

FASHION

Get tanked

by LESIA MANCHULENKO
For Southam Newspapers

OTTAWA - Paired with a luminescent tulle skirt, a tank top can whisk you to a midnight gala. With a pair of cut-offs and a maple leaf tattoo, it can take you into the heart of the festivities on Canada Day. But don't misunderstand this perennial wardrobe staple. A tank top is not just a tank top. Finding the perfect one for an occasion can be a complex challenge.

There was a time when the tank was simply an accessory - to be worn demurely under something more . . . well, just more.

But skin is in and the tank has surfaced as a fashion force unto itself. Tanks are more popular than T-shirts this summer and they're popping up with lacy edges, applique straps and silk-screened fronts a la Charlie's Angels; in cotton knits and racy leathers.

"They're everywhere," says Lucie Seguin, manager of an Au Coton store in Ottawa. "I think women want to wear them more than they used to. There's more of a 'go for it' mentality. Even bigger women will wear them."

But there are factors to consider when choosing the tank that's right for you - from fabric to style.

Au Coton carries at least seven varieties, each of which comes with its own list of pros and cons. All of their tanks are at least 98 per cent cotton, which can be good or bad depending on your outlook.

Cotton is more comfortable and breathes better than synthetics, but it doesn't have the same elasticity and shape.

Eventually, with washing, any pure cotton tank is doomed to become one of those amorphous blobs - suitable for cleaning a barbecue, but not attending one.

"Anything with Lycra in a tank top is really important," says Chantal Biro-Schad, co-owner of Ottawa's two Schad stores.

"You don't wear loose tank tops anymore."

The rule of thumb seems to be the higher the Lycra content, the dressier the top. At Schad, which carries an eclectic selection of tanks, this relationship is reflected in the price - from a paisley polyester kerchief tank by Imitz for \$70 to a kitten-soft cotton knit by Good and Beder for only \$35.

And what to do about the eternal bra

problem? Tank top practicality has made exposed bra-strap acceptable, but some women just haven't warmed to the idea. And even the most carefully designed tanks with the widest straps can still slip and slither just enough to keep you constantly adjusting.

Solutions to the problem can range from safety pins to layering; from going strapless to (if you can get away with it) going braless.

But one of Biro-Schad's favourites is the new line of tube bras by Vie available at the Bay for about \$20.

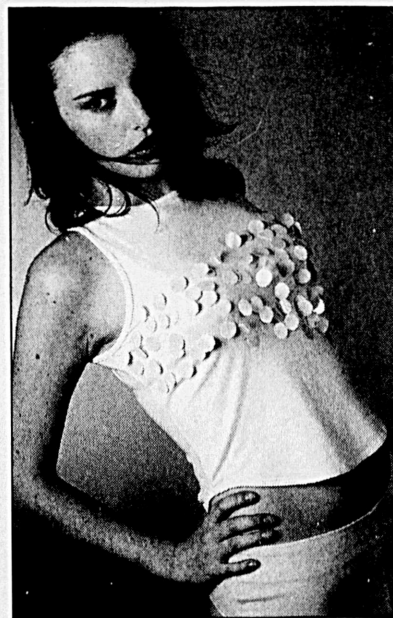
"They hold better than a strapless and they come in all sorts of beautiful colours so it doesn't matter if they show," she says.

As for body type, both Biro-Schad and Seguin agree that, in general, women with large breasts should shy away from itchy-bitsy camisole tops and go for something with a wider strap and a bit more support.

And women who are self-conscious about their arms should look for something with a cut-in shoulder. "Everyone has nice shoulders," says Biro-Schad.

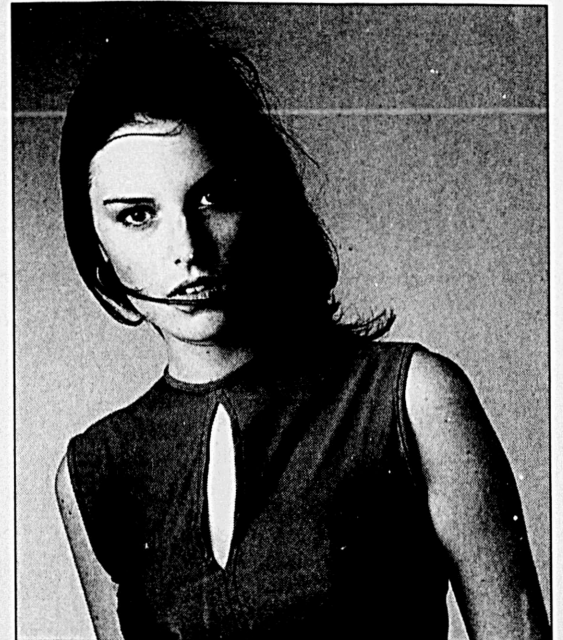
For now, the word in the fashion world seems to be that with more and more styles emerging, there's a tank out there for everyone.

"I would never wear a tank before because I thought I was too skinny, but now I just go for it," says Seguin.



Southam photos
Cotton and lycra tank with iridescent sequins, left, and lycra tank, below, with opening in front gives style to these tops.

Open shoulders, cut-out photo, make this tank attractive to women who want to draw attention away from their arms.



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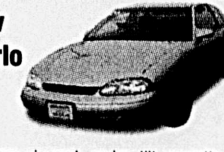
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