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Office to party wear

Keep these clever tricks in mind

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As if buying gifts and planning menus wasn't enough stress, dressing up for holiday parties can throw a whole other wrench in your otherwise well-laid plans. With many events taking place after work hours, women are looking for solutions that won't have them lining up for the bathroom stalls to change outfits once the clock strikes five.

"What I've been finding is that people are not buying for the holiday season," says Erin Nadler, owner of Toronto-based fashion consulting business Better Styled. "What's been happening is somebody taking, say, a basic dress, throwing a jacket over it for the office, then taking extra pieces to go to a party or something after work. So you need to have pieces that are pretty easy to mix and match."

Nadler, who offers clients specific fashion advice and carries clothing that will work for different body types, is seeing a lot of the feminine trends so popular this fall carry through to the holiday season.

"If you want to wear a dress, then the easiest thing to do is just add accessories, like a belt, and change the shoes. You're also seeing blouses that have details and feminine twists - a satin blouse with rosettes, or a

boho style with embellishments - to go underneath suits. All of this is stuff you could bring to the office with you, just to change it up."

Noting that many office parties aren't very fancy, particularly for companies with a more casual dress code, Nadler is a proponent of jeans that can almost double as slacks.

"Dark denim is always the best because it looks dressier. If a skinny jean is your thing, then wear it with a great boot," she counsels. "My preference is the wide to straight, dark leg, which can be worn with a great dressy heel. I think boots tucked in is fabulous for everyday, but it's not necessarily as sleek as something that looks more like a pant and less like a jean."

As for colours, the usual holiday tones are all over stores right now - tons of gold, winter white, red and green. But designers have taken to the trends as well, embracing fur and leather materials and bib necklaces that can complete an outfit.

"But don't overdo it - do it really simply," counsels Nadler. "If you're going to wear a big chunky necklace, pair it with a thin belt that's more subtle; if you're doing to wear something that's more classic, like pearls, maybe you'd introduce a funky belt as contrast."

For all her love of fashion and advice, Nadler recognizes that not everyone is enthused about getting dolled up this season. For those women used to the corporate uniform of suits, she offers some easy solutions.

"You could wear the white blouse of the classic suit and add a funky little cardigan, or switch up the blouse for a fabulous satin shirt. But the easiest thing to do, even if you're wearing a full black suit, is just add a funky necklace and change the shoe. Just adjust the look."

And above all else, make sure this isn't a one-time only piece. Make your clothing worth the money you spend on it.

"Think about the versatility of the pieces before you invest in something, because you want to be able to keep wearing it," Nadler says. "Maybe save it for the holiday season and then introduce it, but definitely think about how you're going to mix and match it throughout the year."

Turning last year's clothes into this year's wardrobe

Not everyone is inclined toward getting a whole new set of duds for the holidays, so why not try to make the best of what you have? Jennifer Baird, Chief Operation Officer of Stitch It, an alteration company that has outlets across Canada, offered some tips on bringing older clothes from the back of the closet and letting them out to party again.

For skirts: "The most common problem here is the fit around the waist," says Baird. "You want to make sure it is sitting at the proper spot that the garment was designed for." With an A-line skirt, for example, there can be bunching or fabric on the sides if the fit isn't right, so an alternation can take that in to smooth it out and fit it to the body.

For dresses: "Dresses can have different issues, but a common one is not fitting around the bust," explains Baird. "Another is straps - if they're constantly falling off your shoulders, it's going to drive you crazy." For the bust area, darts can be inserted for a snug fit, while a strap adjustment is an easy change to make. As Baird points out, this can all be done in one day at a Stitch It location.

For pants: "The biggest thing with pants is updating them," says Baird. "Styles for pants tend to change quite often, so it's great to be able to update them for the season. We can make a huge transformation - right now, pants are slimmer, so you can taper them and if necessary, shorten them." But it's not just cutting off length that is possible - Baird points out that most pants have enough fabric to find another inch on the end for those who are taller.

And the best news for updaters? Prices start as low as \$8 for alterations, so it's not a huge investment at all. "To have something fit you properly makes you feel that much more gorgeous," says Baird.

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