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[The Washington Post]

Sunday Source

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Clothes Encounters

She Loves Fashion but Hates the Hunt. Can Two Personal Shoppers Help?

By Suzanne D'Amato
Washington Post Staff Writer

If you could see my closet, you'd be surprised — and not in a good way. As a fashion editor, it's my job to pore over the most ravishing clothes and accessories you can imagine. Bubble skirts molded out of glossy strawberry satin. Quilted handbags worthy of a 50-person waiting list. Dresses dusted in sequins, edged in tulle, lathered in eyeliner, dipped in gold.

I may write about how to wear such clothes (or at least the knockoff versions), but I'm not good at taking my own advice. Year-round, I stick to baggy sweaters, blousy tops, ballet flats and jeans I've had since college. And when I'm at a store, I overthink everything. Confronted with styles that I've focused on too much to appreciate in purely personal terms, I look at little and try on even less.

This is why my closet (while including a few nice items, such as perfectly weathered motorcycle boots and a vintage coat the color of a ripe tomato) currently contains:

- Ten almost-identical tunic tops in gray or black. All are long and droopy. (And, no, I am not expecting.)

- Ten cardigans in varying shades of cream, brown, gray and black.

- Seven pairs of jeans, one of which fits as it should.

- An expensive evening dress with a ragged, asymmetrical hem that strives for avant-garde but, after only four wearings, says, "Send to Goodwill, stat."

- A curious (and somewhat disturbing) number of items that would be appropriate on a 12-year-old, including a Boy Scout shirt, Kangaroo sneakers and a baseball T-shirt with unicorns and rainbows on it.

Equally bad is what I don't have. For someone who works in an office, I possess a startling lack of Grown-Up Clothes. This is probably because I used to work at a fashion magazine where everyone strove to look like stylishly disheveled art students. I'm not there anymore, but I still dress the part: slouchy layers, thrift-store jewelry, the kind of lank hair and chipped nail polish that make people wonder if it's Take Your Daughter to Work Day. It occurs to me that it wouldn't be so bad to invest in a few polished pieces: structured jackets, pants that aren't jeans, shirts that fit and don't have unicorns on them.

As it happens, the D.C. area is home to several personal shoppers who are only too happy to help people like me. They can be found at department stores, in boutiques and on the Internet; their levels of experience vary widely; and their fees range from free to you-don't-want-to-know. I decide to seek out two wardrobe wizards: a personal shopper at Lord & Taylor, whose services are available to customers gratis, and a freelance shopper who charges a cool \$100 an hour. What does each teach me about adding some chic to my closet? Find out on Page 4.

This might be a casual Friday outfit for some, but for me it's a work look that's a dramatic shift from my usual T-shirt and jeans. It's all about baby steps, right?

Cynthia Steffe jacket, \$285
Club Monaco blouse, \$89
Tevrow & Chase slacks, \$225

BY NATE LANFORD
FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

[INSIDE]

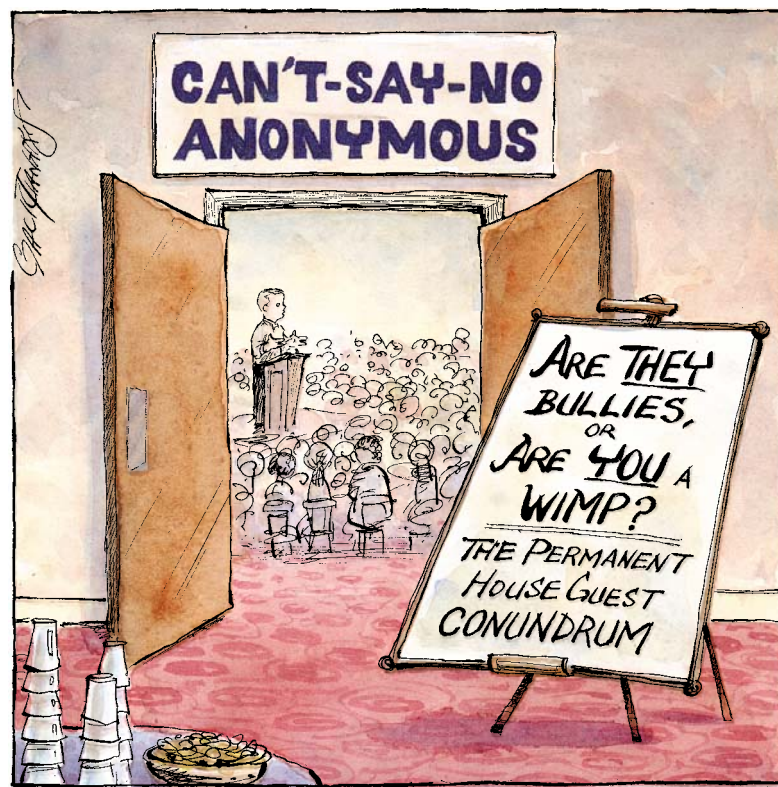
- Meet our two personal shoppers.
- Tips from the pros on shopping smart, no matter what your budget.

[ONLINE]

Join us Monday at 11 a.m. for a live discussion about personal shopping and style.

Find the right shopper for you at www.washingtonpost.com/source.

TELL ME ABOUT IT[®] BY CAROLYN HAX



BY NICK GALIFIANAKIS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Dear Carolyn:

My husband and I tend to live in places that are attractive to friends and family. We've been quite open with our hospitality, but now we're burned out. Additionally, our new place is just not suitable for overnight guests, and our work situations are not amenable to constant hosting.

We've been approached by friends telling us they want to "make a booking," and we gently tell them we're not accepting "bookings." I'm not sure they take the hint. We've been dealing with family members who are not deterred when we tell them we have only a wooden floor for them to sleep on. Short of telling people, "No, you can't stay here," which sounds rude, how can we tell people we don't want overnight guests right now?

— Shangri La

Your problem has two halves: people who can't say no and people who can't hear no. Make one half vanish by recognizing you can't make anyone be a good sport. Then deal with your half: not knowing how to say no. Hints might feel polite, but when you just end up resenting people who fail to pick up on them, they ultimately defeat the purpose.

Just to be sure: The purpose is to remain

close to people while not having them walk all over you (or you over them, en route to the bathroom). Right?

That's an entirely honorable purpose, so trust it — and trust people to take the news like adults. Say something positive, set your limit, offer a lollipop: "We love your visits but can't accommodate guests anymore. I can suggest great hotels."

Good people want to visit you, not burden you, and good riddance to the rest. Though I do feel the ache of justice when I imagine them on the floor.

Dear Carolyn:

I'm getting married soon. One of my groomsmen has a friend I'm acquainted with who can be charming but occasionally seems to relish embarrassing people or making a scene — especially when he's had too much to drink.

My fiancée and I struggled over whether to invite him but decided that since I really only know him through my groomsmen, it wasn't that much of an issue. I heard he was hurt when a save-the-date didn't arrive, but that was to be expected.

That groomsmen, however, may be getting married in the near future, and it's a safe bet he'd ask me — and the oft-embarrassing friend — to stand with him. Doing the social calculus

on the situation makes my brain want to explode.

— Invitation Anxiety

Your brain just may go for it, 15 years from now, when you remember how much you cared 15 years ago about wedding-invitation calculus.

In the meantime, have confidence in your non-issue ruling. His not being a close friend is ample grounds for courteous exclusion.

Just promise me that, when you meet this guy at your friend's altar, you won't launch into an unsolicited explanation session a la, "I'm sorry we couldn't invite you. It was a really small wedding blah blah." People on the receiving end of these generally think, "That's okay, we don't like you, either," and simply find the willpower not to say it.

In the acquaintanceship rings of a social circle, non-invitations are a fact of life and should be treated as such.

Write to Tell Me About It, Sunday Source, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071 or tellme@washpost.com and join Carolyn's live discussion Fridays at noon at www.washingtonpost.com/liveonline.

