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Savvy Style: Back to school style all about going back to basics

These are the clothes that will get your kids out the door quickly, easily and in style

BY JOANNE SASVARI, SPECIAL TO THE SUN AUGUST 17, 2015



Triumph tee in hunter green and charcoal stripe, \$36, chocolate quilted Remy vest, \$68, and chocolate denim Kick jean, \$54, all by Redfish Kids Clothing, 851 Hornby St., redfishkids.com

A decade ago, when Lorraine Kitsos was still a new mom, she couldn't find the kinds of clothes she wanted for her kids. So she decided to design her own, and with the help of her business partner Kristy Brinkley, Vancouver's Redfish Kids Clothing was born.

They decided early on that their clothes had to be stylish, of course, but also wearable, versatile, durable, easy to clean and made for movement.

"Physical activity helps with brain development," says Kitsos. Because her husband is a dancer, she is very much aware of the interaction of body and mind. "You don't want a young child restricted in any way."

And that esthetic is what back-to-school fashion is all about this fall.

There is an ease, a comfort and a unisex appeal to kids' clothes this season. All you need are a handful of basics that mix, match and layer and your kids will be out the door in no time flat.



Caraway pullover in cherry, \$64, wraparound Good Fortune skirt in chocolate denim, \$64, and striped legging, \$34, all by Redfish Kids Clothing, 851 Hornby St., redfishkids.com

"When you look at something, you should think of how it can be incorporated into your wardrobe in three different ways," says Emily Scarlett, director of communications for H&M Canada.

Here's what you should be looking for when you hit the malls this month. Fashion trends come and go even faster than an eight-year-old goes through shoes, so they're rarely worth spending money on. The exception is when a trend transcends its 15 minutes and becomes, simply, the way we dress now.

Right now there are two major trends sweeping fashion.

The first is athleisure, that hybrid of active and leisure wear we've been seeing the last few seasons. Think tailored sweatpants and hoodies in luxurious fabrics. These are clothes your kids can move in — but still show up for a meeting with the principal if they have to.

"It's what customers want," says Kitsos. "We've always been clean lines and refined, but we've also brought in that comfort and relaxed fit."

"I think athleisure is really big for little boys," adds Scarlett, who notes we'll be seeing lots of those pants that marry elements of jeans and sweats, with dropped crotches, baggy legs and tapered cuffs.

The second big trend is the return of '80s and '90s fashion. Yes, grunge is back, along with a touch of punk and hip-hop.

"For girls, it's more the microflorals, that tiny print that's an homage to a lot of trends from the grunge era coming back," Scarlett says.

The baby doll dress is especially hot for little girls, and makes a great transition piece — wear it now with sandals and later on layered over a turtleneck and leggings. The best way to build a back-to-school wardrobe is in layers.

Like any good construction, it starts with a solid base, in this case, jeans.

"(Invest in) a good pair of jeans that fit properly and are a good wash, a good jacket, a hoodie you can wear under it," Scarlett says, adding, "For girls, we're still seeing the skinny jean in different shades and washes."

If it's not jeans, it's leggings or "jeggings," with details like patches, prints and sequins making them "a bit more trendy and fashionable," perfect under a slouchy sweater or swingy dress.

For boys, we're still seeing skinny jeans, but also that wider-legged athleisure pant.

"It's a hip-happening silhouette," says Kitsos. "It's slouchy, no restrictions, and you can roll the cuffs."

Next, it's layers of tees — short- and long-sleeved, plain, printed or graphic — and then a slouchy sweatshirt or hoodie.

"Hoodies can be for a boy or a girl. Pair it with a skirt and you have a cool outfit," Kitsos says.

Outerwear is huge this season for both kids and grown-ups.

"A good transitional jacket is a good starting point," Scarlett says, noting it's best to go a size up so it can fit over multiple layers and has room for your kid to grow. Think padded vests, quilted bombers, shearling aviators, moto jackets, varsity styles and, for girls, faux fur toppers. Kids clothes can't just be cute. They also have to be functional.

Look for fabrics that are soft, long wearing and have a bit of stretch, like the organic bamboo cotton Kitsos uses at Redfish. (Although her clothes are designed and made in Vancouver, she sources material and inspiration from around the world, especially Asia.) They're also easy to clean.

"I'm the kind of person who throws dish rags and cleats and nice, pretty dresses in at the same time," she says with a laugh. "I think the washing machine is that magic machine."



Looking good everyday is as easy as ABC when you stock children's closets with classic basics that are a cinch to put together. All from J.Crew Crewcuts (jcrew.com): Girls — Side-Zip Flannel Skirt in Navy, \$99, striped Popover Sweater, \$86.50 Glitter Apple Bag, \$86.50, Suede Macalister Boots, \$128, Patterned Macalister Laces, \$5. Boys — Pocket Tee in Speckle Blue Stripe, \$50.50, Ludlow Two-Button Blazer in Navy Wool, \$230, Slim Jean in Well Worn Wash, \$62.50, Max The Monster Backpack, \$86.50, Suede Macalister Boots, \$128, Patterned Macalister Laces, \$5.

Also consider building a wardrobe where all the colours go together, so there's never any early morning panic. This fall, basics of black, grey, chocolate and indigo are punched up with hits of cobalt, mustard and green, as well as pink for girls.

And with that, your kids' back-to-school wardrobe just got an A+.

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