

Colored paper and fabric swatches help women consider new style choices for a new stage of life

Description

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They sat at tables topped with fabric swatches, pieces of paper in a variety of colors, scissors, glue and colored pens. But it was a group of older women not kiddies getting set to dig in.

The women mixed and matched colors and fabrics, gluing their choices on heavy paper. â??This is just like kindergarten, itâ??s so much fun,â?• said one participant.



The two-day workshop included an exercise in choosing and matching colors and fabrics. Photos by Gene Cohn.

The event was â??Aging in Style,â?• a two-day workshop held at the Cornerstone Trinity Baptist Church in the Miraloma neighborhood. Their instructions were to put together colors and fabrics to create a personal style blueprint. While the first workshop focused on concepts and self-awareness, the final session delved into colors, patterns and resources.

â??I came home with some terrific combinations for future outfits,â?• said Patricia Shanahan, who found the exercise helpful in coordinating colors and accenting with patterns. Julia Scott-Jackson said she gained a â??better understanding of how color can be used to brighten my wardrobe and influence my style.â?•



The event concluded with a clothing exchange, from which the women assembled outfits for a fashion show.

The goal was opening the women up to the possibility of renewal at a new stage of life, starting with personal style. It could be confidence-building and just a lot of fun.

â?•I think how you dress and how you present yourself is a vital part of creating, or recreating, yourself and your image in this â??newâ?? stage of life,â?• said workshop leader Juliet Rothman, a retired social worker and professor at the University of California-Berkeley.



Juliet Rothman, a retired social worker and professor at the University of California-Berkeley, was tapped to lead the workshop.

She was tapped for the job by Patti Spaniak, a colleague on the cityâ??s Department of Aging and Adult Services Advisory Board and a Community Connector with the San Francisco Community Living Campaign, which sponsored the event. â??She told me she liked the way I created my outfits each day,â?• said Rothman.

Rothman was assisted by Melanie Grossman, also a retired social worker. They started the workshop by clearing up any confusion about fashion versus style.

â??Fashion is trendy. It goes in cycles and is always changing. Style, on the other hand, is personal,â?• Rothman said. Style can be affected by life experience, body shape, personal likes and dislikes, culture, habit and finances. â??Style can change, but it can also remain the same for periods of time, or even a lifetime.â?•

Creativity in one part of your life can flow into your personal style choices, she added. So can your emotional state.

â??When I started to think about this workshop and how I put outfits together, I realized that I chose my outfits according to my mood,â?• she said. â??When I feel sad, I wear darker colors with long sleeves and high necklines, and when I feel happy, like when Iâ??m with my grandchildren, I wear bright colors.â?•

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Connie Levy tries on a red coat while workshop co-leader Melanie Grossman dons an embroidered sweater.

When an audience member offered that she does just the opposite, Rothman allowed herself space to consider changing her pattern. â??This is just what I mean by a mental/emotional mind set for style. We can consider, and then we can re-consider, and, maybe, change.â?•



Maria Guillen tries on a hooded jacket.

Maria Guillen took that advice to heart. â??The class provided me with the reinforcement that style doesnâ??t mean adhering to a particular fashion. I see now that style is how you express yourself in your attire â?¦ â??I am a blank canvas and I choose to express myself with color, texture and flair.â?•

Retirement is often a time when women in particular start re-evaluating their wardrobes, Rothman said. Tuning up or trying a new wardrobe along with a change in status is a creative endeavor that can be quite satisfying, she said. â??In retirement, we can reinvent ourselves â?? become volunteers, athletes, docents or caregivers.â?•

The key to avoiding the â??slideâ?• into sweats and sneakers is to make style-conscious choices each day. â??Itâ??s OK if you want to wear jeans and sweats all the time, but be aware of what youâ??re doing,â?• Grossman said. â??The way we look is important because it defines us in many ways. It reflects the way we see ourselves and the way others see us. How we look is an essential part of who we are.â?•



Julia Scott-Jackson puts together an outfit all in blue, while Blanche Capilos matches a bright scarf with yellow pants.

While Blanche Capilos appreciated the lessons, she most liked the camaraderie. â??I enjoyed the sisterhood of older active women who like sharing their knowledge and understanding of life as we

age.â?•

As the workshop wrapped up, participants exchanged clothing they had brought, now carefully laid out on tables. They tried on tops and bottoms, shoes, outerwear and jewelry. Then, wearing the items of their newly chosen style, they lined up in a fashion runway, swirling and turning while flash bulbs popped. A professional photographer preserved the special moment.

If youâ??re interested in future â??Aging in Styleâ?• workshops, email Estelle Schneider, director of Community Learning and Empowerment at the Community Living Campaign, estelle@sfcommunityliving.org.

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