

GETTING A LEG UP

The power suit reinvented, again

BY ANDREA KENNEDY

A glance back at the '80s power suit is enough for a good laugh. Holy shoulder pads: What in the name of Murphy Brown were we thinking? Quite a lot, as the women who donned this wardrobe of the workplace revolution remember. The shifting fashion, which helped signal a shift in thought, was courtesy of designers such as Giorgio Armani, who suited up celebs like Lauren Hutton, and Donna Karan, who added some softness to potentially boxy ensembles.

As the shift continued over the next 30-plus years, the number of working women grew as suit silhouettes shrunk. Jackets downsized, hemlines rose and shoulder pads got burned — or at least ripped out — as a reclamation of the female form and proclamation that one need not assume the sartorial male vantage to assume power. (Well, obviously.)

Today we're left with the most stripped down suits ever. Mini, but not necessarily minimalist, they hit spring runways flaunting embellishments like sequins and lace for lots of three-piece fun. Did I mention one of those pieces can be a bandeau? What would the Sugarbaker sisters say?

Few ensembles ring sexier than a short skirt and a long jacket — or short shorts, as Michael Kors proves in this look of indigo cashmere/cotton denim. What I love about this is how the jacket acts like a buttoned-up dress that's trying to decide how much to leave to the imagination. Well, that, plus it also could be the best possible outcome of leaving your blouse and slacks at home. The peeping bandeau almost reads swimsuit rather than power suit, but pairing it with a skinny python belt plus matching purse and pumps gives it an elegant and unified finish.

Kors shows even more skin with a classic double-breasted style in hemp linen that covers barely more than the torso. It's a stunning way for a sexy safari sophisticate to step out in the concrete jungle. And those slingbacks make the leg go on forever.

Another cousin to the Wall Street wardrobe, Rachel Zoe modifies her traditional black-and-white getup by chopping a pleated pant leg off a couple inches down the inseam for a miniskirt-looking flare. A little disheveled in that endearing way, she fits a cropped jacket with elbow-length



Michael Kors.
Courtesy
Michael Kors.



Band of
Outsiders.
Courtesy PR
Consulting.



Jason Wu.
Photograph
by Dan
Lecca.



Rachel
Zoe.
Courtesy
BPCM.



Barbara Bui.
Courtesy
BPCM.



Genny.
Courtesy
Genny.



Honor.
Courtesy
Bradbury
Lewis.



Michael
Kors.
Courtesy
Michael Kors.



Nina Ricci.
Courtesy PR
Consulting.

sleeves over a tidy blouse with full-length French cuffs. In a paper doll world, I see this look for a rising “Vogue” fashion editor where all that’s missing are thick-rimmed spectacles and a red pen lost somewhere in her hair.

Back to our more tailored selections. This season seems partial to waist-high shorts with thigh-high hems, and Barbara Bui, who’s known for crisp cuts, makes her denim micro-short like a second skin. She uses the same fabric for her neat and

noteworthy blazer, adorning it with interesting and intricate appliqué.

Italian designer Genny also takes appliqué to the next level, but one-upping the formal factor with hand-sewn sequins over a cream blazer with – wait for it – full beading from shoulder to shorts hem. (A moment of silence for those weary fingers.) I love these looks with the blazer in the spotlight.

Ladylike lace stars in the suit by Honor with the laser-cut detail repeating in the

blouse and the short. The cropped jacket, high neck and daisy motif makes it slightly schoolgirlish, while the see-through aspect makes it subtly seductive. And who can overlook the sass in those shades?

For a hint of departure from the barely-there short, Nina Ricci goes for a sky-high skirt with two tiers of tops. A shock in all white, the stiff construction of the ensemble hints at masculine – or perhaps ice queen – with its rigid and regal stand-up collar.

On the flip side, Jason Wu, who’s re-

cently been prone to power dress, scaled back with a sense of softness in his flowing sage pairing where shorts get a generous inseam. For being a fairly close relative to the business suit, it feels cool and easy.

Speaking of cool and easy, how about comfy? That’s the sense I get from Band of Outsiders’ riff on the suit, though its only relationship to a suit is its breezy blazer. This is mesh stripe, soccer short, socks-with-sandals territory – proving that for the 21st century suit, anything goes. ■

Are your knees having as much fun as you are?

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