

A mommy makeover, California-style

After giving birth, writer sets her sights on rediscovering her fashion sense

Mhairri Woodhall
FOR THE PROVINCE

My lacklustre postpartum wardrobe had me wondering if I'd been a member of a Goth band prior to getting pregnant.

Everything was black, with the exception of a couple of army-green pieces, and either too short or too tight. After a year in leggings, loose fitted tops and pants with elasticated pouches the thought of purchasing a whole new wardrobe was as overwhelming as it was thrilling. It was my husband who after watching me tear through my closet like a mad-woman looking for anything that might resemble an outfit from this decade, suggested that I consult a fashion stylist.

We decided to make my wardrobe overhaul a family vacation to Laguna Beach and Santa Monica

in Southern California for some sunshine and much needed fashion advice. The power of Google led me to Leslie Christen (lesliechristen.com), a Laguna Beach local, fashion editor and personal stylist to none other than Orange County housewife 'Fancy Pants' Heather Dubrow. Prior to our shopping day, Leslie had me send her some pictures of myself as well as the celebrities who best represented the style I was hoping to achieve.

LAGUNA BEACH POWER SHOP

Fashionista Forewarning: Shopping with a stylist is a focused mission that requires comfortable shoes (preferably slip on), quick-change clothes and an open mind.

From the moment I met Leslie, I felt confident that my clothing

calamities would soon be over and I'd never again have to figure out which faded black leggings best complimented my oversized, slightly pilled off-black cardigan.

Our first stop was Westerly in Corona del Mar. This darling little shop offers an array of sought-after labels, all of which are hand-picked by owner and former L.A. stylist Lindsey Garland. Leslie's first style tip was "try everything on." Yes, this sounds logical but I know I'm not the only person to have picked through a rack of clothes and walked away dismayed that a store didn't carry anything that would work.

Leslie circled the store, plucking piece after piece that in my mind wouldn't be suitable; after which she did another loop and pulled even more items. I spent the next 45 minutes trying on umpteen sweaters, jeans, blazers and blouses all under the critical eye of my guru, who parlayed advice on wardrobe must-haves and how to shop for outfits versus individual items.

After the whirlwind of fabric settled I was left with two pairs of jeans and a blouse, blazer and tank top, the majority of which were on sale.

THE RECOVERY

After a day of intense retail therapy, my body begged for some pampering, and so I left for an afternoon at the Montage Laguna Beach Spa. The Montage is a stunning five-star oceanfront retreat with beachfront guest rooms, outdoor pools, lounge, three signature restaurants and a massive foot spa.

After shopping, I ate at the Loft restaurant, which had a cheese bar featuring over 150 local and international cheeses.

SANTA MONICA

Prior to heading home, my husband and six-month-old girl spent a couple of days in Santa Monica. This beautiful city is easy to navigate on foot, which is always preferable when you're travelling with a stroller-bound child.

Although my purchases were complete, the shopping in Santa Monica is phenomenal.

Third Street Promenade is a mix of local and chain stores sprinkled with cafés and restaurants, while the tree-lined Montana Street offers a selection of higher end shops and boutiques often frequented by celebrities.

For additional destination information visit arrivaltravel.com



Gourmet cheese selections and paired condiments from The Montage were splendid after a long day of shopping.



Leslie Christen, a Laguna Beach local, fashion editor and personal stylist, has all the fashion answers.

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