

Eyeglasses: picking the perfect pair

by Danielle Hatch

Wendy Smith says she can transform a person from geek to chic in a matter of seconds.

According to the eyewear consultant and owner of Wendy's Eyeglass Shack in Peoria, Ill., it's all about the specs.

THE FRAME GAME - Wendy Smith helps Robin Forstrom try on a new pair of glasses at her store, Wendy's Eyeglass Shack in Peoria, Ill. Smith uses a digital camera and fabric swatches to help clients select frames that enhance their appearance. CNS Photo by David Zentz. **THE PERFECT PAIR** - Sandy Cahill of Peoria wears Versace mint green plastic frames; Brie Nielsen, 6, of Peoria sports Marcolin metal rims; and Mike Aguilar, 18, of Peoria is in Revolution Innovation Technology frames. CNS Photos by David Zentz. "It's trendy to wear glasses now. I have salespeople come in to get 'attitude glasses,'" she said. "They've done polls that show people think you're more intelligent and more sincere if you wear glasses."

Smith, who opened her shop seven years ago, says glasses are basically jewelry for the face.

"It's the most important accessory because you wear them every day," she said.

For many, it's not always easy to choose the right frames. Anyone who isn't blessed with 20/20 vision has a story about those horn-rimmed glasses, or the ones that made them look like a bug in their high school yearbook picture. So how can a person avoid going down that road twice?

Smith said a good place to start is to determine the shape of your face - round, oval, square or heart-shaped - and stay away from frames that mimic that shape.

Gina Cisneros, an optician at Eyeglass World in Peoria, says it's a good idea to try on frames that contrast with your face shape.

"Some people with a round face look better in square frames; some people with a round face look better in octagonal or cat-eye frames," she said.

Cisneros said she tries to give customers an honest opinion. "I don't want them to walk out with ugly frames," she said. "Take your time, look at all your options. Bring in a friend to give you an honest opinion, (someone) who will tell you if they look bad."

Smith said someone with a rounder face would need squarish frames to define their cheekbones and brow bones, while someone with a strong jaw line should stay away from frames that are too square.

Barb Nielsen, office coordinator at Wendy's Eyeglass Shack, said frames shouldn't extend outside the face or eyebrows, and it's very important to make sure your eyes are centered in the frame.

"If the frames are too big, they can make your eyes look too close together," she said.

Smith said she often special orders glasses to make sure they fit the client's face.

"Frames are a big investment for some people," Nielsen said. "Everyone is so different, it's about finding the right fit for each person."

Smith said she takes pictures of her clients with a digital camera. That way, they can study the photos for a few days or show them to their loved ones. She also uses fabric swatches to help determine what colors enhance a client's skin, hair and eye color.

Sue Colby, co-owner of Vintage Optical in Morton, Ill., said people shouldn't be afraid to flirt with color.

"Color is the only thing in the world that will make people notice your eyewear," she said. "If you get something that's going to blend (with your features or your wardrobe), how much fun is that?"

Colby said people who are big on neutrals or who might be afraid of color are the ones who need it the most - men included. Colby would put a man who wears a lot of dark colors in a blue, black or silver frame, while a man who wears a lot of khaki would look best in earth-toned frames.

"You put those khaki guys in green frames and it looks great," she said.

You also can jazz up your eyeglasses with small details.

"Jewels are big; a little bling bling is really hot right now," Colby said. "You can dress up a pretty safe pair of glasses with a little jewel" or laser-cut detailing on the side. People with wide-set eyes can pull this off more easily than others.

"If you have close-set eyes, the last thing you want to do is to bring attention to the bridge of your frames," Colby said, because it can make your eyes look even more close together.

Not feeling the bling?

"Black is a great neutral," Colby said. "It's like a great pair of pumps; what doesn't go with that?"

Colby, who owns about 17 pairs of glasses, said it's nice to have several to choose from. That way, you can be conservative when you want to, and dressy on occasions when dressy is in order.

"Some women have shoes; I have eyewear," she said. "And I think eyewear is more important than shoes because people look at your eyes, they don't look at your feet."

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