New Specs on Style: The eyes have it

by Sharon Mosley

What's the best thing we can do to give our wardrobes a shot of style, even as we get older and older? Think about the A word, says Christine Schwab, fashion expert and author of the new "Grown-up Girl's Guide To Style" (October 2006, Harper Collins, $34.95).

"As we pare down our clothing trends," says Schwab, a regular contributor to "Live with Regis and Kelly," "accessories take over as our single most important fashion element. Accessorizing is the most irresistible element of dressing."

And what should be a "grown-up girl's" No. 1 accessory priority? According to Schwab, eyeglasses are a girl's best friend and the best way to "radiate style." Forget the boring peepers. Go for contemporary and fabulous.

"The right glasses can make you look smart, the wrong ones can make you look dated," she says. She suggests taking your best-dressed friend with you when you pick out stylish frames. She also advises building a "wardrobe" of glasses if you wear them on a daily basis. "It's hard to find one pair of glasses that look right with everything," she adds.

Here are some other anti-aging tips from Schwab on selecting grown-up girl's glasses:

- Never reveal that you are wearing bifocal or trifocal glasses with that "giveaway line" between the different strengths. "Spend the extra bucks and get the blended lenses," advises Schwab. "They are worth every single penny."
- Avoid those tiny fold-up glasses that draw comments like "Where did you find those? They're amazing! And so practical." There's that word. "Do we ever want to look practical?" asks the fashion expert rhetorically.

- Today's frames are so fashionable that the shape of your face no longer determines their style, notes Schwab. "The principal rule is to match your bone structure if you are small-boned, go with smaller rims. If you are big-boned, balance your structure with larger frames."

- Get rid of outdated glasses. "Your choice of glasses reveals your attitude," says Schwab. "Out-of-date glasses set the tone for your total appearance." What's out? Lenses with initials, gemstones, or decorative objects "are from the '70s and should be left there," says Schwab. And she also suggests leaving those half-moon glasses to college professors. "They look distinguished peeking out over them; we just look old."

- Choose contemporary styles. Pass on the aviators. "Their egg shape once made us look cool," says Schwab, "now it makes us look droopy." Ditto for wraparounds. "Oversized wraparounds are sleek and secretive when you're 20," notes Schwab. "Now they make us look like we just had our eyes dilated." And she adds: "Even Elton John has toned down his choices. So must we."

- Choose a variety of glasses: Classic frames in tortoise, black or neutral are professional; funky frames to wear when you crave a little attention and evening frames in delicate gold, silver or bronze metal.

- Forgo mirrors. "Have you ever tried to have a real conversation with someone wearing mirrored lenses?" asks Schwab. "It's like talking to yourself. I always end up checking my lipstick."

- Check out contacts. "If you don't love frames, or need a break from glasses, this is your solution," says Schwab. But don't overdo it. "Don't try to outblue Paul Newman. Only Elizabeth Taylor has lavender eyes. Softer and more natural is always better when it comes to eye color."

- Have fun in the sun. "Sunglasses must look like they belong on your face," says Schwab. "Don't select frames by what is the latest, go with frames that make you look the greatest."Sharon Mosley is a former fashion editor of the Arkansas Gazette in Little Rock and executive director of the Fashion Editors and Reporters Association.

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