SATURDAY, AUGUST 30, 2008

GLOBEANDMAIL.COM

Globe Life Style

Dressing for the office this fall is easier than ever, thanks to classic staples like jackets and pencil skirts that take their cues from your funkiest sportswear. Comfortable cuts in chic fabrics work everywhere, **Amy Verner** writes

Beyond the suit

Wilfred peach blouse \$115 at Aritzia (www.aritzia.com). Hugo Boss skirt, \$475 at Finishing Touches (www.ftouches.com). Repeat sweater jacket, \$490 at Finishing Touches. High Fashion Handbags fold-over purse, \$155 at Capezio (www.capezioshoes.ca). Tortoise shell pumps, \$310 at Cole Haan (www.colehaan.com).

The only upside to the end of summer is that everyone gets into a headspace of newness.

Take work wear: For women, traditional three-button blazers no longer look new. Which is not to say that they have disappeared from the retail racks; they just don't feel as relevant as the alternatives.

This dovetails with evolving expectations about what constitutes an appropriate work wardrobe. For instance, take the masculine-inspired power suits so popular for decades and add the desire to be comfortable throughout the day.

» SEE 'WORK' PAGE 5



Arkis Jacket, \$1,550 at The Bay (www.hbc.com). Gunex pants, \$695 at Nicolas Women. Tevrow and Chase blouse, \$249 through www.tevrowchase.com. Stuart Weitzman studded pump, \$315 at Ron White Shoes. Brown fold over purse, \$160 at the Gap (www.gap.com). Atlas watch, \$2,400 at Tiffany.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEY HUTCHESON FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL; FASHION DIRECTION BY AMY VERNER; WARDROBE STYLING BY CLAIRE MURRAY (JUDY INC.); HAIR AND MAKEUP BY DAVID GOVEIA (THE ARTIST GROUP). SHOT ON LOCATION AT THE CBC.

Then, mix in the influence of the hyper feminine looks worn by the secretaries on TV's smash hit *Mad Men* and top with a sprinkling of high fashion, you've got an utterly confused and complicated outfit.

But finding the right new pieces that do double duty for the office and life outside of it simply means thinking beyond the suit.

"Many consumers find jackets restricting," said HBC's fashion director Suzanne Timmins in an e-mail, while also pointing out that there will always be a market for super sculpted suits. "There are many hybrid options that are comfy while still retaining that put-together look."

Knitwear is the primary problem solver. Options ranging from dresses to long vests plus greater emphasis on shape and detailing have put the sweater set into early retirement.

"Knitwear has become so important and it's steadily increasing," says Jennifer Wells whose label, Line, consists of sweaters and leathers that she designs with long-time Toronto pal John Muscat.

Look for styles that mimic jackets or have an outerwear appearance thanks to collars, button fronts and heavier weights.

"We doubled our cardigans this year compared to our traditional suiting jackets," says Pat Kline, a co-owner of Finishing Touches, a Toronto boutique that caters to professional women. Even the jackets, she adds, are treated as separates and are designed to feel as wearable as knits. "They are more relaxed and comfortable but also edgy."

Since 2008 is the year of the hoodie, there's nothing wrong with wearing one that is luxe without being loud to work. Think three-ply cashmere, which is widely considered the gold standard. Even cashmere blends take cotton to the next level.

"The hoodie is not a sportswear item any more," says Wells, who notes most hoods aren't even functional. "In the past, you got the feeling that

they were for the gym or Saturday schlepping and now I think they've become a fashion accessory."

Bear in mind that a work-worthy hoodie should stick to a conservative colour palette. Shades of grey mixed with muted pastels channel Marc Jacobs and feel fresher this fall than basic black. Wells says Line never goes too bold on top because the pieces have to relate back to the bottoms that shoppers already have in their closets.

Indeed, you will feel less compelled to shop for pants and skirts if tops have been updated, mostly because well-fitting bottoms can be tougher to find and are less visible behind a desk. New shoes, on the other hand, are worth pursuing. Flat boots and heels with cushioning are inching closer to *Lipstick Jungle* sexy: equal parts function and fashion.

The popularity of *Mad Men* has brought renewed interest in looking womanly, but to borrow too directly from office manager Joan Holloway's attire would be akin to showing up in costume. The trick is to incorporate fabrics that feel more contemporary. Pair a ruffled blouse with a windbreaker-weight zip jacket.

Speaking of zippers, they're popular for a reason. On a jacket, they become the fastest possible path from sloppy to smart.

And easy answers are what women ultimately want when shopping for work fashion, which, at this time of year, causes the same anxiety as buying back-to-school clothes. Just take comfort in the fact that you are not being graded.



French Connection dress, \$78 at Aritzia. Line grey and black knit hoodie, \$249 through www.lineknitwear.com. Cole Haan patent boots, \$420 at Ron White Shoes (www.ronwhite.ca). Filodoro tights, \$6.95 through www.filodoro.com. Marc Jacobs watch bracelet, \$240 at Holt Renfrew (www.holtrenfrew.com).