

City Lifestyle

How many perfect people can you fit into a rectangle?

1. dropping the waist

- with a blouson

Slight blouson Fuller blouson

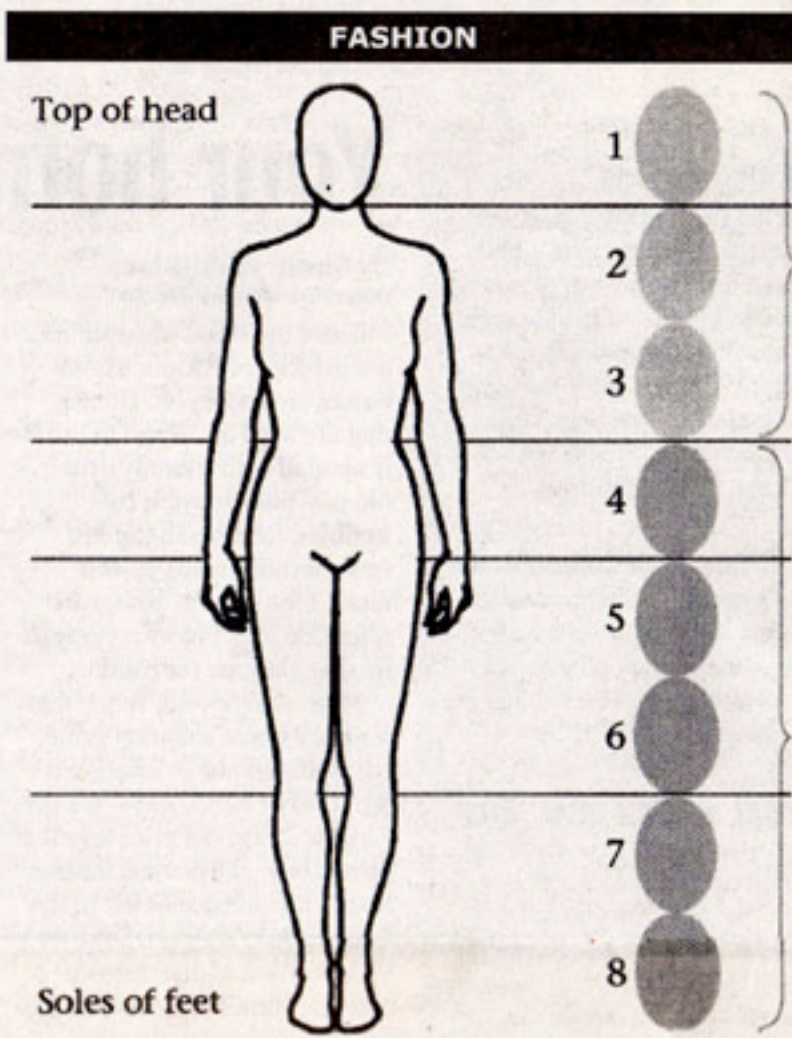
- in the construction

- with a short jacket just below the waist

By Deanna Larson
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If you can't find a thing that fits on the racks in the women's department, it could be because most clothing is not meant for you. Most clothing is not meant for most of us, which is just one of many surprises in *The Triumph of Individual Style* by Carla Mason Mathis and Helen Villa

Connor. This book is all about embracing the body you have, and through clothes, turning it into a reflection you won't mind catching in a mirror. But first, you need to understand that mass-produced clothes are made for rectangular-shaped figures in perfect proportions of eight head lengths from crown to feet — hence the fitting-room frustration.



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The 3:5 "golden mean" ratio represents the perfect, easy-to-dress body that acts as a baseline for measuring actual proportions. Long legs can be balanced with a shorter torso through clever dressing. A short waist can be lengthened with tailoring or clothing style.

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"The reason even [plus-sized models] look so balanced in the clothes they wear is because they have [a body of] at least eight head lengths," Connor said. "Models have at least eight or 10, that's why they can carry anything they put on."

The easy-to-dress body is rare, that's why they're on the runway. Normal women can mimic these perfect bodies by dressing in proportion to their unique body lengths. "Many women focus on clothes, rather than body harmony," Connor said.

The first step to body harmony is measuring your proportions. Take a length of string and measure your head from crown to chin. Then use this piece of string to measure your upper body (chin to natural waist) and bottom body (waist to feet). Perfect balance is an upper body of three head lengths and bottom body of five head lengths. This is called the "golden mean proportion," a ratio of 2:3 or 3:5. But if you're shorter or longer

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— HELEN VILLA CONNOR

in places, don't despair. Just follow this principle when dressing yourself: Where you are shorter, optically lengthen, and where you are longer, optically shorten.

If you have short legs, optically lengthen them by pushing up your sleeves. Who knew? If you have a long waist, balance it by wearing horizontal or diagonal lines in the bodice to break up

the upper-body space. This includes a camp shirt with pockets and the collar turned up, or a cap-sleeved top that ties at the waist.

If you have a short head, wear fullness in your hair at the top; if you have a long head, wear bangs. Many women discover these principles by instinct and trial and error. The book gives reasons for the instinct — hundreds of pages of techniques, clothing sketches, and paintings by artists through the ages clarify the principles. Connor believes that we can highlight or camouflage any body particular by first understanding, then echoing and harmonizing the lengths and shapes we find in our natural silhouette.

"Your body speaks to you," Connor said. "Once you understand your body's design pattern, you can invite your creativity to ... develop a signature style, because you're confident about what you're doing."

The Triumph of Individual Style is published by Fairchild Publications, and can be ordered through Davis Kidd Booksellers or www.amazon.com.