



# URBAN

YOUR GUIDE TO LOOKING GOOD

## HOW LOW SHOULD YOU GO AT WORK?

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# Booby TRAPS



IMRAN JALAL

Revealing too much cleavage can hurt your career. Urban finds out how low your neckline can go

After being under wraps for the past few seasons, the bust is busting out this fall fashion season. It was cleavage, cleavage, cleavage on the runways and the clothes have now made their way to the racks here.

Well-endowed women will enjoy celebrating their curves with this trend. Those whose cupcakes have not risen – a situation that many with slender Asian frames find themselves in – can get creative with toppings (see Page 14).

Designers going for decolletage included Marc Jacobs, whose collection for Louis Vuitton put the emphasis on the “V” with scooping bustier tops.

Miuccia Prada took the plunge with New Look dresses with bustline ruffles that made it look like the models did not wear bras, but balconies.

The latest look could spell double trouble though. There are two issues bouncing around: How much is too much to flaunt? And is flashing your assets at work a definite no?

## WORK EXPOSURE

Ms Cecelia Telkes, an associate consultant at image consultancy Imageworks, says: “Socially, a hint of cleavage is much classier than letting it all hang out. As a general rule, the exposed area from your chin to the end of your cleavage should not be longer than your head.”

Cleavage at work, however, is a booby trap for your career, she warns.

Declaring that “it is simply inappropriate to flash any cleavage in the office”, she points out that 93 per cent of communication is non-verbal.

“Unless you are a ventriloquist and can project verbally through your cleavage, chances are only about 7 per cent of your message is getting through if people’s attention is on your chest,” she says.

Most employers share her stand. Ms Jacqueline Goh, the human resources and administration director at Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre, says: “Clothes that reveal too much are a distraction. The way you dress affects your credibility and professionalism.”

It is no wonder some well-endowed women view their assets as liabilities. Take former office manager Cecilia

Ng, 33, who found herself – and her well-filled 34C cups – the object of unwanted attention at previous jobs despite dressing modestly.

“It came to a point where I had to say ‘no’ to sleeping with the boss,” says Ms Ng, who is now an interior designer.

In an e-mail interview, American author Elisabeth Dale of Boobs: A Guide To Your Girls, says the media has conditioned people to believe that a woman must be “selling” a product if she bares her bosom.

“Every woman who has ever worn a push-up bra or a low-cut gown understands the power of breasts.”

## BIG BOOST

This might explain why more women now believe bigger is better. Not only are more going for breast implants, they are also asking for bigger cup sizes.

The average size of silicone implants in Singapore has

gone from 200cc in the past to above 300cc, says consultant plastic surgeon Tan Ying Chien of The Sloane Clinic Plastic Surgery Centre in Novena Medical Center. 100cc of implants is roughly equivalent to an increase in one cup size.

Up to 20 per cent of his patients ask for cup sizes which he feels make them too “top heavy”, he adds.

Even without silicone aid, breast sizes have gone from buds to blossoms in the past 10 to 15 years, causing some bra fitters to declare that E is the new C.

In Singapore, where the average bust size was a 75A about five years ago, the norm is now 75B, with a 15 per cent jump in the number of women with larger sizes like D cups.

“70D bust size is becoming more common these days,” notes Wileen Chen, advertising and promotions manager for underwear giant Triumph International (Singapore).

Better nutrition is one reason for the bigger busts. For those who are hung up about their small bust size, Ms Dale has some reassuring words: “Many women assume that men prefer larger breasts, when there is no such preference.”

“Men are happy to be around any breasts at all and know they are found in a variety of shapes and sizes.”

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## CAN LOW CUTS MAKE THE CUT?

Urban runs the three work outfits on these two pages by the heads of a recruitment portal, an advertising agency and a five-star hotel to see which low-cut look meets their office dress code

### Mr Chris Chiu, group executive creative director of advertising firm Leo Burnett Group Singapore

“Perhaps it is because I work in advertising, but none of these outfits would seem out of place in our industry. If I have to choose, Look 3 might be seen as a tad sexy but that is easily fixed with a cardigan should she have to meet a conservative client. I think we would have to show a lot more skin before eyebrows would be raised.”

### Ms Emma Meyer, director of human capabilities, human resources and training of The St Regis Singapore

“Looks 1 and 2 are equally appropriate for the hospitality industry. They are both feminine without going overboard. The distance from the collar bone to the chest is just about right, exuding confidence, free spirit and elegance. All these elements complement the familiar warmth and ready smiles of St Regis staff.

Look 3, while appealing, is too low-cut for women in this industry. A neckline like this may draw unnecessary attention and can be a distraction when you interact with clients and guests.

Perhaps it is acceptable for more creative industries, especially when paired with bold, chunky accessories or slim, layered chains to direct attention to the elegant look instead of the cleavage.”

### Mr Tay Kok Choon, head of strategic sales development of online job portal JobStreet Singapore

“We acknowledge a growing trend among women to ditch power dressing for tighter clothes with lower necklines. However, you can dress to impress but not to reveal. Hence, Look 3 is nice but not appropriate for an office environment.

The shirt and skirt combo of Look 1 is great and comes across as professional yet personal. Look 2 is a little too casual, but would be great for dress-down Fridays.”

**Look 1:** Shirt by Sportmax, \$449, from MaxMara; petticoat skirt, price upon request, from Prada

**Look 2:** Allaire jacket, \$409; Halle tank top, \$99; Karlle pleated pants, \$209, all from Club Monaco

**Look 3:** High shine twist top, \$159, from Ted Baker; petticoat skirt, price upon request, from Prada

**Photographer** ASHLEIGH SIM;

**Stylist** IMRAN JALAL;

**Hair** CARMEN YOON, kimrobinsory;

**Make-up** BENO LIM, M.A.C,

using Fabulous Felines Collection;

**Nails** Pink Parlour;

**Model** YERI K, Looque Models;

Special thanks to The St Regis Singapore for the use of its Presidential Suite

# CLEAVAGE FOR EVERY AGE

Fashion stylist Valerie Jiang shows four women of different ages how to dress tastefully for work

## IN YOUR 20S

**MS NADIA DAENG, 27, PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANT**

### Are you for or against showing cleavage?

I'm all for it. A woman should be proud of her body. Showing some cleavage does not have to be vulgar. It is about the whole package – the way you speak, your body language and your dressing.

### How low would you go?

I would not dare to reveal any cleavage during family occasions out of respect for my elders. There will be no bra peek-a-boo situation at work either. For play, I like showing a bit of cleavage.

### What do you think of your makeover?

I feel like a bombshell. I'd say the look suits my line of work because we handle events for lifestyle and consumer clients, who tend not to be so conservative.

### Stylist says

"A bustier boosts a woman's confidence because it enhances the body shape. The jacket makes it suitable for the office. She can take it off after work."

### In your 20s...

"You can get away with revealing more skin at this age. But here is a rule: If you are baring your cleavage, cover up your legs," says fashion stylist Joshua Cheung.

BEFORE

AFTER



On Ms Nadia Daeng (left): Blazer, \$199, from Zara; skirt, \$289, from Karen Millen; bustier by Valisere, \$399, from Tangs Orchard; heels, her own; On Ms Harasha Bafana (right): Draped top, \$519, and pants, \$509, both from Marina Rinaldi; heels, \$199, from Zara

AFTER



**MS HARASHA BAFANA, 36, FOUNDER AND COACH OF A COMMUNICATION CONSULTANCY**

### Are you for or against showing cleavage?

Against. Your body should not be a distraction. Sexiness comes from within.

### How low would you go?

I usually use a long scarf to cover my neckline. When I conduct training, I will not wear low-cut tops because I don't want to attract the wrong kind of attention. For nights out, I may wear a top with a lower cut but with a lace overlay to cover the cleavage. I love the fact that lace hints doesn't reveal too much skin.

### What do you think of your makeover?

I feel comfortable. The look is tasteful and does not reveal too much. I would wear this to work as it is not too fussy.

### Stylist says

"Harasha is not comfortable with revealing tops. I chose a look that shows her neckline without baring too much skin."

### In your 30s...

"Go only as low as you are comfortable but dress appropriately for the situation. You don't want to wear a plunging neckline if you are in the office. Remember to wear pretty lingerie because if you do show a bit of bra, it should be pretty," says Mr Cheung.

BEFORE



## IN YOUR 40S

**MS MARIE TEO, 42, COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT**

### Are you for or against showing cleavage?

I'm for it. If God gives you a gift, then use it. How much you show really depends on the occasion. Of course, you would not be wearing a low-cut top to religious events or when picking your kid up from school.

### How low would you go?

It depends on my mood and the occasion. When I'm meeting clients who are conservative, I would not show any cleavage. Clients in entertainment and hospitality, however, are fine with it if it is done tastefully.

### What do you think of your makeover?

This outfit complements my figure, but I won't wear it when I'm conducting meetings with, say, a construction company because the neckline is too low. The bosses tend to be men and you want them to look you in the eye and not at your chest.

### Stylist says

"The chiffon sleeves balance the low neckline and make this a tasteful outfit that can take her from work to play."

BEFORE



AFTER



On Ms Marie Teo (left): Top, \$269, from Karen Millen; belt, \$119, and skirt, \$269, both by Marella from Isetan Scotts; heels, \$229, from Zara; On Ms Linda Lau (right): Dress, \$89.90, from Zara; heels, her own

## IN YOUR 50S

**MS LINDA LAU, 52, DIRECTOR OF A PRINTING COMPANY**

### Are you for or against showing cleavage?

It really depends on the occasion. It is acceptable when you attend social functions like a dinner and dance. If a woman has the confidence to show off her cleavage, why not?

### How low would you go?

It is fashionable to show a bit of skin. Of course, I won't wear tops that let everything spill out. I mostly wear pants at work with a spaghetti top under my jacket sometimes, but I make sure I look professional.

### What do you think of your makeover?

The look works fine with or without a jacket, but the colour and design seem a bit dressed up for me.

### Stylist says

"This is age-appropriate and something that Linda will be comfortable in. The black and white sheath dress is classy."

### In your 50s...

"The skin on the décolletage is thinner than that on the face, so it tends to give away your age more than other parts of the body. Ditch tops that expose too much of the bosom," says Ms Cecelia Telkes, associate consultant of image consultancy Imageworks.

BEFORE



Photographer  
ASHLEIGH SIM;  
Stylist  
VALERIE JIANG;  
Hair  
SHA SHA OH,  
Kimrobinson;  
Make-up  
BENEDICT CHOO  
(9682-9590),  
using M.A.C



## PACK THAT RACK

Forget about going under the knife: all it takes to get that va-va-voom cleft is deft make-up skills and strong adhesive.

### SECRET WEAPON

The secret weapon of celebrities like Nicolete Sheridan, the strapless NuBra Original Silicone adhesive paddings (right) are great for strapless gowns and come in varying thickness. For a deeper plunge, simply tighten the front clasp. \$99, from NuBra Shop, 01-38 Sunshine Plaza

### STICK THEM UP

The transparent and waterproof Bring It Up Bra Tape lets you go au naturel with some lift. Stick the tape above the



PHOTOS: M.A.C, FILE

nipples and pull the adhesive flap up for instant lift.

From US\$19.99 (\$\$27) for eight pairs, from [www.bringitup.com](http://www.bringitup.com)

### FAKING IT

Mr Beno Lim, a senior artist from M.A.C, shows how you can fake a cleavage: 1 Apply a face and body liquid

foundation – in a shade that matches your skin tone – to the chest area that will be exposed. 2 Using the 168 Large Angled Contour Brush (\$57, right), apply M.A.C's Mineralize Skinfinish Natural powder (\$46, far right) in a darker shade than the foundation to the same area. The curved brush tip allows for even blending as it follows the natural contours of your bosom. Apply the powder from your cleavage and move upwards and out along the circumference of your cups. Stop at the highest



part of your breasts. 3 Spread a lighter shade of the Mineralize Skinfinish Natural powder on the highest part to give a three-dimensional effect.

~ IMRAN JALAL

## RISE & FALL OF THE DECOLLETAGE

### 15th century to 19th century

Decolletage is a focal point of the wardrobe.



### 1914

The first modern bra, made of two handkerchiefs, a pink ribbon and cord, is patented.

### 1935

American lingerie manufacturer Warner's introduces cup sizes A, B, C and D.

### 1948

The first push-up bra, Rising Sun, makes its debut.



### 1962

Silicone breast implants are invented.

### 1964

The Wonderbra is born.

### Mid-1960s

English models like Jean Shrimpton (left) make natural, unfettered breasts hot again.

### 1980s to 1990s

The era of the supermodels sees the likes of Naomi Campbell and Claudia Schiffer (right) flaunting their curves, thus celebrating the womanly figure.

### Mid-1990s

The rise of waif-thin models like Kate Moss (left) puts the bosom out of favour once more.



### 2010

Brazilian-born model Sheyla Hershey has multiple implants to achieve the world's largest breasts measuring 38KKK, but will have to remove the implants due to an infection.

### 2010

For fall, designers like Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton (right) and Miuccia Prada play peek-a-boob with low necklines.

