



FOLLOW US ON
TWITTER
@starverve

lifestyle Verve

contact verve
E-mail verve@inl.co.za
SMS 32546 (Each SMS costs R1)

UNSUIT YOURSELF

THE HILLARY Rodham Clinton matching pants-and-jacket look is so passé. And there is something about a skirt-and-jacket suit that is so reminiscent of a uniform, and doesn't speak of success and drive.

Some women have perfected the trick of matching a tailored skirt with an edgy top, or twinning a shift dress with eye-popping jacket. Or maybe the outfit is a black pant suit, but with accessories and shoes that shout: "I'm unique!"

And you probably know one or two women who seem to effortlessly mix corporate essentials with a dash of African flair, using prints or jewellery to express their individual style.

So how do you dress for success while daring to be you?

The rule of thumb if you work in a corporate environment is to have a stock of traditional skirts, pants and jackets in neutral colours

black, brown, grey, stone or navy blue. "Yes, that is still the dress code for most corporates. Only a few companies are a bit more relaxed, but it's still advisable to dress up rather than down," says stylist and make-over guru Chata Romano.

However, you can regard these items as separates, mixing them with other tops or bottoms, or wearing just one item with something more provocative.

"Think of a pair of black pants but with a silver silk shirt and a belt with a diamante-studded buckle, matched with an elegant shoe," says Romano.

Trending at the moment is animal print and beaded accessories. Subtle floral prints are also on trend, and with warm colours you can wear gold accessories – several of them if you like, but in subtle design – that really lift an outfit. "As you become more confident, you can build up the more arresting elements of your outfits," says Romano.

So can you twin a pair of designer jeans with a tailored jacket? "It depends on where you work. At Investec, for example, it's no jeans, ever. If the dress code does allow it, be sure the jeans are smart and the top is elegant. And wear elegant shoes with a bit of a heel," advises Romano.

Pops of colour can really lift your look, says Stefanie Nothard, stylist at Vogue Fox. "Colour adds interest. Think of a fuschia or royal blue shirt with your neutral-coloured, tailored skirt or pants. And tan, beige or brown is great mixed with a white or light blue shirt, for instance," she says.

You can even go for a block colour shift dress, if it's toned down with a neutral jacket, but be sure it has some shoulder covering.

"Spaghetti straps or thin shoulder straps are generally frowned on in the corporate world," says Nothard.

Alternatively, if your outfit is mostly neutral, you can also use colour to great effect in a brightly coloured bag or a necklace with fun shades, she says.

And, yes, go tall with shoes by all means, but one of the biggest no-no's, warns Romano, is killer heels that make you walk with a wobble. "The simple rule is, if you can't walk in them with a good, straight-up, confident stride, don't wear them," says Romano.

Above all, make sure that everything fits perfectly. "The jacket, skirt or trousers must fit like a glove. If you need to try on 150 pairs before finding a perfect fit, do it. Or have the item tweaked or even



These days you don't need to suit up to be successful at the office. Helen Grange talks to stylists about how to liberate your personality

TIP: If the dress code is 'smart casual', the emphasis is on 'smart'. So wear jeans, but with a silk shirt and tailored jacket, for example. On the other hand, if it's 'casual smart', the emphasis is on casual. So wear a white T-shirt and jeans, but with a tailored jacket.

custom made. It's worth it. Ill-fitting clothes ruin any style or look you're trying to achieve," says Nothard.

As important, adds Romano, is the fabric and colours you choose. "People get fixated on the shape of garments, but the fabric and colours are equally important. Find out what colours suit you, and the styles that suit your body shape. Go for fabrics that drape well on you, that don't crease when you drive to see a client," she says.

In summer, cottons are cooler, as



Invest in good-quality neutrals, but don't wear suits all at once. Treat the pieces as separates, which you can wear with something edgier or more in keeping with your personality. Here a classic LBD is paired with blue leather.

PICTURE:
MARGE ELY/
WASHINGTON
POST



Brown pants worn with an animal print top. Always create balance in an outfit – pair trousers with something flowing and feminine on top.



Colour adds interest to your neutral tailored skirt or pants.

TIP: It's a given that attractive, well-dressed people climb the corporate ladder faster. "How you look is how you feel. If you are well groomed and dressed for success, you feel more confident, take yourself more seriously, which reflects in your behaviour towards others and creates a positive impression on those who you come into contact with," says Chata Romano.

blazer:

"As long as the fit and cut of the suit is right, you can have lots of fun with fabrics, prints, unique shoes, hats, scarves, tie or cufflinks," Nothard says.

is linen. "But stay away from pure linen if you don't want to look all crumpled and creased. Rather choose a linen blend," advises Nothard. Woollen and thicker fabrics are great for colder days.

Nothard says by far the most important tip for men is that even if jeans are allowed, "rather dress according to the role you want to play in the company".

She agrees with Romano that if you do wear denims, always dress them up with a blazer and crisp

shirt with smart shoes.

The tie, of course, remains key to a man's expression of personality in his outfit. Polka dot ties are timeless, but colour and detailing are becoming less pronounced, says Nothard. "We're moving away from loud ties to a more subtle tie with interesting details," she says.

Men can also personalise their look by having bright-coloured socks that just peek out when they sit down at a meeting, or contrasting pocket squares on a



You can wear jeans to some workplaces, but make sure they are smart ones which you wear with heels, right. Flats are a no-no. Look how much smarter Andy appears in the picture on the right. PICTURE: CHATARAMANO.COM