

POLITICAL LUXURY LOOKS SELL FOR LESS AT LOCAL BOUTIQUES

Presidential material without the labels

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Toledo fashionistas, take heart. You too can dress like a presidential contender or running mate.

Sort of.

Sure, you may be intimidated by recent news that the Republican Party paid \$150,000 to outfit Sarah Palin and her family. And you know you'll probably never find that Valentino jacket she wore to the Republican National Convention - reportedly at a cost of \$2,500 - within the confines of the Glass City; you worry about tracking down the \$1,500 wool suits that Barack Obama favors too.

Here in Toledo, the reality is that you can copy the look, but in many cases not the designer or price tag.

Area department stores haven't offered haute couture merchandise since Jacobson's closed in 2002, according to B.J. Stiles, area sales manager for ladies ready-to-wear at Dillard's at Westfield Franklin Park.



Models at Sophia Lustig show off clothes that Sarah Palin or Michelle Obama might wear (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

"You would have to go to Chicago or to Somerset," she said, referring to the mall in Troy, Mich., whose collection of stores includes Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue.

But, she continued, "We could put you in that look. [Mrs. Palin] wears a basic little suit that everybody in the industry knocks off, and it always looks good."

A woman could get a polished, professional look with a suit by Kasper or Tahari with prices ranging from about \$169 to \$249, she said.

Jane Wurth, owner of the women's apparel boutique Ragazza in Perrysburg, agreed that you'd probably have to leave town to "shop like Sarah."

VIDEO

[Palinesque fashion from a local boutique](#)

"You could buy different things and still look as good, but if you wanted the exact brands Sarah is getting, you would have to go to Somerset."

Mrs. Wurth noted that she has seen Michelle Obama wearing a dress by designer Donna Ricco, a line that shoppers would find at Ragazza.

"Joe Biden's wife wears Kay Unger; we have Kay Unger in the store," she added.

Even at the tip-top of local women's fashion, one won't find haute couture, according to Janine Middlesworth, who is in sales and marketing for the Sophia Lustig and Sophie's Sister shops in downtown Toledo.

"Valentino, Oscar de la Renta, Armani, Stella McCartney: We don't deal in that world here," she said.

Though that doesn't mean she wouldn't jump at the chance to outfit Governor Palin. Mrs. Middlesworth would be happy to send the vice presidential candidate home with a "knockout, gorgeous suit" costing \$600 to \$1,000.

If she preferred an evening gown, Mrs. Palin could flip through a selection ranging in price from \$300 to \$2,000 at Sophia Lustig or even buy a made-to-order gown of handwoven silk for \$1,000.

Designer lines include LaFayette 148 New York and Yansi Fugel, both American; Max Mara and Zanella, Italian, and Louben, French Canadian.

Marianne Ballas, who as president of Ballas Buick GMC in Toledo appears in smart, tailored suits in all of her television commercials, often looks to Sophia Lustig or the Somerset Collection. But she said Toledoans could mimic the style for less. Splurging on just one item, like a designer jacket, handbag, or shoes, can be a real wardrobe booster.

"You don't have to spend a lot of money to look good if you have good taste," Mrs. Ballas said.

Toledo men may have things a little easier when it comes to mimicking the major party candidates.

Take Mr. Obama's custom Hart Schaffner Marx suits that sell for \$1,500 as the Gold Trumpeter collection. Dillard's carries ready-made suits from the collection that retail for \$895.

Scott Bonnick, co-partner at Ticknors Men's Clothier in Westfield Franklin Park, said the store carries high-priced suits by other designers such as Hugo Boss that retail for about \$800.

"When Obama was here ... he could have come in here and we could have definitely fit him up with things very comparable to what he's wearing right now," he said.

If you want to get really presidential, then maybe you should consider men's clothing store Jos. A. Bank.

"I know that President Bush wears our pajamas," said Lynn Jordan, department manager at the Westfield Franklin Park location.

At its high end, the store - which also has a location in Perrysburg - carries a Signature Gold Collection of ties that starts at \$135 and suits that go for \$995, she said.

Or, if you're more interested in the \$520 Salvatore Ferragamo loafers that John McCain likes to wear, you might consider one of the store's Allen-Edmonds shoes. It's a different brand, but at \$525 the price is similar and it boasts a hand-finishing process that takes months to complete.

For those looking for a custom fit, there's Custom Shop Clothiers in Monclova Township. CEO Michael Smith said its average suit sold in Toledo goes for about \$1,000 but could go all the way to \$3,500, depending on the fabric and construction.

Jim Findlay, a Sylvania man who has been a patron of both Mr. Smith and Jos. A. Bank, likes to dress well. But while he might have the look of a presidential hopeful, he's not ready to start spending like one just yet.

"I like nice suits. I like nice ties. I like nice clothes," he said. "And you can get awful good clothes for a lot less money."

Staff writer Bridget Tharp contributed to this report.

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