

A Plus Buyer's Guide: Women's Accessories

Details of Distinction

What do we mean when we talk about "accessories?" The word seems to relegate details to mere afterthoughts, but consider what allows a diamond to sparkle. Facets: small and properly placed, they balance the play of light within the stone and emphasize its color and clarity to give it prismatic fire.

An accessory may itself be embellished, but an accessory doesn't ornament or decorate the wearer: it harmonizes a singular look, uniting seemingly disparate elements and connecting it to your beauty, your style, your grace. Just as no two diamonds are alike, neither are any two women alike: you have your own fire and light that details distinguish.

Handbags: no other accessory so strongly transforms a look as a handbag. But what about the details? With so many different options, which is the best? Well, the key word here is "options" and you should always keep yours open. A pouchy hobo bag will hold the essentials that'll help you transition from a day at the office to a night with the girls. Phone? ✓ Makeup bag? ✓ Sunglasses? ✓ Wallet? ✓ A big, squishy handbag makes carrying everything casual. ProTip: If you're going to an evening event where a large bag would be too much but you have plenty to carry, put your cash, cards, and phone into a box or bijou clutch and slip it into your bag. Then just leave your bag at the coat check and carry your clutch! Go with something sparkly and eye-catching: crystal accents or patent leather on a clutch are fun and classy without being overbearing or trying too hard.

Oversized clutches bridge day and evening, dangling with casual sophistication on wristlets. These are large enough for a card case, a wallet, a phone, and whatever else you can fit while keeping it light and flat enough to forget it's there...or pretend to. Carry them with confidence: the night belongs to you. While shopping, a detachable strap keeps your hands free by slinging your bag over your shoulder and can easily convert back and slip over your arm. For the beach or pool, nothing beats a tote: its simplicity speaks to the simple elegance of your swimsuit and certainly won't detract from your tan. An understated bag pulls a casual outfit together and gives it purpose and direction: you're a woman in motion. Neutral earth tones go with everything, but besides basic brown, try an off-white or beige. Both can easily be worn with everything from vibrant yellows to navy blue. Repeating monograms are classic and underscore conventional good taste. There's a reason those designs exist: they're a silent acknowledgement of others that you know your classics. Paired with sunglasses, a loose t-shirt and jeans they can be spontaneous and carefree while transitioning to nightlife with pumps and a mini-dress. Details like studs, spikes,

and brass or chrome hardware are chic and edgy. Valentino's "Rockstud" designs set the bar high with pyramid-shaped studs edging butter-soft leather bags and adorning their handles and straps.

Wallets can be useful for more than just carrying cards and bills. Eyeliner pencils, blotting paper, hand wipes, breath strips, or other small extras can be slipped into the large compartments to help take some of the stress off your makeup bag, which is a necessity for anyone with an active social life. Don't forget a stain remover stick: they can be life and (blouse) savers. Mini bottles also easily fit in them: you never know when you're going to need a bracer (not that we endorse it). More organization is demanded by card cases, so if you're looking to consolidate or travel light (or carry other things), consider a stylish card case. Look for even stitching and embossed or textured leather: when you're fishing around in your purse for it, you'll appreciate the tactile feedback.

Feminine Facets: Jewelry

When you put in a pair of earrings, clasp a necklace, or slip on a bracelet or a ring, you command the observer to look. You project your presence. Playful silver and crystal earrings can be a modest, flirtatious addition to a flowy sundress or worn with street-smart attitude in boyfriend jeans and a jersey tee. A citrine or ruby necklace poured around the neck is a surprising splash of fire paired with an inky LBD: the classic combination of hot and cool colors creating a striking study in contrasts against flawless skin. A whimsical pendant can amplify a cocktail dress, lending a seductive reticence to the formality of the garment. Loose, delicate bangles emphasize the length of the arm and slenderize the limb from wrist to shoulder: for this effect wear them with either a sleeveless or cap sleeved dress. Mixing contradictory visual elements creates unexpected glamour: bold, oversized jewelry worn with sleek dresses or uber-casual outfits combined with serpentine designs intrigue the eye without ever looking affected. Bezel-set faceted or cabochon stones in bright, eye-catching colors work well for these looks. Sky-blue aquamarines turn blonde hair into sun-gilt cascades, while amethysts, cabernet-colored garnets, and emeralds highlight the mystery of shining dark tresses and ruby-red lips. Amber or lapis mounted in a silver ring lend a boho-chic look that can either be casually artisanal...or deceptively dressy. Don't neglect the dainty and lacy, however. Gold and silver dipped lace cuffs are great for a late summer stroll in black jeans and a sleeveless mock turtleneck or for a night at the opera. Stackable rings are fun, fashion forward, and a great chance to mix and match different geometrical shapes and complementing colors and textures. Jewelry should always emphasize your best features. Use it to call attention to them. After all, it's not wearing you: you're wearing it. Do so with confidence.

Scarves:

Scarves are often just as glamorous as jewelry. Worn like a kerchief and paired with oversized sunglasses and a cashmere or camel hair trench, a white silk or diaphanous chiffon scarf is enigmatic, especially with red lipstick and nails. Variants of the shemagh – the head scarves of the middle east – in light, gauzy cotton, add a touch of the exotic to urban street fashion. The intricate silk prints of the couture houses are always in vogue. Draped over the shoulders and loosely knotted, they speak to timeless sophistication...but their versatility doesn't stop there. Tied around the handle, a scarf can add a swipe of color and whimsy to a handbag: try it with an embossed leather shoulder bag. You can also create a ruched bandeau with a long cotton or chiffon scarf for an unplanned trip to the pool or beach: flirty improvisation at its finest. A silk scarf worn around the hips as a belt or wrap can slim the waist of an H-line dress and break up the solid tones with a vivid, colorful burst that brings modern sass to retro-chic. Play with the infectiously joyous qualities of a scarf or turn them into dramatic tools for mystery...or mischief.

Get waisted: belts.

A narrow belt for jeans and pants is an absolute, but there's so much more to the midriff than just leather or fabric strips. A wide belt with an oversized buckle is a glam accessory to a conservative dress or skirt/blouse ensemble. Use it as a bridge for work wear and turn drab to fab. For a sexy, flattering approach to evening wear, try a subtle corset belt. The addition of soft leather to silk coupled with the intertwining laces is provocative, flattering your hips, waist, and bust without being louche. For a casual, preppy look, go with a grosgrain ribbon belt the next time you wear shorts or capris.

Accessories are more than just things to collect: they're a collection of details that, when properly lined up, turn an outfit into an ensemble.