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What's up with Albertans' garb?

We all walk a fine line when combining our passion for western wear and "vintage" clothing

My younger son once said to me, as I paraded a "vintage" look I often like to pull together when hanging out in my antique shop, "Mom! There is a fine line between dressing trendy-vintage and looking old-lady!" Now for those of you smirking and thinking that the '70s weren't *that* long ago, I will gently remind you that 30-something years have long passed by.

In observing many fashion-conscious Albertans out for an adventure all across the province I have keenly noted that Albertans love to dress the part. Those west-coasters can keep their summer flip-flops (never date yourself by calling them thongs) or their winter socks and Birkenstocks and giggle to themselves while thinking those of us east of the Rockies have no style, but they only have to take a weekend getaway drive to realize we, in Alberta, are loaded with unlimited creative options that rival the fashion runways abroad.

Perhaps it's because, in Alberta, we live in a somewhat theme-based reality. The pioneering spirit of our wild-west heritage and the oilmen's savvy has prompted what I like to call the only-in-Alberta fashion trends. The obvious, in my day-to-day experience at my antique stores, are those who love to dress in vintage wear for a nostalgic day of antiquing. Not only here in Nanton, famed for its Antique Walk, but in any antiques hot-spot province wide, one can catch a glimpse of an elegant woman browsing in a unique, vintage couture dress set off with a French Art Deco clutch purse and a Trifari retro pin. One can sneak a peek at two gentlemen sporting a matched set of hand-knit pumpkin-coloured turtleneck sweaters, complete with one for their impeccably well-mannered Scotty dog named Angel. (I saw it with my own eyes, I swear.)

Not into antiques? Rather stroll the trendy art galleries of urban Edmonton or Calgary? Be on the lookout for those who love to dress like art. One can spot attire akin to a bold Picasso with colour and silk dripping off the body imitating an artistically blown Italian Murano glass vase. Topping off the abstract ensemble is always a vivid pair of 1960s' pop-art dangling earrings, a space-age plastic pendant, a vividly coloured alligator-box handbag, and completing the look, a pair of step-in toe pumps with shiny gold coins floating in the clear Lucite heels.

A little posh for you? Just head out for a walk past a popular mezzanine area such as Prince's Island in Calgary or around the boardwalk in downtown Red Deer or uptown Edmonton, and you can easily spot one too many weekend dads trying to be hipsters with their skateboarding kids. The board shorts and skater shoes on the father-son duo would almost work if it were not for the orthotics slipped into Dad's tightly tied

shoes as opposed to Junior's loose laces. Before you mothers chuckle too much, browse through any mall in the province on a Saturday and see the mother-daughter twins playing "dress-up shopping day" and note that it is not always a good look on either, given the 30-ish year span of generations these days.

For a little afternoon break, check out any quaint shop in a rural day-tripping destination or urban centre and the coffee set abounds. Here 1970s' leather has resurfaced in a big-lapel way with that little Alberta splash of sophistication added. The cowboy influence and the oil-slick style creep into this set, in subtle thrift-store couture of French cuff shirts sporting vintage cuff-links, or western shirts with pearl snaps contrasted against the old, wooden buttons on their coats.

After a hard day's work on the prairie, the martini-bar or cowboy-bar Happy Hour comes alive as does the thigh-hugging, tight, cigarette pants back in Alberta fashion, uniquely bottomed off with not so flattering cowboy boots, or even worse, black and white velvet tuxedo sneakers pumped up for comfort to the volume of a clown shoe look.

Albertans are not just about dressing up, they are equally about dressing down. A

Saturday trip to the local home-reno store requires an outfit all in itself, and the look of the casual, homeowner couple in crisp Levis and matching '70s' hoodies, sporting baseball caps and ponytails, is a weekend fashion statement and a comfortable escape from their Johnny Cash black-on-black week of suits.

Only in Alberta can one spot fads that run for decades. The passion for making a unique fashion statement has "trendy" prairie types decked out in anything from Disney-mania, Nascar-numbered-jackets, to medical scrubs claimed to be worn by Dr. Greene from ER. Even the yoga trends come across in that lululemon-meets-Flasdance style. Worthy of mention, one cannot deny the wave of 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics clothing that still shows up in full-force winter after winter almost 20 years later.

Still don't believe me about Alberta's fashion savvy? Just mosey on into Calgary during the annual summer Stampede, a western wear bedazzler's paradise, and you will have little doubt why it is billed as, The Greatest (fashion) Show On Earth! Giddy-up! •

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