

## FASHION &amp; STYLE

BY SYDNEY STOYAN

If you are a reader of upscale American fashion magazines, you have likely encountered an essay or two blithely describing the seasonal purchases of an average, wealthy stay-at-home mum, detailing the must-have pieces she is wait-listed for and the various designers she turns to seasonally to update her wardrobe.

These features inspire in me — a full-time mother of a three-year-old boy — a potent combination of envy and hilarity. Can you imagine donning a Marni necklace for the school drop-off? Stuffing a \$1,200 It bag with Wet Ones and a dog-eared copy of *Madeline*? Risking a toddler's mucky embrace on a MaxMara cashmere coat? And yet, how delicious it would be to be able to afford such glamorous togs. And how gloriously cavalier to wear them when you're looking after your child.

But be realistic. What do you do if you are a full-time mother of young children, don't have untold wealth, yet happen to be an insatiable fashion fiend?

Literal adherence to fall and winter trends will obviously land said yummy mummy in trouble. Pencil skirts do not lend themselves to games of tag. Ballet flats don't have the muscle to kick the brakes off a Peg Perego. Even the seeming practicality of denim gives pause when interpreted in the current modish form: How the heck do you play trains with your preschooler if your circulatory system is compromised by the new skinny jeans?

The answer, I have found, is to piece together what one might call "functional chic," with a wink and a nod to seasonal trends. The tricky part is to negotiate that fine balance between ease and fashion, to stock up on well-priced mainstays and to splurge a little on more unusual offerings from local designers.

First off, cherry-pick a few practical items from the mainstream stores. Cargo pants, with their multitude of useful pockets, are suddenly *au courant*, given fall's return to grunge. Plus, their capaciousness is superior to tight denim.

The trick is not to go too cheap or too low-rise; fit is everything. J. Crew makes very good ones (and the dollar is conducive to online shopping these days). So, surprisingly, does H&M, although its many versions and unreliable sizing demand try-ons.

The usual suspects — Gap, Old Navy, American Apparel — are deft at facilitating the layering trend for T-shirts. Pile on extra layers in the form of sweaters and shrunken jackets. These serve as barriers to the weather and represent mummy-friendly



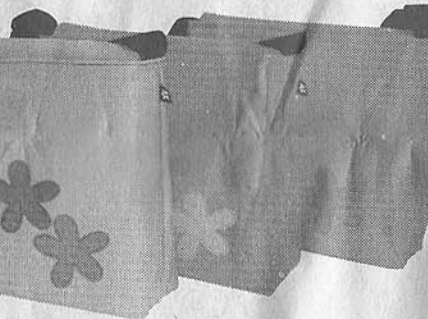
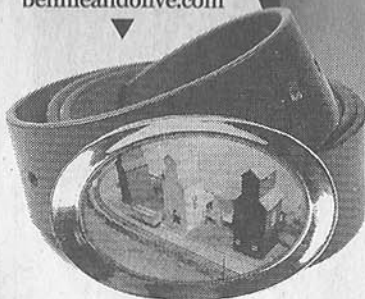
TYLER ANDERSON / NATIONAL POST

Deborah Cope and her 16-month-old daughter, Scarlett Younger, with Stephanie Wood and her 22-month-old son, Ned Devereux.

## PRADA V. PLAYGROUND

It's the yummy mummy's dilemma: stay stylish, yet sensible enough to face the challenges of daily life. A mix of form and function should do

Grain Elevators belt buckle on brown leather belt, \$75, by Bennie and Olive. [bennieandolive.com](http://bennieandolive.com)



The MaPa diaper bag with ultimate changing pad, \$225, at [Fleurtje. fleurtjebags.com](http://fleurtjebags.com)

Machine washable Victorian jersey tops embellished with lace, by Momo. [momo-web.com](http://momo-web.com)



The Organico boot by El Naturalista (in green, black or red), \$209.95. [australianboot.com](http://australianboot.com)

versions of Marc Jacobs's absurd assemblage of separates. Affordable examples abound at such shops as Jacob, RW&Co. and American Eagle Outfitters.

Footwear can be tricky. Surely there exists the perfect shoe that can shuttle between pant and skirt, with the requisite hardness for negotiating the sandbox. Some mothers swear by their Blundstones, those indestruc-

tible Australian pull-on boots with the earthy charm. Still, if you're looking for something more refined, consider an edgy flat from Fluevog, whose trademark chunky soles and left-of-trend aesthetics are sought after by hip mums.

And El Naturalista, the eco-friendly Spanish footwear line, might well be the perfect hybrid of stamina and style: The fall line

features a slip-on wedge (trend alert!) with a heavy-duty sole and rugged topstitching.

The next step is to tweak these basics with pieces from independent designers, ones whose eclectic style can also withstand the travails of daily parenting. When that postpartum tummy

phrases: "Impatiently I wait for the end of the day," reads one shirt, destined to resonate with exhausted mothers everywhere. If that dark wit doesn't speak to you, advertise your spiritual energy with a shirt from Squeezed, which offers a host of rainbow-coloured tees printed with yoga motifs.

On the mornings you wake up determined to look pretty and not simply practical, slip on a skirt from Susan Harris: Her tweed wool version has raw edges, a drawstring waist and a detached pouch pocket secured with a vintage button. It offers enough volume to scramble after small children and to satisfy the dictates of cold weather. It's also remarkably flattering.

Throw Comrags' indispensable black jewel cardigan on top (a staple of its collections, the cardigan is nicely cropped and easy to wear), and *voilà*, an outfit that will light up the local playgroup.

While yards of beads might ensnare a nursing baby, earrings are unobtrusive and provide a dose of flair. Forget those dull diamond studs, however, and check out Caprice Akram's extensive line: She combines sterling silver and semi-precious stones in pretty little clusters that add lustre to a tired mama's face.

And while rainy days require sensible nylon slickers, consider a boiled-wool topper from Ottawa designer Muriel Dombret. Boxy, ruffled or long and wrap-around, the cozy jackets come in a variety of rich colours and will dress up jeans or cargos.

Finally, there's the issue of The Bag. For many women, there is trauma involved in sacrificing this singular representation of personal style for ... a diaper bag.

Luckily, retailers and indie designers have moved beyond the limitations of ducks and bunnies and there are now a stellar array of funky multi-tasking bags. Fleurtje works with durable wipe-clean vinyls and vintage fabrics (often punctuated by her trademark daisy flower) and offers a "MaPa" diaper bag, with extra pockets and changing pad. If you want something less street, Montreal's Matt & Nat produces affordable, trendy pieces in eco-friendly pleather.

Though it has an elegant "Jack and Jill" diaper bag, its "Harriet," "Jorja Fox" and "Depeche Mode" styles are super-sized carryalls perfect for baby paraphernalia. And they resemble those seen on the arms of hipsters in American magazines.

And there you go. Playground chic without the Prada price tag. You're free to parent your bambino with verve and energy, and you look like a million bucks to boot.

Weekend Post