

Corporate dressing for the new millennium

by Juanita Fernandez

The catchphrase of the 1980s was 'it's all about me' and 'if I want it I can have it'. Being on 'The Richlist' was more important than being part of a successful company and Donald Trump was a business star not a television star.

To match this aggressive style of business, corporate fashion followed the over the top trend. Hair grew bigger as did shoulder pads on the power suits of corporate women, gilt buttons the size of earrings added detail to block colour suiting. Yuppies negotiated business deals on mobile phones the size of a small dishwasher while sporting skinny ties and soft mullets. When work stopped it was time to relax with a glass of champagne then off home to watch the latest episode of Dallas and Dynasty for more fashion inspiration.

Lucky for us the days of the power suit and bulky shoulder pads are gone, locked safely away with the rest of the world's fashion crimes such as hypercolour t-shirts, MC Hammer pants and legwarmers.

Corporate fashion has come a long way since those days with the trend moving toward a casual look. It is now acceptable to convey individual personality and style in the boardroom without compromising status and power.

Personal wardrobe stylist, Angela Stone says today's corporate wardrobe can be more versatile and practical than in the past.

"A lot of women today buy separates to mix and match rather than the power suit. They want a more functional wardrobe with a twist and its ok for clothes to show personality, even in the boardroom."

Women's corporate clothing has a more feminine edge without compromising professionalism. "Before women wanted to be taken seriously so clothing was masculine inspired. Today it's

acceptable to express yourself as an individual and have a feminine approach to dressing."

Although corporate dressing is more casual these days, 'Casual Fridays' can be a fashion disaster zone and it's essential to maintain professionalism and style according to Mrs Stone. "Even though it's a day when you can dress in a more relaxed style, you should never be underdressed. Corporates can't afford to look messy or untidy because you are judged by the way you look."

Traditionally New Zealand men have not been the most fashion conscious breed in the world but are now more interested in fashion than ever before. Men's corporate fashion trends include the single breasted jacket teamed with colourful shirts and mismatched ties.

"Checks and stripes are business friendly and add a splash of personality. It's acceptable to wear a busy looking tie with a striped shirt."

But it's not just about buying an expensive wardrobe. It's about an overall look including accessories which add the finishing touch, beautiful shoes, tidy hair and makeup.

"There is no point having the clothes if you don't have the grooming to go with it," Mrs Stone says.

Scarves are hot this season, cufflinks are in vogue adding to overall style and pinstripe suits are a unisex fashion staple. The key to successful corporate dressing is knowing your body shape, accentuating the good, and disguising the bad. It's acceptable to illustrate personality and individual style, but don't go over the top.

Let's just hope that the big hair, broad shoulder pads and skinny ties of the 1980s remain a corporate fashion trend (or disaster) of the past. ■

For more information visit www.angelastone.co.nz



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Personal wardrobe stylist Angela Stone.

The height of working man style



New Zealand Best Dressed Businessman award-winner Ross Hutton (left), being congratulated by Mr Auckland Matt Tooman.

Mr Hutton was named the overall winner of the annual event at a cocktail function in Auckland in October, during the lead up to New Zealand Fashion Week. His corporate flair earned him a \$5000 Working Style wardrobe along with the title.

Working Style managing director Chris Dobbs says style is a key ingredient for success at work, and he describes these awards as "unashamedly male to balance the female fashion onslaught" of Fashion Week.

"First impressions do count but standards need to be maintained week in, week out. The Best Dressed Businessman award recognises this and rewards those whose daily dress habits stand out from the rest."

Mr Dobbs says Mr Hutton's fondness for pinstripe suits is "more than acceptable and a trait that has not gone unnoticed by his colleagues at ABN Amro Craigs".

While a crisp white shirt is the norm beneath Mr Hutton's dark suits, more often than not a dashing colourful tie sets off the ensemble, Mr Dobbs says.

Runners up in the 2004 awards were David Winsborough of Wellington and Matt Tooman of Auckland.

Described by his peers as one of the capital's most exciting dressers, psychologist David Winsborough has a "use of colour that is nothing short of extraordinary", Mr Dobbs says. "He shows us what can be achieved when fear is not a factor."

While freely admitting his wardrobe is not to everyone's taste, Mr Winsborough says he is not the least bit discouraged by the fact.

Mr Dobbs describes Auckland finalist Matt Tooman (director of real estate firm CB Richard Ellis) as a young and energetic dresser who always presents an immaculate appearance.

"From his trademark square-rimmed glasses down to his toes, everything is in the right place. Matt has recently invested in a new made-to-measure Working Style black suit with gold pinstripe - another classic but daring addition to his sophisticated wardrobe."

Mr Dobbs says Mr Tooman carries his immaculate dress code into the weekend "with a polo knit and taupe trousers finished off with a nice pair of sneakers".

More than 70 businessmen were nominated for the three-year-old award since the call went out for entries in early September in Deborah Hill Cone's 'Private Bin' weekly column in NBR. ■

Dress smart

Presentation is a key part of landing and keeping a job, but not everyone can afford to look smart.

Not-for-profit organisation 'Dress for Success' is enabling long-term unemployed and low-income women to make a tailored transition into the workforce, by providing free business attire, confidence boosts and career development to more than 100,000 women in over 70 cities internationally.

There are five branches throughout New Zealand.

Auckland Dress for Success executive manager Laura Rogerson says any training provider that is supporting women on a benefit can refer the client through. "The ultimate goal is helping women back into work towards self-sufficiency."

The majority of the clothing is donated by the public, and the organisation also has support from several retailers who provide shoes, jewellery and make-up.

Clients get to keep their interview outfit, and can then return for a second outfit if they are successful in getting a job.

Mrs Rogerson says a lot of the women that come to Dress for Success for assistance have very little self-esteem, and outfitting them in professional attire helps give them the confidence they need to be successful in their job quest.

"We are all judged in the first five minutes that you meet someone, and particularly so in an interview situation. It's absolutely essential that people present themselves well, not only by how they are seen, but also by how it makes them feel.

"A lot of the women we see are basically in track pants and jandals, they don't have the money to get themselves sorted for an interview. So it's a real helping hand to helping them get that job." ■

Phone Dress for Success Wellington on (04) 473-2940 if you can help with donations of clothing, handbags, shoes or accessories.

Functionality, a point of difference and of course...style.

These are the three key components that enabled Christchurch stockbroker Ross Hutton to take out the title of New Zealand's Best Dressed Businessman.