

The fashion dos and don'ts for holiday parties

by Sharon_Mosley

Bubbles are popping, sleigh bells are ringing and it's time to dress up and party. Celebrate the good life and put a little style in your dance step - even if it's to walk across the street to a casual neighborhood open house.

WHAT TO WEAR - A special blouse is one way to dress up for a festive casual party this holiday season. CNS Photo courtesy of Max Studio. "At these more-than-casual, less-than-dressy gatherings, it's wiser to overdress than underdress," says fashion expert Kimberly Bonnell, author of "What to Wear: A Style Handbook" (St. Martins Press). "Looking as if you didn't bother to care is an insult (if a tolerable one) to the host."

While most of us know what to wear to a gala ball or a holiday potluck, it's the "in-between" parties that often cause us to gnaw on our peppermint sticks. So start by eliminating what you don't want to wear first:

- That includes your summer flip-flops. Even if you live in a tropical paradise and haven't seen snow in your lifetime, you can still manage to slip on a dressier pair of sandals.

- Any shoes that look like they've seen better days, especially scuffed-up snow boots and pumps with worn-out heels.

- Sweats or workout clothes. It's easy to dash into a party on your way to the gym, but no one else wants to see your well-toned gluts while they're guzzling down gallons of pineapple punch.

- Overly sexy clothes. Yes, you'll get attention in that little backless red dress, but you won't attract the kind of jolly old St. Nicks you'll want coming down your chimney on Christmas Eve.

- Plain Jane suits. After-work parties abound during the holiday season, but you can at least add a sparkly cardigan, a jeweled cuff bracelet or change your shoes and handbag to make your tailored suit look more festive.

Things you do want to wear to a not-fancy, not-casual party:

- An embellished top. There are plenty of ways to kick it up a notch this holiday season with slinky tunic tops and sweaters that have a little bling around the neckline. You don't have to compete with the Christmas tree lights; however, remember to keep it subtle and sophisticated.

- The printed dress. Whether it's a little silk wool jersey dress with balloon sleeves or a tunic style blouson, grab some pearls and put on your tights for a special night.

- Sweaters. A cozy sweater dress is one of the best ways to dress up a little for a party and still be comfortable. Cardigans are also great knits to layer over a metallic sheath dress or lace pencil skirt.

- Relaxed suits. Holiday parties are not a time to wear uptight clothes, so relax and unwind with easy menswear trousers topped off with an elegant blouse. Take off your jacket and have fun.

- Special accessories. Bring out your best jewels - that special rhinestone pin from your grandmother. Trade in your oversized handbag for a purple crocodile clutch. Kick off your everyday flats and slip into some red patent Mary Janes or a pair of tapestry knee-high boots. Wrap up in a fabulous animal print shawl. It's time to party.

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