

diva diary

BY JILL JOHNSON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY BUNKY HURTER

Sophia's* quest to acquire the perfect fall wardrobe

Appearances are deceiving. I spent most of the day lounging by the pool — sipping Perrier, flipping through *Vogue*, occasionally gazing off at the rippling water of Long Island Sound and the long rippling muscles of Sergio, the gardener. Sounds like a carefree summer day, right?

Wrong. The thermostat lies. The hall table tells the truth. Upon it are a pile of invitations — two charity luncheons, three cocktail parties, two black-tie galas and one black-tie “optional” event — declaring that summer is being ushered out and autumn is demanding a grand entrance, or, at present count, *eight* of them!

And how can I be carefree with the decisions ahead of me: Carolina or Oscar? Valentino or Vera? Armani or Shaloni? Studly Sergio or my darling husband?

OK, I'm kidding about the last one. Watching Sergio make the flowerbed is one thing; lying in it with him is another. I'm just heating up for my true amour — the scintillating boutiques of Fairfield County. It is here that fall fashion is congregating in various states of dressiness, promising that a committed shopper will walk away with something lovely and lasting (or ten to fifteen lovely, lasting things).

**Sophia is fictional;
the fashion is real.*



September I

Off with the bikini, on with the task at hand. My little black book is full of shops I love, but this packed social agenda calls for some strategic planning. I'll narrow down my search to just a few of the stores in my speed dial — Mitchells, Razooks and Helen Ainson; then I'll swing by Scoop for the jeans I'll live in between events; and finally, Plaza Too and Chou Chou to purchase some grand-entrance insurance for my feet.

Even though Mitchells is virtually my home away from home, some seasons I just ring up and have a selection of looks sent to my home — or couriered up to Maine if I'm at the summer house. The long-distance thing works fine for us, and they'll do almost anything to please. But when I got Linda Mitchell on the phone and she gave me some hints about what's in store this fall — a return to black (phew, this means a return to carbs too); more evening separates (balloon skirts and serious beaded sweaters); and mixing of fabrics, looks and designers, I had to go into the store to play around and get my hands on all those textured fabrics, like overlaid velvets and lamés in the rich subtle colors of rust, aubergine and olive. I'm with Carrie Bradshaw: This is the stuff of poetry. I book an appointment for Friday.

My next call was to Leslie Razook, who scopes out the emerging designers every season to freshen up her store. Ruffian, Suzanne Simon, Josef Statkus, Gypsy Couture, Jeffrey Chow, Palmer Jones, Peter Som, Cortazar (so fresh that his age still ends in "teen") — these are a few of the names she shared, in fashionista confidence, over the phone. I can't wait to get them in my closet,



to replace the been-there-done-that skeletons hanging there. Soon I'll be giving my bohemian looks the peace sign and retiring them to the attic, at least those that aren't chic, because "luxe" is in (think cashmere, sable-lined coat). She and Linda had the same advice about another tenacious trend: Dump the miniskirts (at, well, thirty-nine-ish, I'm not going to argue). This will make room for the full skirt that Leslie said *everyone* will want this fall. I know who to thank for that: Marc Jacobs, whose latest designs spoke voluminous volumes on the runways of New York and Paris. Leslie also advised that I make room in my jewelry box: piling it on is in. Appointment at Razooks: Saturday.

I have fond memories of joining Mom on her visits to the Helen Ainson Shoppe in New York City, so it's always nice to see Erica Jensen (Helen's daughter) at her shop in Darien. When fashion runs in the family, there's always good stock. This fall it's cashmere, wool, silk, suede and velvet, uniquely combined for daytime or evening; black suits; dashes of deep burgundy and chocolate brown; a free-for-all in shapes, styles and lengths of jackets; and dresses showing "romantic restraint" have replaced the more risqué numbers. I book my appointment for Helen Ainson.

September 2

Mitchells was abuzz with smart shoppers who know that September is the peak month for fall inventory. Linda had selected irresistible outfits for all my occasions.

LUNCHEON: A full tweed skirt and gold-washed short leather jacket by Douglas Hannett.

The Lagerfeld Gallery is so unique and the Pollini pantsuit is great for those indecisive days. I threw in a rose wool lace skirt suit from Luisa Beccaria, which will go from a day of charity-event planning to dinner with the husband.

COCKTAIL PARTY: A beaded cashmere sweater and short or long lamé skirt by Lela Rose (plus, I could wear the long skirt to a black-tie, pair the sweater with jeans for shopping the Avenue, and wear the short skirt with a white blouse for lunch with the ladies).

BLACK TIE: I could choose the more traditional long gown or relish the return of the fancy cocktail dress with an Armani Black Label silk dress featuring a just-below-the-knee balloon bottom. Fabulous!

For the ever-befuddling black-tie optional, Linda gave me some guidance: "You can go with anything from a beautifully cut black suit embellished with accessories, all the way to a gown. If the event is during the week, it won't be as dressy; add a pair of Manolo Blahniks and the right jewelry to dress up a suit. The Lela Rose outfit works. Jack Posen and Shalani do some beautiful gowns that aren't so serious. There's a Shalani dress (à la Audrey Hepburn) in silk twill, with little off-the-shoulder straps and a slight A-line, or a four-ply silk, cap-sleeve dress with a soft flowing skirt that falls just below the knee and a twist in the front to give an open neckline." (She stresses that it's *open*, not plunging. Reminder: Sexy and feminine are in; provocative is not — no emulating Edie of *Desperate Housewives*).

"I'll take it. And the Lela Rose — the long and short skirt, since they're so versatile — and the Armani, of course." As I sashayed over to peruse the must-have metallic accessories and interesting pumps and slingbacks, I was lightheaded. The shopping-spree buzz is better than all the champagne-induced ones in my future, and I won't need aspirin in the morning.

September 3

Leslie at Razooks didn't make my decisions very easy. All the choices had me concocting fantasy invitations to pad my shopping list.

LUNCHEON: A wool and silk jacquard Luca Luca dress and jacket in an eggplant-chocolate shade — wouldn't be nice to eat, but it's a dream to wear, and I can use the dress and jacket separately all fall. Also, Chloe's origami jacket in ivory piqué that works equally well with a skirt, pants or even jeans.

COCKTAIL PARTY: A beaded cocktail dress from Daslu in burgundy velvet — *the* bargain of the year. Or I could go for a decadent Daisy Buchanan look — a sapphire-blue, fringed taffeta dress by Lanvin.

BLACK-TIE: The perfect black gown by Nina Ricci or an amethyst dream by Kevan Hall with a beaded bodice and chiffon bow.

BLACK-TIE OPTIONAL: (Why don't they just make up their minds?) Leslie had some solutions, in case I can't make up mine either. A Lagerfeld Gallery look that is actually two separate dresses: a sexy strapless satin sheath underneath a lighter-than-air chiffon long-sleeved "overdress" in "petrol" blue (designers must be running out of color adjectives); or option two, a bronze jacquard Pollini pantsuit that I can wear with a melon mousseline bow blouse underneath, or, if I'm feeling particularly daring, over nothing (well, maybe a little lacy cami). Leslie was right about newcomer Josef Statkus; his ethereal crocheted cashmere dresses and gowns are works of art. I tried on a halter-neck gown in charcoal ombré. It felt like I was wearing the sexiest cashmere sweater ever. >>

Decisions, decisions. I couldn't resist the Luca Luca, and the Chloe jacket I'll wear all the time. The Daslu was such a good buy so I balanced things out with the Lanvin dress (my fashion editor friend in New York City said this collection is one of the best). The Nina Ricci I'll need, as black is such a must. The Lagerfeld Gallery is so unique and the Pollini pantsuit is great for those indecisive days. I threw in a rose wool lace suit from Luisa Beccaria, which will go from a day of charity-event planning to dinner with the husband. (We'll be talking about going long and going short — he'll mean hedge funds, I'll mean hems, but at least we'll agree: these days you can do either.)

September 4

I thought my Helen Ainson spree would be a breeze, but I always forget that Erica works with 150 different manufacturers and many of the dresses are custom-made, which means choices: a rainbow of colors, plus beads, sequins, pearls, jackets, stoles, sometimes even sleeves, to add or delete. At least Erica had narrowed down my selection with some looks that were made for Helen Ainson — and, it seemed, for me. (She does designer wear too, but clearly I've done that already.)

LUNCHEON: A cashmere jacket and matching top in soft caramel with cocoa, beige and black pinstripe tweed pants, topped off by a three-quarter-length black cashmere coat, featuring mink looped cuffs and edges.

COCKTAIL PARTY: A black boucle Chanel-inspired jacket, trimmed with



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Dress by
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The shopping-
spree buzz is
better than all
the Champagne-
induced ones
in my future,
and I won't need
aspirin in the
morning.

peacock feathers and paillettes, worn over a satin camisole with feather-trimmed straps and a wide-legged satin evening pant. For a funkier night out, I could pair the jacket and cami with my favorite jeans and sexiest stilettos.

BLACK-TIE: A ruched bustier with a graceful floor-sweeping skirt in brilliant colors, like metallic olive, orchid, mango and rich jewel tones.

Erica picked out jewelry and purses to complete each look, and I figured since I would save so much time in accessory shopping, I may as well take the lot. Erica convinced me not to take *black-tie* so literally. At one gala, I shall arrive in purple and turquoise (if that doesn't grab attention, the Cartier-inspired Swarovski crystals around my neck will).

September 5

Scoop is the place to find a chic blazer, funky sweater, show-stopper designer dress and a great pair of jeans all in one store. I tried to focus — jeans, jeans, jeans — as I don't really need anything else (a lesson from Shopaholics Anonymous).

The metallic trend has hit the jeans market too, and James Jeans has designed an exclusive jean with metallic-gold embroidery on the back pocket just for Scoop — a no-brainer, had to have 'em. Seven also did an exclusive Scoop jean, a boyish "Papa Don't Preach" cut that hits at the ankle. I bought them and a pair of Scoop's very own metallic ballet slippers. I decided to come back with the husband — they have some great Scoop cords by AG for him and her.



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As long as I was already on Greenwich Avenue (a fashion diva feels a bit more grounded if her feet touch it at least once a day), I decided to buy some *presence* for my precious pieds. Plaza Too's Greenwich store caters to the black-tie crowd, and the fall colors are some of the best in New England: dark metallics like bronze, copper and pewter; brown satin; some navy; of course black, in shoes and accessories; and sequins, crystals — embellishment to the max; not to mention, an array of toe styles and heel heights to serve every whim or loop around the dance floor.

John Mendes, one of the owners, pointed out two pairs I had to have: a beautiful metallic-copper Vera Wang evening sandal, with a high heel and one simple row of topaz rhinestones across the toe; and Stuart Weitzman's "Favorite," very Chanel-esque, with a peek-a-boo toe and bow, in black or chocolate brown satin. They technically are evening shoes, but John says the twenty- and thirty-somethings wear them with jeans too. So technically, I probably shouldn't, but there are worse things I could be doing, and why not have a closet full of barely worn shoes that are begging to take a stroll with my new jeans?

Before I got flustered by several Cynthia Rowleys and Anne Kleins (shoes are another area where Miss Bradshaw and I can relate), I grabbed the Vera Wangs and the Weitzmans (in brown) and made a clean break. (Reminder: Call credit card company and make sure they don't put a stop on the card for slightly unusual activity.)

September 6

Last stop: Chou Chou. Katharine Sanford, the owner, walked me through her fall colors: chocolate brown and black — neck and neck for number one; plums; and rich metallics. Rich suedes are also big. She had some walk-on-a-cloud suede dress shoes, but comfort *and* style? C'mon, right? Well,



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Dr. Edward Jacobson is a board certified gynecologist who has been in practice in Manhattan and Greenwich for over twenty five years. He is an Attending Physician at Greenwich Hospital and the Fairfield County Surgery Center. Dr. Jacobson also directs the Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation Center of Greenwich (www.lvrdoc.com).

Dr. Jacobson has devoted his career to bringing innovative technologies into the Greenwich community, from advanced fetal monitoring to the use of laser for vaginal surgeries. He is accredited to perform all aspects of minimally invasive surgery, as well as correcting urinary stress incontinence with outpatient laser surgery. Dr. Jacobson continues to actively diagnose and treat couples with infertility problems. His practice focuses on individualized counseling and treatment for women suffering from menopausal and premenstrual symptoms.

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Dr. Jacobson and Dr. Hagberg are very pleased to announce the addition of Pat Baird, MA, RD, FADA to their office. Ms. Baird is a registered dietitian and a Fellow of the American Dietetic Association. Formerly the Administrative Dietitian at Memorial Sloan Cancer Center and The Hospital for Special Surgery, Pat is an award-winning author and nationally recognized speaker. Her specialties include individualized weight loss management, osteoporosis prevention, and nutritional counseling.

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Katharine says she actually requests that vendors put in extra cushioning sometimes. If she can help me make my way gracefully through three galas a week, this woman is a godsend.

If she can do it on the cheap too, the husband will agree. The "Fifi" by A. Marinelli, a midheel strappy sparkly slingback, was only \$129. I picked a platinum pair to round out my shiny shades. With Delman's "Rajah" evening shoe, an adorable black high-heel with mink pompoms on the end of the ankle straps, my total crept just barely past \$300. That should hold my shoe fix until the end of September when a huge Chou Chou will be opening in Fairfield.

We'll be talking
 about going long
 and going short.
 He'll mean
 hedge funds.
 I'll mean hems.

September 7

Ahhhh, mission accomplished. Today I relaxed and reflected on all I'd learned in the last week.

This fall, style is all about personality and polish: It doesn't matter where a skirt or jacket falls, how high a heel is or how much jewelry I wear, as long as I feel good, and my outfit is put together in an original, tasteful way, from head to toe — meaning a mix of designers, styles and fabrics, plus just the right accessories and shoes. Black is back, luxe and feminine are in (after all, 2005 is the 100th anniversary of Christian Dior's birth), full skirts are big, minis are out and rich metallic shoes, purses and accessories shall be fall's shining stars.

I will feel like one too, if I can just figure out which outfit to wear first. ■