the ABC's of Personal STYLE

by Ginger Burr, AICI, CIP
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Whether it’s the “dynasty” shoulder pad era, the never-ending confusion of business casual, or the low-rise pant controversy, Ginger has helped women navigate through (sometimes completely ignoring!) the styles of the season and feel good about how they look. Your image is about representing the best of you (not making designers happy). Use these tips to get started (you’ll find more at http://www.totalimageconsultants.com/subscribe.shtml).

In 1987, Ginger launched her own company, Total Image Consultants, with the simple credo that a dynamic personal and professional image could be created without having to relinquish personal style or comfort. Today, Ginger offers private consultations and remarkable makeovers for women, brides-to-be and transgender clients. Ginger also directs corporate seminars and community education programs for some of Boston's most prestigious organizations including Harvard Law School and Fidelity Investments.

A notable speaker and leader in the field of fashion and style, Ginger's adroit understanding of beauty trends and fashion image has been celebrated by The Boston Globe, Women's Health Magazine, cnn.com, ABCNews.com, Elegant Wedding Magazine, Fox TV News and WHDH Television's Chronicle. She also recently launched her new body image, self-esteem, and style home study program called “Who Taught You How to Dress?”

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Are you frequently overwhelmed by all the decisions you need to make when shopping for clothes or even when you get dressed every morning? Do you feel like it makes you weary and keeps you stuck? Ahhhh, that’s what I thought (I hear it all the time!). Everyone wants to look good. The problem is that many women feel lost and frustrated when it comes to putting together a wardrobe they love…so they just don’t!

Let’s remedy that by breaking it down into three steps--the ABC’s, if you will, of personal style. This will make it easier for you to break that stranglehold that keeps you stuck so can get started (and have fun doing it!).

A - Accessorize

While this might not be your very first step in creating a wardrobe, it is extremely important in the scheme of things, and, to be honest, I have been known to build an entire outfit around a handbag or necklace I think is beautiful. Never underestimate the power of fabulous accessories.

Have you ever watched “What Not to Wear?” If so, you know that not only do they spend time helping each woman accessorize every outfit, but they regularly watch the women struggle when left on their own to deal with this aspect of dressing. While we could spend all day talking about it, let’s address two of the most important components of successful accessorizing to get you started (or to use as a guide to evaluate what you already have):
1. **Handbags**

While I know not everyone loves handbags the way I do, it is still true that one handbag will not take you everywhere. Be sure you have at least three: a basic neutral handbag, a fun handbag, and a pretty evening bag.

- **BASIC:** Your basic, every day handbag will need to be:
  - In the **neutral color** you wear most often (depending on your wardrobe, you might need one for spring/summer and one for fall/winter),
  - A **reasonable size** so you can fit what you need in it (but not too big – you can leave the kitchen sink at home). If you are not someone who has a whole wardrobe of handbags, be careful about getting a basic bag that is too trendy (too big, small, or with too much hardware or doo-dads), or you will have to replace it every year.
  - **Well maintained.** We tend to neglect our every day bag and not notice when it gets worn. Give it a once over with a fresh pair of eyes every few months to be sure it is still in good repair.

- **FUN:** Your fun handbag is meant to be just that…fun. To make the most of it, buy it in a color you love and that you wear often. It can have a little hint of trendiness so you feel current and chic when you use it. Be sure it makes you smile before you buy it! Take it home and try it on with a few outfits to be sure you still love it. If not, return it and keep looking.

- **EVENING:** If you only have one evening bag, make it fabulous! Black is usually safe but be sure it has some pizzazz. For something different, try one in a metallic that will go with everything or maybe something with a touch of glitz or a fabulous color!
Examples:

Crystal Clutch – www.nordstrom.com

Jessica McClintock – www.nordstrom.com

2. Jewelry

Oh, you can have so much fun here! That said, it is often an area that overwhelms women when they are starting from scratch—or if they have accumulated so much that they don’t know what to do with it. You want your jewelry to reflect your coloring, personality and lifestyle. So, let’s simplify it with a few guidelines to help you:

- **Find one necklace that you can wear with multiple outfits.** It’s kind of like your “when in doubt necklace” because it goes with so much! Generally, it is in either gold or silver but it could be in a neutral bead as well. (Note: Avoid single strand thin gold or silver chains unless you are planning to wear many (that means at least more than two) together to give it some distinction – but even then, it is rarely the best choice.)
• You can **choose a short or long necklace** (often long has the added versatility of being able to be doubled and worn short). If you choose a short necklace you want to be sure to find your best length.

• **What length is right?** Measure from your hairline to your chin (this is always 8 inches or less) – or, if you wear bangs, measure from the bottom of your bangs down to your chin. Then starting at your chin, measure down that same distance so the point will fall somewhere around your breast bone (the bump in the middle of your chest). When in doubt, this is your most flattering length.

• While fine jewelry is lovely, often **bridge (semi-precious stones) or costume jewelry** is your best bet for a necklace that has enough impact to make a statement. Not only do you want it to be versatile – you also want it to be fun and reflect your personality.

Here are a few examples of fun signature necklaces:

This necklace is from Jewelry by Karel (kmhalaby@aol.com)
This necklace can be found at www.bessheitner.com

This necklace (or similar ones) can be found at www.liasophia.com

You can see that each necklace has a different flavor. No two signature necklaces are alike. Only you can decide what works for you and makes you smile!

Bra

Obviously, I am not mincing any words here! What you wear under your clothes is critical to a great looking wardrobe. How your clothes fit is dependent upon a good foundation (proper undergarments), and so many women (it’s a huge
percentage!) are wearing bras that do not fit them well and do not give them the support or coverage they need.

Have you ever gone shopping for clothing and, as you try something on, you scowl at yourself in the mirror? Somehow, the outfit didn’t look like that on the mannequin, you mutter. What’s wrong? Then, out of the blue, a saleswoman runs over, grabs your bra straps (with your permission, of course), and pulls. (This really does happen on occasion!) Miraculously, the garment takes on new shape. Darts fall at the right place, sleeve length feels better, your waist seems more pronounced… What just happened?

Since our undergarments are not seen by the general public, we have a tendency to forget about them or, at the very least, to relegate them to the realm of the invisible. Sometimes it takes undressing in one of those group dressing rooms where, as women we tend to compare ourselves mercilessly to every other woman in the room, or a motherly saleswoman at your favorite store to point out that your undergarments could use a little lift, literally! What’s a girl to do?

Evaluate your undergarments regularly and see what needs replacing. This could be yearly if you have only a few and put them in the dryer or longer if you handle them more delicately. Then, what? I highly recommend professional help if you have never had it. (Go somewhere where they specialize in fit and not somewhere where they’ve been handed a measuring tape after 10 minutes of training!)

Try one of these resources (or the equivalent in your area if these are not anywhere near you):

- www.myintimacy.com (stores in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Miami, New York, San Diego)
- www.nightanddaylingerie.com (stores in Andover and Newburyport, MA)
- www.ladygrace.com (stores in MA, ME, NH)

If all else fails, I highly recommend: “The Lingerie Book” by Rebecca Apsan and Sarah Stark.
Of course, finding a bra that fits properly is only one part of the equation. You also want to be aware of:

- **VPL** – Visible Panty Lines – (there are many solutions out there)

- **Smooth Fit** – With clothing being more form fitting these days, many women are (or might want to be if they are not already) cognizant of how revealing a tighter top or bottom is. Sometimes it is helpful to wear a body shaper designed for the part of your body you want to smooth. Find every imaginable style at [www.spanx.com](http://www.spanx.com).

**Color**

Few things have such an immediate impact on how you look as the colors you choose to wear. In fact, other than having a great hairstyle, the colors you wear can be your most effective styling tool.

Where do you start? How do you know what to choose and how much color to wear? It’s more than saying red looks good on me. What shade of red? Primary red? Or, perhaps a red that is closer to raspberry, russett, magenta or burgundy? How do you choose?

1. **Look in the mirror.** What color is your hair, your skin, your eyes? Replay those colors in your wardrobe. One of the most approachable looks you can wear is to repeat your natural colors. In other words, wear an outfit that includes the color of your hair and eyes or your skin and the red tone in your cheeks and lips. It is a very elegant and flattering look, and people will feel drawn to you.

2. **Who are you?** Are you outgoing, energetic, and playful, or serene, introspective, and gentle? Your personality affects the intensity (bright vs. quiet) of the colors you wear. A friend of mine is a petite blond with brown eyes and translucent ivory skin. Her coloring alone dictates soft, understated
colors. But, let her loose for a few minutes and you know you are dealing with a fireball. If the colors she wears do not reflect some of this intensity, her unexpected energy will terrify (or to put it more delicately, will overwhelm) people when she first meets them. The colors she wears needs to correspond to her personality as well as to her natural coloring.

3. **Walk.** How you move affects your color, too. Do you have bounce in your step or is your gait smooth and effortless? The former might indicate that your colors have a lively tone while the latter might require more sophistication. One is not better than the other, just different.

4. **Speak.** Do you have a lilting laugh or a deep resonant voice? Are you soft spoken or highly animated when you speak? Allow the colors you wear to reflect these subtle personality features. For example: if your coloring is deep and rich and your voice is light and airy, you’ll want to add softness and feminine touches to your outfit, especially around your face.

The colors you wear speak volumes and work to your advantage when they are in sync with who you are. The next time you get dressed, look in the mirror. Reflect on what you see. Walk towards your image, smile, speak to yourself. Does it work or is something missing or off kilter? Perhaps you need to add bright earrings to bring focus to the whites of your eyes. Maybe you want to change your pants from black to navy or camel to soften everything? Play, experiment, and see what happens.

**Learn Your ABC’s**

If this is all new to you, choose just one aspect to work on to begin with. It really does not matter which order you do it in as long as you eventually address each element of the ABC’s of personal style. Breaking it down into smaller pieces makes it manageable and doable. Explore each style piece until it feels just right – ask for help where needed. Then keep going. Your wardrobe will transform before your eyes, and you’ll look and feel:

**Amazing, Beautiful and Confident!**
What Else Does Total Image Consultants Offer?

1. Fashion Secrets eZines
Subscribe to one (or all) of three fashion-related eZines and receive information on trends, fashion and style advice, fashion events and sales, specials, workshops, and much more.

2. **NEW**: “Who Taught You How to Dress?” body image, self-esteem and style home study program
The "Who Taught You How to Dress?" Home Study Program is your personal guide to undressing old beliefs, recognizing your inner beauty, and learning how to create a fashion statement that is truly your own. It empowers you to redefine your own style-to create awareness without having to address every "in style" aspect of fashion (that rarely works!). It is different from anything else you have ever seen and is not a traditional "makeover" program—you can do it at your pace from the privacy of your own home. And, you have the added benefit of monthly teleclasses with Ginger to support and encourage you on your journey. To learn more (including all the bonuses that come with it), go to: [www.WhoTaughtYouHowtoDress.com](http://www.WhoTaughtYouHowtoDress.com)

3. Fashion Stylist Services
What else does Ginger do that can help you? You might be surprised! Everything from personalized color analysis (using over 2,000 colors to customize your
palette) to wardrobe consulting, personal shopping and makeup application. To find out more go to http://www.totalimageconsultants.com/services.shtml on the website or e-mail ginger@totalimageconsultants.com.

3. Workshop and Events
What to learn more? Sign up for one of several workshops on topics ranging from “Totally You: Aligning Your Inner and Outer Beauty” to a workshop on makeup tips and tricks “Now You See It, Now You Don't: Makeup Secrets that Get Noticed Without Being Obvious!” and much more… Or, plan a girls’ night/day out and organize a workshop just for you and your friends! http://www.totalimageconsultants.com/events.shtml

For more information on all Total Image Consultants services, packages, workshops, products, and events, go to:

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