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HOW TO BLOSSOM AND BLOOM THIS SPRING

Despite snow and ice, I was into the West End as soon as possible after New Year, not for the sales but rather to check on the trends for the coming season. And I am delighted to report there are already some clear new directions.

The biggest news is that there is a return to the natural waist. Dresses have fitted bodices with straight or slightly gathered skirts, and there are some crossover styles. They have either self-belts or narrow belts. So it's time then to give a break to last year's wide belts that were slung low on the hip. The hemlines are to the knee, always so flattering, but you can challenge the length more if you wear opaque tights and boots over the knee. Tights are up to 120 denier now (starting from about 6).

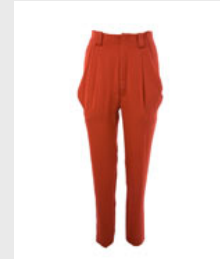


Another trend to watch is at Donna Karan who is showing biker pants under dresses and skirts. Trousers have a high rise (this is the measurement between crotch and waistband) but otherwise there is a variety of styles from Capri pants to narrow legged with a turn-up. There are a few with some pleating but these too go into a narrow leg.



There's lots of choice for your shoes. I suggest wedgies for daytime, leaving the high-heeled platforms for the evening. If you prefer flats, look for those with a rounded point toe. Add a bag - there lots around embossed with studs. This doesn't sound like a match but sometimes one item that's quirky can give a lift.

The colours for this spring are interesting, with a predominance of a rich red. It's not so strong that older girls can't wear it. How about a little red dress instead of a little black number for St Valentine's Day? Hobbs has a particularly pretty one.



Watch out for laser photo patterns. I saw them everywhere from Karen Millen to Nichole Fahri, and even reflected in Jimmy Choo's latest collections of handbags and shoes.

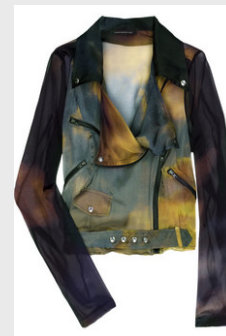


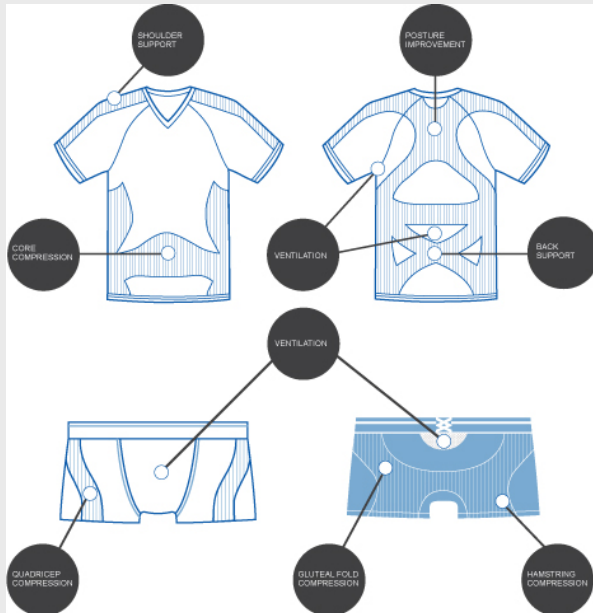
I am also going to keep an eye on Alexander McQueen's latest fabrics with paint splashed onto his clothes. I suspect we will be seeing that on the high street soon.

Other colours I spotted are in the sherbet range, notably aqua and lemon, along with grey and beige. All these enliven both back and white.

Patrick's rule on colour is simple: try any shade that you are considering against your face. If you look healthy, wear it. If you look dead, PUT IT BACK. After being indoors so much recently, you should blush - on the apple of your cheeks, at the temples, on your chin and the tip of your nose.

Other notables: there are short leather jackets everywhere, which will go well with the little waisted dresses; look out for the all-in-one tops, that is, tee shirts that extend and fasten under the crotch, and be aware that broderie anglais is making a return. It's in the detail in lemon and aqua at DKNY. And Selfridges has a new section called 'The 90s are officially vintage', picking out Prada, Gucci and Vivienne Westwood.





For men, check out Equemen. It has an interesting range of constructive underwear, designed in fabrics that both breathe and support, even to straightening the shoulders.

Well that's about it for now... Stay tuned for more next month.

Patrick Swan

PS – Remember – 20% off for all returning shopping clients!