

LIFE

Editor: Bruce MacKenzie > Telephone: 250-380-5346 > E-mail: features@tc.canwest.com ■ ARTS, D5 ■ TV, D7

timescolonist.com/extras



WEB EXTRA: Hats are where it's at

Stylish guys are using their heads to make a fashion statement

FASHION

Girls just wanna have style

Tween clothing dilemma leads two moms to open age-appropriate boutiques



SARAH PETRESCU
Ready to Wear
spetrescu@tc.canwest.com

Sarah wears a Vivienne Westwood Anglomania dress from Bernstein and Gold at 608 Yates St. Jewelry by River Song.

Each year, the fifth- and sixth-grade girls were herded into the library at Sechelt Elementary for the "talk," which included the dreaded question: "Have any of you started wearing a bra? Please put up your hand."

Despite being a towering five-foot-two (I still am) and needing a C-cup, I refused to raise my hand — opting instead to layer tight undershirts under my Alf sweat-shirt and stay a kid despite myself.

Over the next year or so, friends' bodies and attitudes would change. We became a motley crew of different sizes and shapes — some child-like and others womanly. Shopping at the ladies' department became a source of pride, not embarrassment, as fashion senses developed beyond frills and cartoon-character T-shirts.

The leap to grown-up clothes brought grown-up problems — namely, when sexy outfits elicited leering looks from adults — something a 12-year-old who likes horses, candy and dolls might not know how to deal with.

The tween years continue to present a fashion dilemma to girls and their parents, says Elena Grant. This is how the North Vancouver mother of three came to start Sofia-bella (sofiabella.ca), an age-appropriate online boutique for girls that launched in September.

"My daughter Sofia turned 12 and started to become conscious of what she was wearing," said Grant, who also has two sons. "She didn't want to just shop at Gap and Old Navy anymore."

Grant started looking around for clothes that would fit her growing daughter's body but stay appropriate to her age. She talked to other moms having similar issues and even ventured to Seattle for a Nordstrom trip.

"There really wasn't much here, especially when it came to formal wear," said Grant, adding most of the available clothing is athletic or casual, such as that from Lululemon — which recently capitalized on its popularity with young girls by opening the dance-inspired Ivivva teen stores (540 Johnson St.).

There was also the issue of sexy clothing being

marketed to young girls.

"Try finding a teen bra that's not padded. There are G-strings marketed for tweens, and where do you think the wording splashed across the bum of jogging pants is meant to attract attention?" Grant said. When her daughter wanted to wear the same T'n'A clothing as her cousin, Grant told her the name was too suggestive.

"She said, 'It stands for The New Attitude.' I told her it stands for something else, too. They are too young to get these things or deal with the attention it may bring from grown men," Grant said.

"I even came across a pair of 6X-sized underwear that read 'Who needs credit cards?'" Grant's vision was to find clothing that empowered girls in their development as individuals, not just sexual beings.

The former stockbroker travelled to New York and Los Angeles to hand-pick tween lines that were trendy but age-appropriate, including the Me to We line that helps support Craig Kielburger's Feed the Children charity. She also created her own shirts with slogans like, "I am the change."

"I wanted to inspire them to be whatever they want in life, way beyond a princess or a diva."

Fellow mompreneur Charlene Walker in Victoria noticed a similar void for tween fashions in her capacity as mom to an eight-year-old daughter and as a boutique owner. Walker opened Sweet Nancy's on Broughton Street in homage to her late mother and women's fashion just over two years ago.

The concept was for multiple generations of women to be able to shop together.

"I realized I needed a place for the young moms and daughters (like myself), too," she said at Lil' Sweet Nancy's at 650 View St. Walker opened the store several months ago, dividing the space between trendy styles for girls and moms in their 20s and 30s.

"I wanted to create a unique space just for girls. There's plenty for kids and teens out there," Walker said. "The clothes needed to still have that little-girl look without being babyish or sexy."

Walker knew there was a need for girls' formal wear, so when she spotted the line Mademoiselle Charlotte she snapped it up. Isabelle Fuhrman, the 12-year-old star of the film *Orphan*, wore a Mademoiselle Charlotte dress to the red carpet Hollywood premiere of the film.

"It's classic and fashionable," Walker said. She'll be bringing in the Noa Noa youth line and others this February, as well as a report card discount program.

Kids will receive up to 15 per cent off clothing with an A on their report card. Bs get 10 per cent off and anything C or below still gets them a five per cent discount.

"It's a way to help them be proud of their accomplishments," Walker said. She also plans to host fashion events for tweens and moms in the new year.



DEBRA BRASH, TIMES COLONIST
Natasha Nelms, 11, and Desiree McIntosh, 10, are ready for the ball in Mademoiselle Charlotte, available at Lil' Sweet Nancy's in downtown Victoria.



HANDOUT



Above and above left: Desiree is ready for school in an everyday outfit while Natasha glams it up in a sequin frock — both from Mademoiselle Charlotte.

Left: Elena Grant with her 12-year-old daughter Sofia Grant, who inspired the online boutique sofiabella.ca.



TIMES COLONIST FILE
Over-the-knee boots were everywhere in 2009.

Best, worst trends of 2009

MIRANDA FURTADO
Canwest News Service

The best

■ **Built-in platform high heels.** We can not tell you how happy we were to say goodbye to dance-wear inspired ballet flats and hello to fun sexy, sky high heels. Note: all things are good in moderation.

■ **Bold, chunky jewelry.** What first started in all the major runway shows has now hit stores like H&M, making this signature couture look available for all non-millionaires like us! These fun, oversized pieces are great to match with a plain white shirt or any dress for an instant outfit uplift.

■ **Tights.** Tights are great this season because they allow us to carry some of our summer pieces into the fall and winter. Whether you're wearing a tunic, long tee, chunky sweater or a party dress, tights glam it up.

■ **Over-the-knee boots.** There's no denying the phenomenon of over-the-knee boots in 2009. All major retailers have jumped on the bandwagon, and with good reason. OTK boots are great to wear over jeans, leggings or stockings. For an evening look, try a pair with a party dress.

The worst

■ **Fringed heels.** Fringe is best left on other accessories: Dresses, great, moccasins, awesome, boots, fine, jackets, OK, but stilettos? Some things are better left untouched.

■ **Harem pants.** There's only one thing to say about this MC Hammer-inspired trend: "Can't touch this."

■ **Guys in low V-neck tees.** We have American Apparel to thank for this trend. Sorry, but some things are just left best to the imagination.

■ **Ed Hardy/Affliction shirts.** Every time someone mentions Ed Hardy or Affliction, an image of Jon Gosselin enters our mind ... or of some over-tanned guy in the club getting drunk on Smirnoff Ice and Bacardi Breezers.