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How to be Chic On A Small Income

Paris' Leading
Fashion Authority
Tells How to Dress In-
expensively and Yet
Look Smart as a Star

By Elsa Schiaparelli
As Told to Harold S. Kahm



Schiaparelli in person. She likes old clothes, especially suits. Actually is very simple. No designer is a better guide to good taste, smartness, and a sense of fitness

A WOMAN can dress within her income and be chic almost no matter how small that income may be. Most women are foolish in the matter of clothes; they buy too many things, thinking they have to have them. That even applies to some movie stars. And when a woman has a limited income she is inclined to buy numbers of cheap things, and this is a serious error.

Good taste is supremely important if you wish to be well-dressed, and wish to make a good impression, in Hollywood or elsewhere, and it doesn't matter whether you are a famous Hollywood star, or an unknown stenographer. When I last visited New York I was shocked to see women in mink coats buying pork chops. You *must* have a sense of the fitness of things, and you must give some intelligent consideration of the matter of where you're going to wear your clothes.

Being a business woman myself, and a busy one (as well as a movie fan), I myself was faced with a problem that I am sure is a common one with girls and women in America who "go to business"; that problem being what to put on in the morning and look smart in all day long, even if it means going to dinner and the movies after office hours in the same dress. I found that a good suit solved this problem. It is satisfactory for work and interviews with important people, and equally suitable if I decided to drop into the Ritz for luncheon. It eliminates the time-consuming change of costume during the business day—and time is important to me as it is to anyone who is busy

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I wear suits nearly all of the time. I like them; they are practical in every way, and my advice to a business girl who wishes to dress smartly at all times and whose income is very limited is this: buy a good suit and live in it, rather than a lot of cheap clothes. Let it be a good, tailored suit, carefully made, with beautiful material, and above all, *don't* be afraid to be seen in it too often. Good clothes, simply made, never "date," no matter what anyone tells you. Of course, they must not be made with eccentric or exaggerated lines.

Wear your suit to business; wear it to dinners; to the theater; wear it twenty-four hours a day, every day in the year, if you must, and if it is a *good* suit, you will always look smart, attractive. On the other hand, if you own a fairly large variety of cheap clothes and change them a dozen times a day you will never appear chic; cheapness is always apparent.

Not long ago a girl—an American—came to me and asked my advice concerning her clothing problem. She said, I am going to Hollywood to try to get into the movies; it is important that I dress well to make the right impression on the people I will have to contact; but my salary is so small that I cannot afford to buy the type of wardrobe I want. What is the least amount of money one must spend in order to be chic?

I will present here the suggestions which I gave her, because I believe that a great many American girls and women may find them helpful. Whether you are trying to crash the gates of Hollywood, or to make a smart impression upon your sweetheart, or merely wish to be chic at all times, these suggestions will apply to you. I cannot quote any actual costs, not being familiar with prices in America at the present time, but I will suggest what in my opinion would constitute the minimum wardrobe that a person with a limited income must have in order to be smartly dressed:

Assuming that you are "starting from scratch," begin building your wardrobe with a good suit, and add to it as you can afford it, a good coat, two plain dresses for afternoon or dinner, a smart evening dress which will do duty winter and summer, and an evening wrap. For the first dress, I would suggest a good crepe with two different scarfs to be worn with a black coat with a fur collar. In the case of the evening dress, add a little jacket for informal parties, and leave it off for the formals. For winter, you should have a three-quarter fur coat, or if you cannot afford fur, a heavy tweed. I do not know how your summer climate is, but Paris is cool and for a cool summer climate I would suggest the addition of a three-quarter cloth coat.

AS to shoes, you should have a minimum of one pair of oxfords, one pair of pumps with Cuban heels, and one pair of evening sandals in either silver or gold (they last a long time). Shoes should never be conspicuous. Don't wear "fussy" shoes with trimming, bows, perforations, etc. A shoe, to be really smart, should be as plain as possible with a heel that suits the girl who wears it. I greatly disapprove of the exaggerated French heels which one sees so often in America with sport clothes. If a flat heel, which is now worn so much, doesn't suit a high-arched foot the effect can be modified by a Cuban heel. Feet are sometimes so overdressed that you can't tell what else their owner is wearing. Americans are more inclined to be guilty of this serious error than the women of any other country. Yet I find American women the easiest in the world to dress because they get so much fresh air and exercise. This particularly applies to movie stars. But invariably the average American woman's feet and head lack attention. Women can learn from men and improve their "chic." A man wouldn't think of wearing a tight shoe or one that didn't harmonize with his suit.

Shoes, hats, bag and gloves are frightfully important and should be considered together. All should match in color. Getting back to the building of our economy wardrobe, you should have a minimum of two hats, one a felt to wear with oxfords and a sport blouse; with the same suit a dressy blouse, a dressy hat and pumps, and you can go anywhere in the afternoon, including a visit to a Hollywood screen magnate, should you have the opportunity; it is all a question of taste, and not money.

Cheap jewelry should never be worn unless it happens to be something that you positively know suits your type. Pearls, including cheap imitations, are always in good taste. Plain gold jewelry in a modern design is always good. Avoid long earrings except for evening wear,

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and shun cheap beads as you would the plague. Generally speaking, keep *simple*; avoid flying ends, untidy appearance, putting on too much.

Don't underestimate the cost of a good bag, a good belt, good gloves. It is far better to pay five dollars for a pair of gloves and wear them for two years than to spend twice that amount in two years on dollar-and-a-half gloves.

A GOOD sweater should be in every girl's wardrobe, of course, for week-ends in the country and general sports.

Try to use the greatest possible care in selecting your hats. Hats are the greatest problem in America, for they are not fitted like shoes, as they are in Europe.

Now then, you have here a complete wardrobe which you can assemble in a few months if your income is very limited, and which will last you for two years. These things you ought to bear in mind always: buy *good things only* and never be afraid of wearing them too often, or of not "being in style." If you have good clothes, in good taste, you will always be chic and you can ignore passing fads. Remember that it is not necessary to spend a fortune in order to look smart and attractive at all times; it requires a surprisingly small amount of money. It requires only good taste and judgment.



Schiaparelli Bow-Knot Sweater, 1927

(image added)

