

How to mix patterns this summer

By Cheryl Fenton | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 10, 2013

Mixing prints often falls into the category of high-risk feats, even for the savviest of fashionistas. But as style icons Scarlett Johansson, Sarah Jessica Parker, and even the first lady have proven, it can be done.

But just when you feel ready to play the sartorial mix-and-mingle game, intimidation can drag you back into your safe zone (neutrals, head-to-toe black), once again leaving those fun nautical stripes, bright geometric patterns, and Liberty print florals behind.

This season, it's time to make a change.

“People think you can only wear prints with solids and that’s not true,” says stylist Christina Pierce. Her namesake boutique fashion agency on Newbury Street has dressed the likes of actress Julia Stiles and WCVB news anchor Bianca de la Garza. “If you’re looking to go to the next level or add more dimension to your look, combining prints can be very easy.”

Whether you’re considering mixing florals with leopard print or paisley with stripes, you can navigate the pitfalls of the fashion-forward trend — with the help of a few tips from local style experts. And if it’s a match well-made, you’ll know. “When prints combine



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Start small

Confidence is key. “If you’re new to the trend, start small and work your way up to a level where your confidence shines,” says Judy-Anne Hereu, a former senior stylist for fashion guru Stacy London’s Style for Hire who now dresses her own clientele from her Wellesley studio. She suggests starting with a patterned bag or a great scarf to rev up to the confidence level needed to rock an entire look in prints.

Keep it in the color family

“When you have two multicolor prints, look for the one color that’s in both,” says Pierce. “Then at glance, there is a slight bit of cohesion that pulls the look together.” For instance, if you’re mixing with a red, orange, and pink floral, your second pattern should also boast one of those hues. “If no commonality is present, your outfit is at risk of looking too costume,” she adds.

Choose different sides of the scale

Opposites attract, so combine a denser print with a sparser one, a large print with a small. “You wouldn’t want to put two large floral sizes together,” Pierce warns. “You want to get a different scale. It can be on-trend to mix a bold print with something like an animal print because the animal usually has a smaller scale.” By mixing sizes and densities, there’s no battling for attention. One pattern becomes the focus, while the other sits sidecar.

Prints can be neutrals

According to Hereu, patterns like tweed, houndstooth, polka dots, navy and white or black and white stripes can actually work to balance an outfit. Their understated nature grants them neutral status, so they’re easy to work with and play well with



others.

Give the eye a break with a solid color

“Ground your outfit with neutral shoes, stockings, or accessories or use the color of the shoes to accent the dominating color scheme in the print,” says Hereu. When you add a solid with patterns, the visual space balances your pieces and quiets any noise that patterns create together.

Let designers do the hard work

For Spring/Summer 2013, designers like Marc Jacobs, Proenza Schouler, and Stella McCartney take out the guesswork with silhouettes that mix patterns and textures within a single piece. “There’s a big trend in wearing single garments that combine prints or place the same print in different ways so it’s flattering,” says Pierce. “It’s kind of a hybrid of the combining prints trend.”

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