

Dress returns as 'success uniform'

The dress is back in the business world.

Leading fashion designers contend that the professional woman no longer needs to adopt the dress code of her male counterparts in order to be taken seriously — thus the dress has reappeared as the "success uniform" for women.

While the options are plentiful, with designers offering virtually every silhouette, hem length, sleeve style and neckline, the dress is also termed more flattering and more economical.

"A dress is a wonderful tool for any woman," says Jerry Silverman, executive director of the newly organized American Dress Council and formerly head of his own dress company.

"Dresses are much more flattering than pants. The long lines of a dress flatter any shape whether it's tall and lanky or short and stout.

"If half the women in this country got a back view of themselves in pants, they'd be wearing dresses all the time. Furthermore," he added, "the dress is more flexible than a three-piece suit and much more economical at this time of rising costs."

There are many reasons for this return to dresses, according to the American Dress Council. The most obvious is the change in lifestyle and attitudes. Dresses and skirts in general were once cast aside by young women in the '60s as a sign of independence. The trend in the '70s toward menswear tailored shirts, vests, blazers and pantsuits followed shortly on the heels of this movement, away from traditional feminine attire.

"But those days are over," according to Silverman. "It's the '80s and women have found their place in the sun. They are individuals. They need not copy men anymore. Statistically and historically, American women turn to dresses whenever they feel secure. Typically, the chemise dress, the easy-to-wear garment, is the first to be accepted."

The chemise, now called the float, is indeed back. Such famous name designers as Adele Simpson, Mor-

ton Myles, Nippon, Bill Blass, Don Sayres and Kasper include the newest interpretation of the chemise — a billowing float or the straight-line sack in their spring collections.

Menswear tailored dresses featuring tartans, paisleys and other haberdashery details and the re-emergence of sexy cocktail-length dresses also are strong in the fashion picture.

With designers now creating timeless dresses that can go from day to nighttime wear with only the change of a few accessories (omitting the blazer after 5), dress buying offers more choices for less money.

"American women have gotten out of the habit of wearing dresses," says Silverman. "We are determined to reverse the trend by showing that for comfort, style and convenience there is nothing like wearing a dress.

"Say yes to a dress, is our slogan."

For those who would make their basic wardrobe for spring "a dress season" or at least add a few dresses to their pants and suit wardrobe, Silverman has the following suggestions for successful dressing:

1. Depending on your budget, have from three to six basic dresses. Silk is one of the best fabrics because it goes easily from daytime to evening and can be worn year-round.

2. Select dresses with simple lines and colors that are easy to accessorize. But don't be afraid to experiment with bold patterns and bright colors. With care they are as easy to accessorize as more conservative ones.

3. Blazers and unstructured jackets are your best accessories. Have at least one for summer and one for winter — preferably in neutral colors. Then, if you can, add one or two bright jackets that will mix and match with your wardrobe.

4. Belts are a must. Collect a bundle of them from the varieties available.

5. Embroidered sweaters and cardigans are back again. They look good over dresses — a conservative one for the office, an embroidered one for evening.

6. Scarves also are mar-

velous with dresses. Designer scarves or those from India add to a dress. Some sari scarves also look great tied around the waist.

7. Shawls also are attrac-

tive, not only for keeping warm, but for accessorizing with a flair. For daytime, tie them over your shoulders. For evening, tie one around your waist. Wool shawls are worn over

blazers or over bare shoulders.

8. Skirts and tunics also can do much to enhance your wardrobe.

9. Shoes and handbags can make a big difference

in your total look. Boots or pumps and a leather shoulder strap bag look very professional with a dress. For evening, switch to sandals, a metallic bag, and you're ready for dancing.

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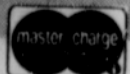
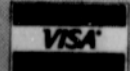
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