

PACKET MAGAZINE

JANUARY 2006

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Wardrobe Makeover

When moving up means cleaning out

BY JESSON BURNAM

I've always been confident about the way I dress. Ever since I was a little girl, family members and friends referred to me as "the fashionable one." So, when the day came to have fashion consultant Paula Molino come to my apartment to examine my fabulous wardrobe, I had no qualms at all. I saw this as a perfect opportunity to amp up my style just a bit to prepare for a new job I was on the verge of starting. I was getting ready to take my professional life to the next level, why not take my style up a notch as well. But the further I ventured into this process, the more I suspected that my wardrobe wasn't quite as up-to-snuff as I thought. How right I was ...

Over the phone, Ms. Molino first asked some basic questions about my personality and style.

This, she explained, is always her first step, as it enables her to get a sense of her client's needs before they meet. It's also a good indicator of whether the client realizes where their fashion mistakes are occurring. As I answered questions ranging from "How would you describe your personality?" to "Describe what your favorite outfit is in your wardrobe and how it makes you feel," I realized that my wardrobe denial was greater than I was willing to admit.

After the preliminary interview, Ms. Molino scheduled a visit to my apartment for the "hands-on segment" of my wardrobe assessment. When she showed up at my door, she was everything I expected her to be — bubbly, energetic and, yes, fashionable. But Ms. Molino was no pushover. Although she immediately made me

wardrobe

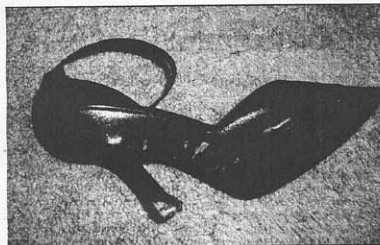


Photo by Paula Molino

Cast off your wounded sole! A ratty shoe, no matter how expensive it was originally, needs to see the inside of the garbage can.

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feel at ease, I could sense I was in for some trouble. As I walked towards my closet, I began mentally detaching myself from the clothes I had accumulated over a lifetime of shopping. Ms. Molino began asking me some basic questions about my awareness of the shape of my face and body. She also asked me to rate on a scale on one to ten the importance of fit, quali-

ty and color. Ms. Molino explained that most of the clothing mistakes people make are caused by not paying attention to the fit or color of the piece. "Dressing well is like following the recipe for making a cake," Ms. Molino commented. "If you don't combine the right mix of ingredients, your cake could be a disaster. Correct styling for body type, flattering colors and sizes that fit right are your main ingredients."

After the question and answer session, Ms. Molino whipped out about 50 swatches of colors, which she tested against my skin. I have olive skin, so I always thought my colors were brown, green and black. However, when I looked at these colors against my skin they actually made my complexion look dull, especially compared to the reds, blues and purples of Ms. Molino's swatches. I suddenly realized that I had a closet full of colors that were all wrong for me. Ms. Molino reassured me, "Dressing well is not about the amount of money you have in your wallet, but learning to recognize what styles are appropriate for your body type and what colors look best on you. Once you know what works best on you, you can dress on any budget. It's just a matter of building the right key components into your wardrobe. Those key pieces should be in your wardrobe 365 days a year for fuss-free dressing."

We then moved on to my closet. I was rather proud that I had just reorganized all of my shirts by sleeve length and all of my pants and skirts by colors. But this was Ms. Molino's first correction. "Always organize your shirts by color. You never look for a shirt by

style or sleeve length, so why organize them that way?" She also urged me to group all my pants and skirts by season, with fall/winter on one side of the closet and spring/summer on the other.

I thought, "This is easy enough." But then she threw out my favorite blue pants. "But everyone loves those pants on me. They fit me so well!" I protested. I really thought I had a case until she pointed out the embarrassingly obvious grease stain on the front (which, truth be told, I didn't think anyone would notice.) The white shirts with armpit stains? Those didn't make the cut either. My favorite black heels, which I bought three years ago? Let's just say, those shoes were made for walk-in' ... right into the trash can.

Normally, after the wardrobe assessment, Ms. Molino likes to accompany her clients on a shopping trip, to help them get started on buying the right key pieces for their new wardrobe. But I was confident that I could do this on my own. Armed with Ms. Molino's personalized shopping list, I ventured out to the mall to find what would be the first piece of my new working-girl wardrobe. Within five minutes I spotted a beautiful cream colored sweater.

But as I tried it on, I heard Ms. Molino's voice in my head saying, "Cream is NOT your color. You need to go brighter." I put down the cream sweater and bought the lavender one instead.

Somewhat unsure of my new purchase, I debuted my sweater that night. The critics raved. I received so many positive comments. Everything from, "Your eyes look great against that shirt!" to, "Wow, you look fantastic! Did you get a new haircut?" Even my boyfriend, who loves to see me in black, gave it a thumbs-up.

Ms. Molino and her much-needed fashion intervention were right on the money. She wheeled me out of my comfort zone and pushed me to the next level of fashion sense. It was a painful experience to part with those jeans I've been wearing (or not wearing) for ten years. But I have to admit, it's almost a relief not to have to stare at something that doesn't fit me anymore. "So often, women keep clothes in their closet that are sizes too small, just hoping that someday they will fit into them," Ms. Molino says. "Why torture yourself? Fill your closet with things that are wearable and let go of the past."

And that I did.