Shopping for Dresses? : May I Help You, Madam?

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SHOPPING FOR DRESSES?

May I Help You, Madam?

Shopping Tips
What is a Bargain?
A Look at Labels
Construction
Complaint Department
Is it for You?
Shopping for Dresses*

Do you remember the thrill you experienced on the day you went into a store or opened the catalogue to “pick out” your first ready-to-wear dress?

Since that day the ready-to-wear industry has grown by leaps and bounds until today, there are styles and fabrics available to fit almost every wardrobe need.

Your aim is no different now than it was then—to get the most satisfaction for each clothing dollar spent in terms of style and serviceability. Your problem, however, may be a bit more complicated than it was then because of the great number of manufacturers of ready-to-wear who are competing for your clothing dollar.

It has been said that good buying habits constitute consumer citizenship and that a consumer’s purchase is a vote—a vote for one manufacturer and a vote against his competitor. In this way, good voting or buying practices really contribute to consumer citizenship. The careless customer and the cautious customer have the same vote.

If you have more money to spend for clothing, you may feel that you can sacrifice durability because the style is right and the garment is becoming. In this case, style or fashion of the dress is the big factor which you consider in your selection. On the other hand if you are operating on a small clothing budget and every dollar spent for clothing has to count in terms of serviceability, then your problem is to get the most in style, comfort, and serviceability possible for each dollar spent. So we can say that you, as a customer, should buy wisely according to your own set of need values. You will come closer to being a trained consumer and therefore, an intelligent voter, if you profit from past experiences in clothing shopping and use this information the next time you go to market.

The following suggestions may prove helpful to you the next time you shop for a dress. The general principles will apply whether you are purchasing a house dress, an all-purpose dress for street and general wear, or a best dress to be worn for special occasions.

**Shopping Tips**

1. Shop when the department is not too crowded.
2. Shop when you are rested.
3. Wear your good foundation garments and be prepared to try on the garment in the store if a fitting room is available. If your store extends to you the courtesy of taking garments out on approval, be prompt in returning the garment in good condition.
4. If shopping by mail order, read the information given as to kind of fabric, etc., and follow carefully the sugges-

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tions given for taking measurements to determine the right size.

5. Study fashion magazines, newspaper advertising, and store windows to become familiar with the current styles before you go shopping. Recognize new and lasting fashion for satisfaction and economy. Avoid fads.

6. Observe the price tag to see if it is within your budget range before spending more time examining the garment.

What Is a Bargain?

Everyone likes to feel that they have bought a dress at a bargain. As a consumer, you may have bought a good dress out-of-season on a bargain rack and found it to be a good investment. It just makes sense, however, to realize that you can't get a bargain every time you shop. If an unreasonably low price must be kept up consistently by a store it will surely be reflected in the quality of its goods. For example, if the weaver is forced to sell his fabric at an impractically low price he must cut the number of warp and filling threads in the fabric. In turn, the dyer and finisher will have to use cheaper dyes and finishes. The cutter may cut the dress, skimping on the amount of fabric in the

Look at the Label

1. Observe what the label tells, as to fiber content and care required, so you may learn something about the cost of upkeep before buying the garment.

2. What does it tell about shrinkage in cottons? If the possible shrinkage is given in percentages you may translate it into inches as follows, if dress measures 50" long and has a 26" waist:
   - 1% means ½ inch shrinkage in length and ¼ inch in width (shape is retained)
   - 2% means 1 inch shrinkage in length and ½ inch in width (feel is tight)
   - 3% means 1½ inch shrinkage in length and ¾ inch in width. (The look is gone!)
   - 5% shrinkage means 2½ inches in length and 1 inch in width. (The garment is no longer wearable.)

3. Does the label tell any facts about laundering, washability, shrinkage, colorfastness, flammability, crease resistance, and permanent finish? New performance standards have been developed for rayons, acetates, and mixed fibers so eventually, when adopted by the trade, the retail buyer, the fabric buyer, and the consumer will have confidence that the fabric will stand up in various end-uses because the label will give more useful information. Watch for the new colored tags on garments made from these fabrics.
dress, on the seam width, hem width etc. Buttonholes may be poorly finished and the findings may be inferior. A bargain can be overdone so that the garment made to meet the bargain price is not satisfactory at any price. So we see that the lowest price may not turn out to be the best value in some cases. Sometimes you can find enough more value in a dress in the next price bracket so that it might pay in the long run to spend the extra amount.

**Check the Fit of the Garment**

1. Try the dress on and observe position of seams and hem.
   a. Normal neckline—The neckline of the dress should hug the neck without crowding, crossing just above the socket bone in the center back and the collar bone at the center front.
   b. Shoulder seam—The shoulder seam sets on top of the shoulder.
   c. Armscye seam—It should appear to fall straight or slant inward to the underarm curve. The underarm seam of the armscye should fit smoothly so there are no folds in the sleeve or bodice.
   d. Darts—The darts should point toward the fullest part of the body where the ease is intended.
   e. Waistline seam—The waistline seam should fit normal waist curve snugly but not tightly.
   f. Up and down seams—The center front and center back seams should fall between the legs. The side seams should appear as straight lines between the top of the shoulder and the ankle bone.
   g. Hem—The hem fold should appear to be an even distance from the floor all the way around and at a graceful length for you.

2. Observe the amount of ease.
   a. The amount of ease should conform to the style and should be ample for body movement. There should be no diagonal or horizontal folds at any place.
   b. Observe the ease in shoulder or back by placing the hands on opposite shoulders. This movement will determine the ease across the back, in the sleeve, across the full part of the arm (3 inches is needed), and the elbow.
   c. Bust—Allow minimum of two inches. Be sure front closures do not gape.
   d. Hips—Hips in a straight-line skirts should have a minimum of two inches of ease below the hipline for comfort in sitting.

**Check the Grainline**

To find the correct grainline, examine the garment at the following points:

1. Pull across the shoulder from the end of the shoulder seam at each armscye. The grain should pull straight.
2. The blouse above the waistline should show identical grain on each side.
3. The skirt below the waistline should have identical grain in like gores.
4. The center back and center front should show a straight grainline from neck line to the waistline unless the garment is purposely cut on the bias.
5. The grain should run straight across the sleeve at the base of the armscye.
6. The lengthwise grain of the sleeve, after the dress is on the body, should run straight from the top of the shoulder to the elbow.
7. The belt should be cut on the grain. In a contour belt, the center back should be on the straight of the grain, unless cut on the bias.

**Look at Construction**

1. Does the length of stitches used in the seams and finishes fit the texture of the fabric? Long stitches cheapen a garment. Twelve stitches per inch is a minimum for most fabrics.
2. Are the seams at least \( \frac{3}{8} \) inch wide and, if there is a need for alteration, is there enough seam to let out?
3. Is the hem appropriate to the fabric and the cut of the skirt?
4. Is the trim well applied and of equal quality to that found in the dress?
5. Are the buttons sewed on individually? Are they of good quality so they won't crack or peel in wear, warp or melt with heat, or cause wear of the fabric under them? If the buttons are covered, will the paper filler stain the fabric or will they rust when wet? Is the shank one that will not cut the thread? Will the shank break easily?

**Have You a Complaint?**

If you are a dissatisfied customer, you may do one of three things: (1) you may take your problem back to the store where you bought the garment; (2) you may complain to your friends about the terrible merchandise you purchased at a certain store; or (3) you may be one of a large group which takes its loss because returning goods to a store is "just too much trouble."

If your complaint is justified, retail stores appreciate having you, as a customer, register an honest complaint. It gives the store a chance to give credit for merchandise which has been proved to be faulty in some respect when it was put to use. This information can be passed on to the manufacturer of the garment if the construction is at fault and on to the weaver or the finisher of the goods if the fabric is at fault.

When returning merchandise you should go to the
store in a friendly co-operative spirit and not with a chip on your shoulder.

**Don’t Expect Miracles**

In shopping for a dress or any other garment don’t expect miracles from any one fiber. Rather, think in terms of the suitability of the fiber and fabric in relation to its end-use. In these days of many fibers, both natural and man-made, fibers may be thought of as building materials. In textile manufacture, textile engineers make plans for the combination of various fibers in a fabric so that it not only looks good but is suitable for a certain use. When buying a fabric which is made by blending different fibers, the consumer should not be misled into thinking that because the fabric contains a small amount of a fiber with certain characteristics that the finished fabric will always exhibit those characteristics. This applies to all fibers including the new man-made fibers as nylon, orlon, and dacron. For example: Textile experts tell us that a fabric must have at least 15 per cent of nylon before the nylon present contributes anything to the strength of the fabric.

Textile manufacturers who have the interest of the consumer at heart will not put “a pinch of this-or-that” fiber into a fabric, knowing that it will add nothing to the cloth but advertising value.

You, as a wise consumer, will look for manufacturer’s names whom you know to be dependable when you buy fabrics in this age-of-change in the textile field. You should enjoy an inquisitive attitude toward the fabrics in today’s market and should try to balance between over-eagerness to try the new, and conservatism which may keep you from enjoying new things. Regard the store as your purchasing agent and make use of the helpful advice the buyer or sales person may have to offer.

**Wear Your Dress with Distinction**

After you have shopped carefully and have added a dress to your wardrobe make sure you wear it with pride and distinction. The same dress may appear very striking on one individual and very ordinary on another. Accessories chosen with your individuality in mind will make the difference.

Give your dress the good care it deserves—following carefully the instructions given for its care. The time you spend in careful shopping will pay off in the added service and satisfaction you will get from wearing a well-cut, well-fitted dress of good material, chosen with your own specific needs in mind.

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