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Mix and match to add style

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Mixing pieces to build an eclectic wardrobe is the newest fashion craze to hit everyone from the fashionistas on the A-list to the people on the city streets.

Well-made staple pieces are essential to having a well-rounded closet, and can be used to complete an outfit by being paired with distinctive thrift store or vintage finds.

Alice Miles, founder and fashion consultant for private shopping firm Stilista Boston, said mixing certain key pieces, like a tailored blouse or a fitted blazer, with more casual clothes, like a thrift T-shirt, is the trick to giving outfits new dimensions.

"You can also really change your outfit by adding a scarf, a pin or by wearing a big necklace," she said. "By doing that, [your outfit is] transformed from something really mundane."

For women, a jersey dress can prove to be extremely versatile. Instead of going home for a wardrobe change, the dress can morph from everyday to evening wear with only a change of shoes or jackets. Paired with tall boots, a jersey dress can serve as an eye-catching outfit when walking around the city, or it could be more geared for the office dress code with a short jacket and pumps.

Sophomore communication studies major Serri Knight said she enjoys mixing her older pieces with more modern clothes.

"I like to put vintage with newer things, or designers," she said.

Freshman economics major RJ Duggan said men can also transform any outfit from day to evening. A suit jacket and tie worn during the day can be replaced with a sweater for a more casual nighttime look.

Duggan said his style changed when he realized he could break fashion rules by pairing different pieces from all the influences in his life.

"I think that guys can be versatile also. I went to a prep school on a dress code, so I have a lot of Oxford shirts, things like v-necks and cardigans," Duggan said. "I really like mixing expensive clothes with clothes that aren't [expensive], and it was only recently that I started to realize that I could mix and match like that."

Chains like H&M and Urban Outfitters have helped to speed this style along by featuring sample mix and match outfits on display, like a flowy dress beneath a menswear-inspired vest or a tailored pant with a band T-shirt.

Besides the trend's growth, a mixed wardrobe has become popular because most people can do it without breaking the bank.

"I think more and more people are seeing that dressing this way is really accessible to everyone," Miles said.

Miles said years ago, most of Target's sale items were casual basics. Today, with the GO International program, designer duds that would usually be too expensive or ignored by the general public have become household names and have supplied affordable, standout pieces to mix within a wardrobe.

"Now, people are more able to experiment with higher fashion because they can afford it. You can go to Saks and buy a really expensive, high-end brand, and you can also go to a Macy's, or you can go to an H&M, and you'll find a very similar silhouette," Miles said.

Another factor that has encouraged people to mix and match is the modern revival of fashion from the 1980s, as well as other decades. Stores like American Apparel, known for their advertisements of spandex-clad models in body suits and leggings, encourage daring fashionistas to try to incorporate unconventional fabrics and prints within a regular outfit.

Miles said the mix-and-match style encourages wearers to find their own perspective and personal style within the trend; there are no set boundaries for how to look, only the concept that it's OK to not fit common fashion stereotypes.

"Some people don't have the confidence, they don't think they can pull off [mixing and matching]," Knight said. "But the only reason they can't pull it off is because they never try."