

For the working woman

Traditional Work Wear for Non-Traditional Workers

BY CATHY GROVES



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Try this on for size. Women currently comprise 46 percent of the labor force and are projected to account for 49 percent of the increase in the total labor force between 2006 and 2016. As I see it, women are officially in the work world. Whether it is in management/professional related occupations (39 percent), sales and office occupations (34 percent), service industries (20 percent), or production/transportation/materials moving/construction/natural resources/maintenance occupations (seven percent), there must be a need for clothing that suits women's needs for their daily routines.

In this case, let us focus specifically on those women in non-traditional jobs. The U.S. Department of Labor defines this sector as an occupation in which women make up 25 percent or less of total employment. Therefore, service and transportation/construction-type jobs would qualify as non-traditional. It is this group of women who require special attention to the apparel in which they choose to get their jobs done.

Sure to seal the deal

Men's workwear has been around since the late 1800s when the category was developed for railroad workers. There has been an evolution from those original bib overalls to a more contemporary definition of "workwear," which today encompasses jackets, sweatshirts, T shirts, jeans, shorts, woven shirts, polo shirts, hats, caps and accessory items.

The common grounds that define these items as workwear is comfort, durability, functionality, professionalism and style. Workwear has been defined as apparel worn at work, especially at manual labor positions. The earliest items to follow bibs were jackets made of durable fabrics but with a conservative and professional appearance to be cer-

tain that employees were well presented in front of customers.

Fast forward to women entering the work world and performing many of the same functions on the job, therefore requiring the same rugged features as men's clothing. The demands from women move beyond the color issue. In fact, it is a mistake to think that women just want pink clothing.

First and foremost are the matters of size and fit. Women want clothing that actually fits them and is contoured for their shapes. By wearing the correct fit, it already ensures comfort and, therefore, more productivity on the job. It looks better since it is not a men's jacket, just a size or two smaller. This creates an instant sense of pride and a good attitude on the job.

Next, it is imperative that the clothing is made from the same durable and rugged fabrics as men's workwear, and sewn with the same quality features to insure durability. Women do care about color in the sense that they want a greater selection. The traditional workwear colors of brown, dark blue and black have become too limiting. Pink is good, sure, but so is chocolate brown, charcoal gray, coral and other fashion shades. And, finally, style *does* enter into the equation. The basics silhouettes are important, but a touch of femininity such as princess seams is sure to seal the deal.

Willing to pay for it

Recently, a local chapter of the NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction) held a fashion show for its members. The purpose was to showcase workwear made especially for women in occupations that ranged from cabinet makers to owners of construction companies. Some important information came out of gathering this group of women together for a day of workwear fashion.

Laura DArenne, a representative of Weitz

(a nationally known Construction firm) and key organizer of the event commented, "Women are looking for variety in the number of style offerings, a mix of light- and heavy-weight, a complete range of product categories and clothing that is not so utilitarian in the styling. They appreciate the option to be able to be more feminine without sacrificing what workwear is all about."

She also noted that much of the clothing is used as a crossover from work to play. Thus, classic outdoor, lifestyle-looking jackets are important. When asked about pricing, it should not surprise anyone that women are willing to pay for fit, quality, style, color and availability. This sector of the working world is anxious to have women's workwear available in more than a brown hooded canvas body model.

New personality, classic style

In looking to summarize the trends in workwear from the feminine side, it is safe to say that these garments will ever-so-slightly follow the world of *haute couture*. But the natural progression of this growing market will be in the number of styles and colors available, new developments in perfecting fit and revolutionary fabric technology. We have already seen a growth in the high-performance, waterproof and windproof garments available in women's workwear. Advances in women's workwear *styles* will be modeled on the basic principles of this category: comfort, durability, and climate suitability, with some new personality added to classic styles.

Reprinted from *Printwear Magazine*
November 2008

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