

Who wears short shorts

Many people do on the streets of Vancouver, but office etiquette is a separate question

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Go ahead, show a little leg this summer.

Nothing is hotter this sultry season than a pair of shorts. In fact, almost every style is fashionable right now, from sporty briefs to work-friendly Bermudas.

That doesn't mean, though, that every style is right for every occasion -- and especially not for work.

"It depends on many variables, the most important being where do you work," says Carla Stef, senior manager of marketing and communications for Holt Renfrew Vancouver.



CREDIT: Vancouver Sun

Shorts are a favourite in Vancouver

"If you are a summer camp counsellor, or an architect, or a location scout, then shorts might make sense, but then of course there are all kinds of shorts."

Shorts simply don't look professional, says image consultant Mihaela Ciocan, president of Vancouver-based ImagePro Image Consulting.

"I know they are a huge trend. I know it's hot," she says. "But it doesn't mean that we can sacrifice professionalism for the sake of comfort or the sake of following a trend."

This trend, though, is one that's likely to last, thanks in part to global warming. Offices from Toronto to Shanghai have been urging workers to save energy by turning off the air-conditioning -- and ditching the suits for shorts and Ts instead.

That idea will suit many Vancouverites just fine. After all, we're not only known for our casual approach to style, but after six months of grey, rainy weather, we welcome any chance to soak in a little more vitamin D.

"Shorts really say summer has arrived," says Douglas Knopp, regional director for Harry Rosen menswear.

Still, he says: "We don't really recommend shorts for the office," adding that even in a casual, creative office, "I would exercise caution if the individual is meeting clients. It's very important to maintain professionalism."

There's also a huge difference in what's appropriate for men and women.

"For women, shorts have been incorporated into a suiting option," says Tara Wickwire, the Toronto-based senior manager of public relations for Gap Inc.

She notes that for many women, a sleek, tailored city short has become a great alternative to the traditional pencil skirt.

"It's really become a professional, work-appropriate piece for women," Wickwire says. "Especially pairing it with a blazer."

However, she says, "shorts on men in the workplace just don't look professional."

The problem is that what makes a look appropriate is the footwear. While women can wear dress shoes with shorts, men are largely restricted to running shoes, flip-flops and sandals, none of which belong in an office.

In fact, many office dress codes won't allow shorts at all. If yours does, and you decide to shake a leg in the season's hottest fashion, keep in mind that too-short or too-casual shorts are never appropriate for work.

"The most office-friendly are perhaps the most classic," Stef says. "A longer Bermuda short, a style that's been around for decades, is really the short that makes sense for work environments."

"The shorts need to be knee length so they look more like a skirt," Ciocan agrees. "Very short shorts are definitely a no-no. Even for the company picnic."

What is appropriate -- for either men or women -- is a tailored city short in a good-quality, well-pressed, neutral-coloured fabric.

Women should wear it with a matching jacket and dress shoes such as pumps or slingbacks.

Men should opt for slip-on loafers without socks or, if the dress code allows it, a sleek, city sandal like the ones from Prada.

"We would also recommend that you pair it with a jacket. That takes it to a whole different level," Knopp says.

And one more thing to keep in mind when wearing shorts: they need to look good on you as well.

"The total look and attention to detail is key. Knowing one's body type and what looks best is really important," Stef adds.

If all this is making those casual shorts seem like more trouble than they're worth, well, maybe you should save the shorts for after-work socializing and look at some other way to keep cool at work this summer.

"There's lots of things that you can wear when it's hot," Ciocan says.

She suggests capris, skirts or dresses for women, while Knopp recommends relaxed, light-coloured linen or cotton suits for men.

And, of course, you never have to follow an unsuitable trend.

As Stef says: "My ultimate test is 'any doubt, no doubt.' If you look in the mirror and have to ask, 'Are these right for work?' they probably aren't. If you look in the mirror and say, 'Are my legs good enough to wear these?' then they probably aren't!"

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THE A-Z OF SHORTS-WEARING ETIQUETTE

If you plan to wear shorts to the office, keep these dos and don'ts in mind:

- Don't wear short shorts -- they should hit no higher than five to eight centimetres above the knee.
- Do choose a sturdy, suiting-weight fabric in a solid neutral or subtle pattern.
- Don't opt for florals, wild patterns, bright colours or flimsy fabrics that expose more than you want the mailroom to see.
- Do wear shorts with crisp shirts, neat sweaters and jackets.
- Don't wear them with T-shirts, sloppy polos or tank tops.
- Do wear sleek sandals, ballet flats, slip-on loafers or dressy street shoes.
- Don't wear sneakers, sports sandals, espadrilles, battered boat shoes or socks.
- Do put some effort into grooming. Get a pedicure, shave your legs, apply some self tanner, use body lotion -- that goes for men, too, except maybe the shaving-your-legs bit.
- Just don't do it. If you have any doubts about how appropriate you look in shorts, wear a skirt or summer-weight trousers instead.