

TORONTO STAR

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Mall retailer's fit experts open reporter's eyes to better fitting clothes

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Wrong fit. Brigitte Martin, the merchandise manager at Reitmans grabs a handful of material bulging over Trish Crawford's thighs. The midrange retailer has introduced a personalized fit service at its stores across the country.

Brigitte Martin took one look at me and says, "You are a tall rectangle."

All I've ever heard about are pear shape or hourglass figures. I didn't know a woman could be a rectangle.

Martin is the fit expert and merchandise manager for Reitmans, a mid-range retailer with locations across the country whose sales staff provide customers with personalized fitting advice.

The service is a trademark of small boutiques and high-end stores, but is now offered by chains like Reitmans that sell pants for \$36, tops for \$30 and sweaters for \$36.

For the last five years the retailer has boosted its training program, giving lessons on fit, body size and style several times a year: new staff get a one-hour lesson, and flashcards on new merchandise are given to all staff throughout the year, says Martin.

When new clothes come into the stores, sales staff try them on so they can advise customers on the fit, she says.

Martin checks out the navy suit I wore to chain's Eaton Centre location and declares that it fits me fine — the jacket doesn't pull over my bust or back, its buttons are done up properly and shoulder seams sit at the right place — but the pants are a bit saggy.



To prevent that from happening, Martin advises, I should wear pants with a shorter rise — the distance from waist band to crotch.

And because my legs are long and upper torso short, Martin points out, I should accent the positive with straight-leg pants, and wear longer tops to stretch me up. Belts and layers will “create the illusion of a waist.” My thin, straight shoulders are considered excellent for jackets and I’m instructed to have the sleeve stop at the wrist bone.

Although I am older than the store’s target clientele of 35- to 45-year-old working mothers, she recommends I wear skirts to the knee.

After looking at my legs, which she describes as my best feature, Martin urges me to take the skirt up another inch. Most of the clothes were either size 13 or 11 and I wore both large and medium in sweaters and camisoles.

There were a few duds, though: A pink sweater was too tight and too short, creating a stuffed-sausage look. I really loved a pair of white capri pants, but Martin said they were too long and cut me at the wrong place on the ankle. Plus, there were inches of material to spare over each hip.

Because of the comfort level, I would have purchased these pants in the past. My biggest wardrobe crime has been picking out clothes that are too big, so Martin warned that oversized clothes just make me look bigger.

Wearing high heels will make me appear taller and slimmer, she says, and urges me to get some scarves and accessories to jazz up the very plain outfits that I wear to the office.

After being reassured that “being all matchy-matchy is out,” I bought a blue-and-white polka-dot blouse with a green flowered scarf.

This rectangle isn’t a square.

Keys to good fit

Shoulder seams on shirts and jackets should sit on the edge of your shoulder.

You should be able to button up a jacket; lapels should lie flat and the back should not pull across shoulder blades.

Waistlines on a skirt should be just loose enough to turn the skirt around while wearing it.

Straight skirts should hang from the buttocks and pants, with the exception of jeans, which should hang straight from the hips.

If pants gape at back of the waist, you need a curvy fit.

Pant legs are too narrow if you can’t bend your knees with ease. If back of the waist drops when knees are bent, you need a higher rise.

If your stomach is revealed when you put your arms up, the top is too short. Longer tops should not pull or tug on hips.

If a bra strap peeks out in a sleeveless dress or top, the cut is wrong for you or too big at your shoulders.

Unflattering folds of fabric at the front of pants means they are either too large or the rise is too long for your body.

Muffin tops mean your pants are too small or the style is the wrong shape for your body.

Source: Reitman's