

INVESTMENT DRESSING

Just because the economy's in tatters doesn't mean your style has to be.

The trend today is "investment dressing" -- buying a few solid pieces that can take you from season-to-season with just a few add-ons to mix-and-match, at any price point.

Fashion stylist Gretta Monahan (<http://www.grettastyle.com/>), co-host of the reality makeover show "Tim Gunn's Guide to Style," stopped by *The Early Show* Saturday to show us the 10 pieces you must have in your wardrobe to make it through fall, from a good pair of jeans to a little black dress.

Q-and-A with Greta:

GRETTA, ON "GUIDE TO STYLE" YOU TALK ABOUT THE "10 ESSENTIALS" IN A WOMAN'S WARDROBE. WHAT MAKES THESE ITEMS ESSENTIAL?

The ten essentials comes from Tim's book, and they're based on quality, taste and style. They form the perfect foundation to any stylish wardrobe. Each one is something concrete, they're not just one-minute wonders. "Guide To Style" is the only show where the participant asks for help, then transforms herself, and we are the coaches. We give them the shopping strategy, and pick the styles that work just for them.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE TEN ESSENTIALS. FIRST, A LITTLE BLACK DRESS. IT'S THE ONE ITEM WE'VE ALWAYS HEARD WE NEED.

You can have any dress you want, but if you have a perfect one, and it isn't as easy to find as you think, you can do so much with it. You have to find one you can pair with a cropped jacket or suit jacket during the day with boots, then throw on heels at night. It's an investment item, but you have to find the fit and proportion that's right for you. You have to find the details that work for you, then change up your accessories that work with it. It can sound like a cliché but you do need one.

ESSENTIAL NUMBER TWO, A "CLASSIC BLAZER." WHAT MAKES A BLAZER A CLASSIC?

We're showing a more modern update to the classic blazer, a short jacket. We're not talking about a men's wear blazer. Go with something more modern, with a modern cut, but you can do it in classic textile, like men's wear tweeds with updated styles and details. That's what makes it modern, things like patent leather piping, but in men's wear textiles. And there are so many different ways you can wear it. Remember, women shouldn't look at this list and not see it in a modern way. But you might have something that works already in your closet. If you happen to have an 80's jacket with shoulder pads, get rid of it. But if you have a great jacket, you can have the sleeves adjusted or have it re-tailored. This can be an opportunity for people at home to rework what's in their wardrobes. But you should never save something that is worn out or faded. And don't buy anything to wear to one occasion or one place, you need to think about how many different roles in your life this investment item can be used for.

THIRD MUST-HAVE, THE TRENCH.

The "trench", as everyone knows, is a raincoat. It has a lot of history, every style icon has used it at one time or another. It used to be seen only in khaki cotton, and it was used for weather proofing and casual looks. This one is brushed satin, and it puts away the old rule about not wearing a lot of shine during the day. That's out the window. This is the right length to wear with a dress, you can wear it with jeans, anything. It can give a lot of life to a stylish wardrobe. You can do the trench in a shorter length, you can do it long, you can find the perfect length and

silhouette. Taller women can tolerate a fuller bottom. This is what we do, we are trying to help women find themselves in the clothing.

UNDERNEATH THE TRENCH, THE NEXT WARDROBE ESSENTIAL, THE DAY DRESS.

I say this, if you have a little black dress and you don't have to replace it, then go for the other "LBD", the little bright dress. It instantly gives you youth. It's a one-piece wonder, it looks fresh, bright, you can do it in a shirt dress, or the wrap dress, which has become the new day dress. It's figure flattering, you can buy it in sizes from 0-24, throw cashmere over it, a shawl, a jacket or a trench. A lot of people go for pants rather than a dress, but the truth is well-fitting pants can be much more difficult to find than a dress. You might want to reconsider the dress. A dress is a lot more forgiving. If you fluctuate in weight, you can keep going back to it, it's not as restrictive as other items. And you can dress it down or up with shoes.

NEXT WARDROBE ESSENTIAL, THE CLASSIC BUTTON DOWN SHIRT.

I call it an any occasion top. We picked a classic button down, in a beautiful orange-y, red color. It's not just a weird Oxford, and you don't have to do it in white. This has exaggerated buttons, a great silhouette, with a belt. It is easy to think of button-down shirts as boring, but you can update it with a big, wide belt, and it can be casual or slip into a work situation. This is a great fit and a great length. You can do the shirt in your personality, in a satin or print. If you're a classicist, do it in white. If you have one in your closet already, you have to remember, if it's yellow or tinted or in any way off, get rid of it.

PERFECT PAIR OF PANTS.

This is one of those items with strict rules: if you have pants in your wardrobe that are tapered or pleated, you must get rid of them. High waisted pants on a long torso is ok, but America is made up of women who average 5'4" or 5'6". And you don't want to add volume. Try the pants on, get an honest friend to tell you yay or nay. These are perfect, because they have a flat front, and slice pockets in the front, which are flattering because they don't include flaps, buttons or bulk. Stick with straight leg falling from the hip or thigh. But this one has more of a flair, and with heels a small model can pull that off. Remember to stay in the proportion you are. You don't have to wear a men's trouser. If you want more fashion, go for trendy details, but make sure you balance. If you're small, don't wear the flair. And hems need to fall 1/4-1/2 inch off the ground.

CLASSIC SKIRT. WE'RE SEEING BUBBLE SKIRTS, A-LINES, PENCIL SKIRTS. WHAT MAKES THIS "CLASSIC"?

You have to put blinders on toward bubbles, trapeze, and more exaggerated skirts. This one is a hybrid, which is a cross between a pencil and an A-line. We've tested it on women who are petite to tall, sizes 0-16, and it looks good on everyone. And the zone for length is to the knee or just above. Going too long is the quickest way to frumpy-ville. Women don't look good in mid-calf length, and that's all women. You don't want it to hang below the knee by much, or it won't show the contour of your legs. And remember, women who are 5'6" or under will probably have to hem your skirts.

WITH THE SKIRT, A KNIT TOP. BUT NOT THE KIND OF KNIT TOP WE NORMALLY THINK OF, THIS ISN'T A HEAVY, WOOL TURTLE NECK?

I think of it as an "any occasion top". You'll find this in empire waist fun tops you can wear with jeans or a skirt, something with print and color, you can make it your fun top. If you're gonna pick a knit, and they're a big trend at the moment, you don't have to go for wool. Cotton blends and cotton cashmere blends work in every season. You can buy chunky knits in silhouettes that are fitted now, which are much better. But get single ply cashmere, layer it, it's gorgeous.

"SWEAT SHIRT ALTERNATIVE": DOES THAT MEAN WEARING TRACK SUITS OUT TO RUN ERRANDS NOW IS A NO-NO?

Tim's definition is always called up on this cause it's confusing. Wearing a sweat suit and frumpy stuff around town is not allowed, you should look stylish no matter what. You need to pick something that will be your run around town option, and make it something that you can wear. This is a zip-up, sweatshirt fabric, but you want to find something done in casual fabrics, buy stylized. Remember the silhouette fit and proportion. It can't look like pajamas or a messy sweat suit. The market is full of them, at all different price points.

FINAL MUST-HAVE, WHICH SHOULD SURPRISE NO-ONE: JEANS. THESE ARE A BIT MORE PRICEY, BUT DO YOU HAVE TO BUY EXPENSIVE JEANS TO GET THE RIGHT FIT?

There are great jeans at The Gap, but jeans like J Brand really last. They have 4-way lycra stretch, and all the details are plain, there are no color pockets or stitched out designs, and no funny rinses. It's a clean jean that can have a casual Friday alternative. There are so many jeans in women's closets that don't fit well, but jeans will last forever, barring body changes. They are difficult fit-wise, so don't try ordering them without trying them on, and you have to invest in tailoring. There's been a real cultural shift, everything these days is more casual. 20 years ago, women couldn't go to the office in jeans, neither could men. Now they're stylized enough to wear on the red carpet.

THOSE ARE THE STAPLES, THIS IS WHERE YOU CAN EXPRESS YOUR TRENDIER SELF, ON ACCESSORIES:

Yes, those are long-lasting style staples, these are trends. If you want to take the basic piece, jazz it up, spruce it up, these are things that you should have: a great pair of short boots, or "shooties", lots and lots of bold hard wear, killer high heels and belts, and all of them can have that edge with grommets, or metal decorations.

Here is the Website for Gretta's Shoes:

<http://www.qvc.com/qic/qvcapp.aspx/app.nav/params.class.L749/walk.yah.0100~L749>
(This is the Website for the shoes, which were all from Gretta's company)