

# Spring Wardrobe Trends for the 9 to 5 Professional

**By Sarah Hathorn, AICI CIP, CPBS**

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As the days get longer and the skies stay sunnier, it's time to think about a fresh, updated look for spring. Get ready to store away those layers of winter woollens and start considering what lightweight fabrics, colors, and accessories to incorporate into your working wardrobe in order to infuse it with renewed energy and put some spring in your step.

Having been in the fashion industry for years I know that every designer, retailer, and fashion magazine has its own unique view of what constitutes springtime must-have items. But I've also observed that most of these trends or collections tend to focus on weekend wear or casual attire for warm weather vacationers. As much as I love watching all the fashion trends emerge, as a professional image consultant I must say that not every one of these popular trends is going to be appropriate for every person – and many are not at all relevant to the workplace wardrobe needs of professional women.

So in this article I've fine-tuned the trends and reinterpreted several of those that can add some polish and style to your everyday 9 to 5 professional or business casual wardrobe.

## **Colorful Springtime Tones**

All of my top professional clients know that dark neutrals are the real power colors. But when springtime arrives with its warmer temperatures you may need to lighten up your neutrals in order to get greater versatility from your wardrobe while still retaining an empowered professional presence. This season the new neutrals are navy, gray, pewter, olive, tan, black, and white. Invest in a few core wardrobe pieces – such as a suit, a pair of dress trousers, or a skirt – to give you valuable versatility and longer wear from your clothing investments. You can also always add a brighter fashion color of the season like turquoise, blue, tomato red, coral, tangerine, lemon yellow, fresh green, or violet. Utilize these brighter hues to add some pop and flair to your power neutrals by incorporating them into a silk blouse, a dress pump, a handbag, or a scarf. Your sense of style will convey to others that you are knowledgeable about the season's fashion colors while it will simultaneously set you apart with an attractive and uniquely polished look.

## **Your Printed Style**

I love prints because of how they can add a bit of magic to a solid suit or skirt, and this spring you'll see lots of romantic floral, abstract, tropical, safari, and tribal prints. But remember that in the workplace prints need to be smaller so that they don't distract from your professional image. You never want to wear a large print dress to a speaking engagement, for example, where the attention will be focused on your wardrobe instead of on you. While it is great to add some prints into your ensemble, be sure to shop for smaller prints and add them in small doses through items like blouses, scarves, tote bags, or shoes.

*As a pioneering and visionary innovator, Sarah is a certified professional image consultant and brand strategist, speaker, trainer and author. Her company, Illustra Image Consulting, provides leading-edge image and brand management strategies for top leaders and high achievers who wish to take their career to the next level. She also delivers innovative and inspiring corporate workshops to assist large organizations in strengthening their corporate brand.*

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678-528-1239, sarah@illustraimageconsulting.com

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## New Accessories for the New Decade

**Jewelry** – Large, bold jewelry fashion statements – with necklaces, earrings, and bracelets that tend to be chunkier and a bit sparkly – will still be in vogue this spring. These are great must-have pieces when you want to create some dramatic interest for your social wardrobe. But while dressing for the workplace environment you should tone it down a bit. Instead of wearing five to ten strands of large pearls, for example, look for a two-strand necklace of smaller pearls. If you wear a dress to work, perhaps one statement earring is enough, or you can add a beautifully elegant cuff bracelet. I also often see women at networking events with a beautiful ruffled or embellished neckline that they have managed to ruin by unnecessarily adding a necklace. You don't always need a necklace. You can let the details of a lovely neckline be center stage while wearing another less obscuring jewelry piece like an earring or a set of delicate bangles.

**Handbags & Totes** – The handbags are smaller this season and carried with a pop of fresh color. Popular styles are soft and slouchy shoulder bags and satchel and hobo styles in buttery soft barely-there neutral or “nude” colored leathers. You will also see handbags or totes with flairs of color like blues, yellows, pinks and floral or animal prints. A great statement tote bag is a must-have for every professional, and is a wonderfully stylish way to carry work essentials.

**Shoes** – Every working woman needs to consider purchasing the new and exciting nude shoe. Beige skin tone pumps, platform pumps, wedges, and flats all look perfectly modern and sensationally sassy. Those women of color with richer, darker complexions should seek out shoes in warmer tones that match their legs – like, for example, various luscious shades of brown, black, or coffee. The key here – regardless of your particular skin tone – is to find a hue that minimizes the contrast between the color of the shoe and your natural leg color.

Why? Because then when you put on the shoe it has the magical visual impact of lengthening the look of the leg. Wearing skin tone shoes, in other words, is an easy technique for instantly giving your legs that desirable long, lean, leggy appearance. Pair the nude shoe with navy for a look that is both elegant and sophisticated.

Another great find this season is the return of 1-3 inch mid-length heels. The kitten heel is more comfortable to wear when you need to be on your feet all day long, and these heels convey subtle sexiness that is understated enough to fabulously compliment your professional look.

## Five Must-Have Spring Fashion Essentials for the Polished Professional

**1) A Modern Dress** – As spring approaches it is all about dress styles that are belted at the waist or draped in a soft, flowing silhouette. Nothing is hotter this season than the classic shirtdress, which is tailored enough for work but still exudes a sassy attitude. For those more dressier occasions select a soft, flowing dress with a bit of ruching around the middle of the silhouette, which is a great way to camouflage those tummy challenges we want to disguise. Don't forget, though, that the styling of your work dress still needs to be on the structured or tailored side. I do love the softer romantic florals and large ruffled styles, but I suggest that instead of wearing those to work that you reserve them for a time when you need to arrive in style at a social event.

**2) The Basic White Shirt Updated** – The white blouse or shirt is always a great way to add a lighter, fresher look when the mercury is rising. But this season it's not about wearing the man's shirt, so instead look for structured tailoring with a few distinctly modern details like ruffles, ruching, or pin tucks throughout the body of the shirt. You will also find great ¾-inch sleeve details like cuffs or small ruffles that will show off your lower arms in style.

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678-528-1239, sarah@illustraimageconsulting.com

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**3) Romantic Florals** – If you work in a less conservative environment where business casual rules, then feel free to add a touch of flair with a floral skirt or blouse. Pair the soft flowing or pencil style floral with a tucked-in blouse or short jacket to jazz up your look. Ruffled or soft flowing blouses and knit tops are also going to be everywhere this season for dressy to casual wear. If you are a top leader within your organization and this style works for you, my suggestion is that you wear smaller ruffles on a beautiful blouse – or smaller floral prints in a great scarf. Wearing business apparel that is too romantic can inadvertently send the wrong message that women are weak, and I want you to arrive at your corner office in style but with grace and power.

**4) America is Feeling Blue** – Blue is America’s favorite color, and this year the color blue is bigger than it’s been in years. Choose darker shades of blue like navy to exude professionalism, confidence, and trustworthiness. Shop for a navy blue suit or add a medium blue shoe, handbag, or necklace to your ensemble. If you have blue eyes, select a blue silk blouse or small stone necklace in the same shade of blue as your eyes and they will appear larger and brighter. Take care when choosing your shades of blue so that you will look your absolute best. If you have a cool skin tone, for instance, wear deeper, richer shades of navy or cobalt. If you are warmer in your complexion, on the other hand, shop for lighter, brighter shades like teal or turquoise.

**5) Notes to Pencil in Regarding Pencil Skirts** – The modern pencil styles are out in stores now in some great modern prints and fun colors. The traditional pencil skirt – updated with a new color or print – gives your tailored fashion a bit of classic-hip style. But beware of how different prints in skirts can change or overemphasize the shape of your figure. If you tend to be wider in the hip area, then either skip this trend or keep it simple by wearing skirts in a soft dark neutral like black, navy, or brown – and reserve the wearing of your fun prints for the upper half of your body. If you have small tapered hips, however, you can have fun by adding a small print or a lighter solid color in your pencil skirt and you’ll be delightfully fashion-forward for the coming season.

I hope you’ve enjoyed my latest professional trends report and find yourself ready to shop and explore to find a few new pieces to add to your wardrobe. It’s all about versatility this year – so before you head out to add a few items, first review your existing spring wardrobe and look for colors and prints that will maximize their wear and usefulness. You definitely have to discover a trend that speaks to your authentic style and personality. Then you can wear it in strategic doses around the office to project an innovative sense of forward fashion and polished professionalism.

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