

Tips and answers to style questions for *Best Body Magazine*

by Helen Villa Connor, Personal Design Consultant, originator of the Body's Design Pattern paradigm, and co-author of *The Triumph of Individual Style* (Fairchild Books, NY). Interviewer was Katherine Caruana in 2005.

The Importance of Fit

The most important factor in any garment you choose to wear is perfect fit. Good fit means that clothes skim the body with ease and that all the details such as seams, lapels, waistbands, pockets lie flat and fall where they are designed to hit your body. This means passing up anything that is too small, too short, or too tight; too big, too bulky, or too long, regardless of how attractive the garment looks on the hanger. When trying on a garment, look for unsightly pulls and puckers, gaps and lumps, droopiness and bagginess, etc., in the key areas of shoulders, bust, waist, derriere, crotch, arms, and legs. Consider if tailoring the flaws can make the piece right for you. If not, move on and remember: for figure flattery, perfect fit is first and foremost, regardless of body type.

Individual Style from Off-the-rack

Of course, when making choices for what to try on when shopping, ideally you should already know by instinct or discovery what *fabrics* suit your body, what is your best *silhouette* shape, and how to combine wardrobe pieces in good *proportion* within that silhouette. With these in mind, deciding what styles work for your unique body becomes easier in the process of 'designing' your wardrobe from off-the-rack clothing.

Precisely because each woman has what I call a unique Body Design Pattern of line, shape, proportion, body particulars, scale, color (skin/hair/eyes), and texture (hair/skin), all written advice are just guidelines, not definitive rules. Do remember: once you find something that works for your body's design -- own it, even wear it often to create a signature style.

That said, what styles of jackets and tops are the most flattering for a large bosom?

I believe that any feature can be camouflaged or highlighted depending on your comfort zone and purpose. For everyday flattery for a full bosom, show your curves without overemphasizing them. Begin by wearing a bra that lifts, supports, and fits comfortably beneath the following styles and details:

- Uncomplicated tops, open-neck sweaters, blouses, and dress bodices. (Avoid anything that adds bulk around the neck and short sleeves that are gathered or flared.)
- Fitted or semi-fitted tops and jackets with contour seaming and bust darts
- Fine-textured, non-bulky fabrics that drape well.
- Single-breasted jackets with closures that end right below the bustline. (Use a bit of shoulder padding that extend the shoulder slightly to balance bosom. Also, consider a fuller hair-style to help create upper body balance.)
- The vertical and diagonal lines on a slim or moderate size lapel on a jacket or a surplice neckline in a blouse will draw the eye away from the width of the bosom.
- Anything that adds a vertical or steep diagonal line above the waist (to break up the large space) and/or an eye-catching detail below the waist (to draw the eye away from the bosom).

Helen's Bathing Suit Tips

Because you are practically baring all, choosing a flattering bathing suit especially calls for good fit and strategic use of color, fabric, pattern, and detailing, in order to draw attention where you want it and divert it from where you don't.

Fit: If a suit cuts into flesh creating bulges, try one size larger. A high lycra content will help hold in shape.

Color:

- As a color designer, I think wearing your natural colors of hair, skintones, and eyes is always a good strategy. For example, if your hair color is dark, match it in the suit or the background of a print, and even down to your footwear, to create an overall elongated look. Colors close to your skin tones can create a feminine and elegant monochromatic effect; skintones are also great for a background in a print that contains your eye-color.
- Use dark colors on places you'd like to slenderize and brighter and lighter colors on areas you want to highlight.

Fabric: Matte fabrics are the most slimming.

Pattern: Avoid big prints. Use a print to draw attention away from your perceived problem area. For example, a print top paired with a matching solid bottom can divert attention from hips and thighs.

Here are other other suggestions:

- Amply-curved body: Try a wrap style with all-over pattern that defuses attention from any one area. Prints with darker background are usually more slimming.
- Small Bust: Try a bra-top style with underwire. Bright colors and details such as bows, shirring, and light padding add dimension if you want to. Otherwise, soft-styled string bikinis look great.
- Full bust: Look for built-in support such as underwire, wider straps, and high lycra content in a dark-colored top.
- Tummy: Diagonal lines or color block can help break up the space of a large tummy. Try a tankini with a higher-waisted, high-lycra content bottom with a high-cut leg.
- Legs: To visually elongate legs, choose the highest-cut leg that your tummy, derrière, and comfort zone permit.