



Karen Anderson

Summer in Seattle: It's time to unzip the fleece liner from your jacket

Club columnist Karen Anderson comments on the Seattle fashion scene (or lack of it).

One of my favorite things about summer in Seattle is the clothing. I love the comfort of fleece, the convenience of performance fabrics, and the bright, bold colors of our rain gear and sportswear.

Seattle clothing not only looks and feels great, but, according to out-of-towners like my mother, it even sounds distinctive.

"I can always tell when your plane has arrived because of the way the people are dressed," she once remarked when she picked me up at the Boston airport. "I just wait in baggage claim until I hear the 'whoosh whoosh whoosh' of the vortex."

She had me worried for a moment, and then I figured it out.

"Goretex," I told her. "I think you mean Goretex."

When it comes to fashion, I'm the first to admit that Seattle's not exactly in competition with Paris, New York, and Milan. In fact, we're not even on the same map. I asked Apple's Siri software what kind of clothes people wear in Seattle and she replied "green-ish."

Who cares what you look like when you're feeding the chickens, digging a vegetable garden, or skidding through the scree on your mountain bike? In Seattle, we value functionality and durability over appearance.

The only reason we run down to REI to buy new clothes is because we forgot to unpack after our last mountaineering trip and now no amount of detergent can eradicate the deadly combination of old sweat and thriving mildew.

While Seattle's style is practical, it can also be wildly innovative. Seattle designers rendered the world of fashion speechless in 2000 when they unveiled a canvas skirt for guys cleverly marketed as the "Utilikilt." It's no coincidence that shortly thereafter software and gaming companies flocked to the region. The Utilikilt pairs perfectly with the tech industry's favorite fashion statement, a T-shirt with an obscure slogan on the front that is obscured even further by

the strap of a cross-body messenger bag.

If you're looking to Seattle's world-renowned music scene to provide some fashion frivolity, don't bother. Remember that the most famous song to come out of Seattle in the past decade is Macklemore's "Thrift Shop." The hipsters at Bumbershoot and Folklife have long since picked over the racks at Goodwill and Value Village. They are now ordering reproduction porkpie hats, bowling shirts, and ruffled aprons from clever entrepreneurs on Etsy.

An East Coast transplant, I've found Seattle's casual dress code a brilliant excuse to reclaim some closet space

for other uses. After my first year here, I tossed out all my wool coats. The next year, I giddily compressed my spring, summer, fall and winter wardrobes into two seasons – fall-ish winter and spring-ish summer. A year or two later, I realized I could just wear the same clothes all year round since most of them are lightweight, packable, care-free performance fabrics. In the summer, I unzip the fleece jacket, and in the winter I wear something waterproof over the fleece. I still have winter boots and summer shoes – but both types of footwear come in handy in the summer, when temperatures near the Sound can plunge down to the 40s at night.

I learned that lesson the hard way my first year in Seattle when I attended a summer wedding in the San Juans. The sunset ceremony was held on a cliff overlooking the Sound. The waves lapped, the gulls cried, and when the sun sank below the horizon, the bride, resplendent in a strapless gown, was shivering so violently that her vows sounded

like "I d-d-d-d-do."

After the ceremony, we took shelter in a tent where we begged the caterer to forget about dinner and serve coffee, preferably with brandy, immediately. Some resourceful groomsmen discovered the resort's fire pit and got a nice blaze going. The locals brought out parkas and down sleeping bags. As night fell, we snuggled by the fire and listened to the unforgettable sounds of the Pacific Northwest woods – the hoots of owls, the howls of coyotes, and the occasional shriek of some well-dressed Manhattan fashionista whose five-inch stiletto sandals had just come into pungent contact with nature.

