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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Playbill for Dreamgirls

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FASHION FORECAST

These days dressing up at night offers infinite choices

Dressing up at night is no longer the cut and dried procedure it once was, if you can call sequins, bugle beads, satin and lace cut and dried.

Once upon a time there were prom dresses and debutante gowns, dinner dresses and ball gowns. When the proper occasion arose, you went out and bought one or the other. All the categories were very much alike: they sported bare shoulders, tiny waistlines and bouffant skirts. Only the colors differed - prom dresses were usually in pastel shades, deb styles were white, dinner clothes were in subdued colors and the ball gowns there were no limits - beads, sequins, embroidery and lace mixed with satin, taffeta or chiffon, in season, to form eye-boggling creations.

Today, dressing up at night is simpler, or more complicated, depending on how you look at it. Whether it is a black tie evening or the men wear dark business suits or blazers, women have almost infinite choices.

The good news is that the evening dress is no longer a one-time proposition, something acquired for a specific event and then put away until everybody forgets about it and it can be removed from its garment bag for another evening some time hence.

The bad news is that the multitude of choices can seem overwhelming. Is it a night for pants? For long skirts or short ones? For bare shoulders or long sleeves? Decisions. Decisions.

The ameliorating factors are that (a) on most occasions, it doesn't matter - the choice is up to you and (b) with the new order of separates dressing, you can have things both ways.

If, for instance, you start with a camisole that covers the shoulders only with tiny straps, you can always add a jacket or a shawl - useful, too, if the room is too chilly for you.

The same camisole can be worn with trousers, especially the new short pants,

[[image - black & white photograph of man and woman on the runway]]
[[caption]]Velvet top and pants from Giorgio Armani[[caption]]

if you're feeling frivolous, or a more conservative long skirt. The trousers can be breeches caught at the knee, long shorts, jodhpurs or the rounded type, puffy over the hips.

Add a pair of festive shoes - metallic sandals or shiny pumps - and you can face the most glittering evening in style.

Instead of a camisole, you can start with a dressy blouse, softened with ruffles or a jabot, in lace or satin, and then plan the appropriate bottom - or bottoms. There's no rule against a full skirt worn over skinny pants.



If you don't feel like lace, you can pick a soft leather top, possible with on covered shoulder, and go on from there. A pretty belt or sash in, say, paisley silk, or copper or gold, is an attractive extra.

The point is, the next time you're feeling festive, you don't have to repeat the exact outfit. If you wore the pants the other night, you can pick a skirt this time, and so on. And, or course, if you mix things

By Bernadine Morris

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