

## The Birmingham News

### Prom done proper

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#### For The Birmingham News

Besides her wedding day, prom night is the biggest fashion event of a woman's life, experts say. It's all about assembling a look that will make heads turn, your date swoon, and have your classmates still talking on Monday morning.

And for that reason, thousands of Birmingham teens - from Forest Park to Fountain Heights - will be sifting through stacks and stacks of fashion magazines and combing through scores of clothing racks in search of the dress.

That dress, according to designers, is all about showing off a young woman's individual style. Gone are the days of cookie-cutter looks. Prom-goers don't want to look like their girlfriend. They want to be an original.

Four trends have emerged above the rest - funky prints, classic silhouettes, colors that pop, and dresses with a dramatic back.

#### Pretty prints:

This prom season, fashionistas are taking their cue from the red carpet, rocking dresses with floral, animal, graphic and ombre prints. "Everything is inspired by the designers," says Arlene Goldstein, vice president of trend merchandising and fashion director for Belk stores. "It's about going from runway to real."

Whether you pick a playful floral gown like what teen celeb Miley Cyrus recently sported at an industry party or a sultry, fitted cheetah print dress like the one singer Jordin Sparks wore to a pre-Grammy's event, it's all about picking a pattern that shows off your individual style, experts say.

Turn heads in Macy's glitter gown by BCX (\$79). The ombre print design features an empire-waist with a pleated bust and rhinestone embellishments. Belk has a chic, floor-length paisley print gown by Cachet (\$212). The silk pattern features swirls of powder pinks and baby blues, cutaway shoulders and a regal beaded neckline.

Top off your print ensemble with simple accessories like bunches of bangles, an elegant clutch and a pair of metallic strappy sandals.

#### Classic silhouettes:

Old Hollywood makes a comeback this prom season with classic silhouettes, lots of feminine touches and sexy details. Channel your inner starlet in a flirty, A-line party dress or a glamorous, full-length, fitted evening gown. These dresses come in an array of luxurious fabrics such as satin, taffeta, charmeuse and organza.

New York-based prom dress designer Niki Livas says this style appeals to young ladies who want a look that is elegant, but also a showstopper. "When it comes to the prom, they want to go all out," says Livas whose designs are available in most stores across the country, including Belk.

Be the leading lady of the prom in David's Bridal's whimsical, pleated halter dress (\$99). This short, silky knit

design features a beaded, V-shaped neckline and comes in sapphire or purple. Take center stage in Macy's red, bubble hem gown by Ruby Rox (\$79). It's strapless, short and sassy with fun rose appliques on its empire waist.

Add a finishing touch to your classic look with chandelier earrings, layered necklaces and the new trend: short or full-length gloves.

Even guys are getting their inspiration from the silver screen, sporting classic black tuxedos with satin peak lapels. Some are even going for a James Bond meets Diddy look donning a striped tuxedo or even ditching the tux altogether for a laid-back jacket and slacks.

#### **Bold and beautiful:**

Brilliant, eye-popping colors are big this season, and the bolder, the better, experts say. From bright fuchsia to shamrock green and hot pink, nothing is too off the charts. Designers are even adding splashes of neon and metallics to their styles.

"I love the bright and bold colors," says Ameris Wallace, a 17-year-old Minor High School senior who is counting down the days to her April 18 prom. "They give some spice, variety and add a twist to the formal looks. They also make a bold statement to your entrance."

Belk has a traffic-stopping canary yellow ball gown by Jessica McClintock (\$268). This strapless look fits in all the right places and flows into a mermaid tail of lavish ruching. David's Bridal has a smoking hot lime green gown (also available in fuchsia) with spaghetti straps, a crisscross bust and back and a fun, flirty train (\$119).

Rich jewel tones such as deep purples and vibrant blues are all the rage, too. And of course, black-and-white never goes out of style, experts say. Top off your colorful look with a contrasting bag and shoes with chunky jewel bracelets and earrings.

#### **A little skin:**

The low, daring back is the No. 1 trend this prom season, Livas says. It's all about showing a hint of skin, but looking tasteful. Designers had fun with these looks, creating cool cutouts on the bodice, plunging backs or crisscross designs accented with beading and bobbles.

Belk's Goldstein says she also is seeing an explosion of one-shoulder looks and halter-style dresses. Teens are buying those looks by the hundreds, she says. But don't take this style too far, Livas says. Showing too much skin is out. "Anything with that cut-out stomach is way too revealing and is taboo," she says. It's about being sexy, but classy.

Be bold in David's Bridal's ink blue, interlock twist jersey gown (\$149). Dazzling beadwork adorns the straps that go from the midsection into a striking X-back. Belk's purple, satin gown by Jump Apparel (\$108) is a perfect compliment to a young woman's silhouette. The low-cut back plunges just enough to be in vogue without revealing too much.

Top off this look with simple, delicate earrings, dazzling peep-toe shoes and a sleek handbag.