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The Style Arbiter - Pick your spring look: spirited, chic, minimalist, goddess

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I'm going to be honest with you: As much as I adore shopping my favorite stores in Cool Springs, I loathe dealing with the mall traffic that's involved in getting to them.

However, there are two times a year when I'm happy to bear the area's concentrated rank of slow/bad/irresponsible drivers in order to get to the Galleria — and it doesn't even involve a sale! I love my biannual meetings with the lovely Arlene Goldstein, the vice president of trend merchandising and fashion direction at Belk.

We've gotten to know each other over the last two years, so our meetings at the store usually start out with coffee and a catch-up discussion about our families and mutual friends; then, Arlene gets into professional mode, flips on her projector and starts expounding on the season's big trends and how to go about shopping for them.

For spring 2009 — yes, there really is light at the end of the dull winter tunnel we're in right now — Belk says fashion lovers are going to feel like “kids in a candy store,” because there's a look for every taste this season.

Goldstein has managed to break the free-for-all into four distinct areas: Free Spirited, which had a mix-and-match, one-of-a-kind aesthetic; New Minimalist, which is characterized by sleek lines, simple colors and architectural details; Simply Chic, a look embracing tried-and-true classics with a slightly vintage touch; and Global Goddess, which is all bohemian, all the time.

Putting neat titles on each of these main trends is a good way of making them more translatable to us, the shopping public. If you can ID yourself with one of the four fashion archetypes, you can plot your spring shopping objectives early on; once you figure out what you need to add to your wardrobe (Belk realizes this is a time for building on what you already have, not starting over from scratch), you can start shopping with care to round it out.

“The key is having a list,” Goldstein said. “You don't go to the grocery store without a list, so you shouldn't go shopping for clothes without one either!”

Ladies who identify with the happy-go-lucky nature of the Free Spirited dresser should feel free to



Costume jeweler extraordinaire Kenneth Jay Lane provides an assortment of stylish baubles to deck our lobes, wrists and necks this spring.

mix and match patterns and fabrics (big florals with small, satins with lace, etc.) and load on eccentric accents like statement necklaces, which are very popular across the board this spring. “This is the gal who has a lot of creative energy,” she said.

The dress is a key piece for the Free Spirit, especially long frocks that she can layer with long cardigans, and wear with chunky sandals and summer booties (look, Ma: no toe!), neck scarves, and the all-important wide belt. “This spring, we say its belts to the rescue!” Goldstein said.

New Minimalists look for simple clothes with dramatic elements — say, a plain white blouse with a series of pleats across the chest or a stand-up collar. Nothing flows around the body, but, rather, defines it in a series of straight, modern lines articulated via short skirts, jackets with angular sleeves and necklines, and geometric platform and wedge sandals that look scary-high, but that are actually wearable thanks to ergonomic and cone heels.

The color scheme here adopts the less is more ethos as well: black and white are go-to hues, with accent colors like acid pink showing up for contrast. Patterns are artistic — think brush stroke and geometric op-art prints.

Simply Chic women look for clothes that are just that: uncomplicated and time-tested pieces that are familiar but worn in a way that makes them look modern.

“This is a celebration of the feminine form,” Goldstein said. “The silhouettes here are familiar but not boring.” She says the new designs Isaac Mizrahi has come up with for his first collection as head designer of Liz Claiborne fit perfectly into this category, as well as dresses in classic shapes like sheath, shift and shirtwaist styles in traditional materials like linen, cotton, lace and satin.

Skirts come to the knee; belts are used to bring definition to waistlines. Accessories are a bit of a throwback: pearls, brooches and dramatic chandelier earrings. The metallic of choice for the Simply Chic gal is gold — “though silver is there, too,” Goldstein said.

Global Goddesses like the idea of incorporating elements from other cultures into their looks. For instance, you might see them in a tunic printed with African ikat or tribal motifs or the elegant tile and paisley patterns seen in Moorish architecture.

Again, dresses are the core element of the look, which also relies on loose-fitting (but not sloppy) peasant tops and other bohemian styles. Pieces are often embellished with details like textured embroidery and fringe; outfits are accented by oversized multi-media jewelry like statement necklaces and stacks of fun bangles. The shoe of choice for the Global gal is the tribal sandal, aka the flat, multi-buckled gladiator style.

*The Style Arbiter appears Thursdays in The City Paper. You can e-mail her at [lcalloway@nashvillecitypaper.com](mailto:lcalloway@nashvillecitypaper.com) or leave a comment on her blog: <http://style.nashvillecityblogs.com>*

## **Arlene's top 10 spring must-haves**

Whether you identify as a Global Goddess or a New Minimalist, don't go shopping this spring without Belk fashion guru Arlene Goldstein's check list.

1. Anything white. The non-color is tops this season — even when used on denim.
2. Button-less cardigan. Long or cropped, it's spring's most versatile VIP: belt it, pin it, love it.
3. Peasant top. Go for bohemian chic in a loose, flattering blouse in a cheerful ethnic print.
4. A skirt — long or short, straight or flowing, printed or plain.
5. Ruffled blouse. Some of the best are plain white featuring gorgeous pleating or drapes across the front.
6. Denim. The deconstructed look is back! You can buy your jeans already destroyed or do-it-yourself at home.
7. Maxi dress. Take it up a notch for evening with chandelier earrings and metallic sandals or play it down for day with a cardigan and flats.
8. Scarves. Why buy just one? Layer two or three for a lush, textured look over a plain white T.
9. Statement necklace. The bolder the better.
10. Tribal sandals. The gladiator sandals you bought last summer are still en vogue. Wear them with everything!

— Libby Callaway