



Photo by Mark Billingsley

Sandi Phillips in her career suit.

Women's suits popular; soft, feminine look is seen

By Suzanne Sayed

Baby soft pastels, bright Hawaiian prints. Long skirts. Shorts skirts. One day they are hot on the market, and within months, they're on the 'sale' racks. Their popularity comes and goes, but according to Lincoln merchants, one particular item consistently remains at the top of the charts.

The woman's business suit.

Dress it up with a frilly blouse and flashy skirt, high heels and numerous accessories, said Doris Brown, a sales clerk in the fashion department of Ben Simon's. Or go casual—jeans, boots, and a 'preppie' sweater, complete with wool jacket or blazer, suggests Carolyn Benisek, assistant manager of Brooks in the Centrum.

Regardless of how it is worn, Lincoln merchants agree that the business suit has definitely made a comeback.

The fashion world has done a turn-about since the late 60s and early 70s when hip huggers, patched jeans and T-shirts were normal school wear. Even office fashions were more casual and blue jeans were worn by some secretaries.

But with the stem of radical political views, anti-establishment dress fell out of vogue.

Today, conservative dress and the suit have made a comeback. Despite the cost of a suit compared to jeans, dressy jackets with vests have appeared in the office, on college campuses and in high school corridors.

Fashion editors have attributed the popularity of suits among women to the softer look they've acquired over the years. Gone are the stiff padded shoulders and severe lines. Instead, suits come in a variety of soft colors and with feminine touches—slit skirts and frilly blouses—that make them more attractive to women.

"Jackets are our top sellers," said Karen Loseke, a sales clerk at The Wardrobe. Loseke said that although they sell only

"separates," people buy jackets to go with "everything."

She said women are buying lots of jackets to go with dresses and the most popular colors are neutral and white, because they are basic colors and can be worn with many things.

She said the average cost for a blazer is \$40 and the longer jackets sell best because they are versatile.

Brown said jackets are sold "mostly to career women" and that ladies buy an average of one new suit a year. She said the average price for a jacket, skirt and blouse or pants would be about \$200.

"But, they never go out of style," she said. "They aren't fads." The best sellers are basic colors, she said, including navy blue.

She said the popular fabrics for spring are linens, poplins, and cotton, and that wool and tweeds are the best for winter and fall.

The major reason for the comeback is that "jackets are versatile and can be coordinated with virtually anything," Brown said.

Brown added that women wear them for travel, to meetings, and especially on the job.

"The suits are feminine and business-like at the same time," she said.

Benisek said that Brooks has sponsored several fashion shows on the UNL campus and that they sell a lot of jackets to women who are going to graduate in the spring.

"Basically, the jacket is one of our best items," she said. "Sales have really increased in past months."

So, said the merchants, jackets have made a comeback. A spokeswoman for Hovland-Swanson-Cochrane said she thinks it is because people haven't seen them for awhile.

Everyone agreed the business suit is not just a fad, and it will be a long time before it goes out of style.

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