

# It makes all kinds of sense to know what not to wear

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**NANCY DURRANT** was expecting the worst when she was invited to a personal styling event hosted by Trinny and Susannah's stylist. Instead she came away feeling – and looking – good

**W**hen I read the invitation to an "Introduction to Personal Styling Weekend", led by Zoë Lem – Trinny and Susannah's recently "outed" stylist – my heart sank. What ghastliness was this? Call me a reality TV snob, but I imagined an audience of dowdy creatures with no self-esteem searching vainly to change their lives. But, of course, I went along, because, well, when it comes down to it, who wouldn't want to be made to look better?

I cast a critical eye over my fellow delegates. It was not immediately obvious that they were miserable no-hopers with sad tales of betrayal, but I felt confident that this would shortly become clear. Lem made an entrance, only slightly late, in an astonishing black and white outfit of flouncy satin blouse and short skirt. She towered above us. What would this imperious-looking Amazon, with her red bob, do to us poor girls? I began to panic, imagining scenes of humiliation worthy of the most trashy reality TV.

As it happened, Lem was even more nervous than we were – this was the first of a series of weekend courses. "It is only clothing," she pointed out, as much to reassure herself as to relax us. "It's not going to save lives."

The first day dealt with the question of dressing for your body shape, followed by underwear and accessories. Three of us – an hourglass, a pear (me), and a straight-up-and-down – were hauled out of our seats, briefly interrogated and packed off to a tiny room filled with clothes, shoes, jewellery and tiny assistants bustling madly around a serene make-up artist. Some Spanx "magic knickers" were forced on me, and as I struggled to squeeze myself into them, a girl with tousled hair and "edgy" clothes whipped me up an outfit. I returned to the stage looking tall and slender to murmurs of approval, and tried not to preen,



despite wearing what I thought was a really horrible top.

At the break we discussed what we had learnt so far. Skinny jeans, I'm sorry to say, are out. For everyone. Even if you bought them last week in a fit of excitement on discovering that you'd lost weight. Wide-leg trousers, on the other hand, are in. For everyone. And a decent bra, as we have all heard Trinny and Susannah say a hundred times as they hoist up some poor Sloane's gargantuan bosom to reveal a perfectly acceptable waist, is about the most essential item of clothing a woman should possess.

For the accessories session, a model called Mel was brought out in a wrap dress (did I

mention that we all have to buy a wrap dress?) and we were invited to dive in to a vast selection of bags, shoes and jewellery to put together A Look. We swooped like starlings. The lack of competition was touching, as everyone asked and listened to each other's opinions and thoughts as we played Barbie with poor Mel.

The second day was spent mainly on the subject of colour. We sat in groups, holding up countless swatches of fabric to our faces and debating the differences, what suited whom, why we shouldn't wear that disgusting salmon and how lime green really suits no one.

Whenever the opportunity presented itself,

I asked my companions why they had come. "Clothes are expensive and looking good is hard," said Catherine, 27, who works in advertising. "I want to be smarter." But you do look smart, I said. "No, not look smarter; I want to be *financially* smarter, *time* smarter."

Her friend Rachael, 28, was fed up with worrying about what to wear in the morning. "I want to look good but don't want to obsess about it. I've got enough things to stress about; I don't want my clothes to be one of them."

And it wasn't just young women who were looking to the practical rather than the emotional side. Karen, a Canadian of 47 who arrived on the first day dressed like a Tory wife in a dark green 1980s skirt suit, felt that she needed to update her wardrobe. "I

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haven't done this for 20 years. I thought I'd make sure that I was doing the right thing before I spent lots of money – everything here seems so expensive." I realised that my original hypothesis, that the rise of Trinny and Susannah and their like had made people feel they had to look good, was way off the mark. These women were intelligent, busy and practical. Most encouraging of all, they felt they had a *right* to look good.

The next Introduction to Personal Styling is on April 8-9 at the Courthouse Hotel, Great Marlborough Street, London W1; 020-8780 0497; [www.helloyou.com](http://www.helloyou.com)