

Trending | [Fast Fifty](#) | [Google office](#) | [Terry Savage](#) | [Personal chefs](#) | [Springfield's inertia](#) | **Most Popular** | [News Alerts](#) | [Mobile Apps](#)

[News](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Multimedia](#) | [Lists](#) | [Small Business](#) | [People & Society](#) | [Special Features](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Health Care](#)

[News](#) | [Focus](#) | [Business of Life](#) | [People](#) | [Columnists](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Corrections](#)

[Home](#) > [This Week's Crain's](#) > [Business of Life](#) >

A custom approach to eveningwear for business

By Lisa Bertagnoli May 06, 2013

[Print](#) | [Email](#) | **0 comments**



Eva Pazola, right, with client Julia Brown in a gown she made.
Tori Soper

Ellen Chessick has a laundry list of musts for the dresses she wears to black-tie business affairs.

The gowns have to be comfortable, good-looking and reflect her personality. They must be “not too revealing, not too young-looking, fashion-forward and still classic,” says Ms. Chessick, 55, vice president of strategic growth at Restaurant.com, a restaurant coupon and gift certificate company based in Arlington Heights.

Her source for these gowns:

Lincoln Park designer/dressmaker Eva Pazola. Most recently, Ms. Pazola designed a gray and black silk tea-length dress for Ms. Chessick to wear to the Northern Illinois University Foundation's Red and Black gala in February.

“It was sophisticated and classic,” Ms. Chessick says. The gown—fabric and labor included—cost \$1,000. For that price, Ms. Chessick got exactly what she wanted without spending hours shopping. “To just go out looking takes a lot of time,” she says.

Ms. Chessick is among the handful of Chicago executive women who head to a dressmaker instead of the racks when they need business-appropriate eveningwear. Gowns need to be different when other guests are colleagues and clients. They have sleeves, show minimal or no cleavage and are a comfortable fit, psychologically and physically.

“When I suggest something, I have in mind comfort, something that doesn't cling and that doesn't reveal all of your body,” says Mira Horoszowski, owner of Mira Couture, a Gold Coast custom clothier. Even when a business client wants a strapless dress, “we secure it with good boning and a lot of fit,” she says. She suggests the material—light taffeta works well, linen and clingy jersey do not—and steers clients toward navy and rich, distinctive jewel tones. “I try to take people away from black” as well as promlike pastels, Ms. Horoszowski says.

Custom comes with a few sacrifices, one of which is the ability to drop a couture name.

“On the red carpet, what's the first thing they ask? 'Who are you wearing?' “ says Jackie Walker, a Chicago-based stylist. When her clients spend four or more figures on a dress, “they want to be able to have that cachet of the designer name attached.”



LISA BERTAGNOLI

Make it better: Custom FAQs

[>Browse Crain's complete Topics Pages](#)

Crain's Live Search



MAY 06, 2013

[Past Weeks](#)

ADVERTISING

[News](#) | [Focus](#) | [Business of Life](#)

More from This Week's **CRAIN'S**

How Goose Island held on to its craft beer cred
Goose Island Brewing employees admit things have changed in the two years since the company was purchased by Anheuser-Busch InBev, just not in the way they feared.

[Read Now](#)

Has Caterpillar met its equal?

Chicago universities become a more exclusive club
Crain's to host Manufacturing Summit

Will ComEd have to pony up millions for thawed meat?

Handmade clothing created in Chicago (yes, really)

[View All The Stories](#)

ADVERTISING

Another is time. Some of Ms. Walker's clients have gone the custom route only to find they don't like the finished garment. That's catastrophic if the dress is completed mere days before the event.

For Julia Brown, stress would be showing up in the same gown as another woman—which is why she prefers custom. "We shop in a lot of the same places, right?" says Ms. Brown, 43, senior vice president of global procurement at Deerfield-based Mondelez International Inc. "Escada, Neiman Marcus—you get a lot of the same brands."

Custom lets her tailor her wardrobe to suit the occasion. For social events, Ms. Brown says, "I might show a little more skin," but for business events, her goal is to look "elegant, not as flashy." For a recent work event, Ms. Pazole made Ms. Brown the perfect business-affair dress: sleeveless, rose-colored silk with a fitted waist and full, sweeping ball skirt. "The movement was elegant," says Ms. Brown, who paid about \$2,500 for the dress.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke has another reason for going custom: She can indulge her inner seamstress. "I used to sew," says Ms. Burke, who made her own wedding dress. "I like texture, I like interesting fabrics." She prefers tea length—which works at both cocktail parties and black-tie affairs—over floor length, and avoids black.

Her closet is filled with custom dresses made by Ms. Horoszowski, including a recent favorite: white silk with red beading. "I haven't bought a dress (off the rack) in 20 years," Ms. Burke says.

► **Contact:** life@chicagobusiness.com

From this week's Business of Life

Cost: Typically \$800 to \$5,000. Silk costs more than a blend; a strapless gown with a corseted or bone structure costs more than, say, a draped Grecian column.

Lead time: Between two weeks and two months.

Useful tips

"Make sure the person understands who you are—not just your appearance but your sensibility. And be collaborative." —Marci Eisenstein, partner and executive committee member, Schiff Hardin LLP, Chicago

"Get a picture of what you want—have it drawn or pull it from a magazine. Make sure there's an alignment on the style. Get a picture, get a fabric sample." —Julia Brown, senior vice president of global procurement, Mondelez International Inc., Deerfield

"Give it enough time—have a consultation. It helps for (the dressmaker) to get to know you and your personality." —Ellen Chessick, vice president of strategic growth, Restaurant.com, Arlington Heights

More events this week

Alzheimer's Association, **26th Annual Chicago Rita Hayworth Gala**, May 11, 6:30 p.m., Hilton Chicago, 720 S. Michigan Ave., 312-335-5216, ALZ.org/galas/Rita/gala_chicago.asp

Social Whirl! See slide shows of recent events at ChicagoBusiness.com/society. Submit your own event information at ChicagoBusiness.com/societyevents.



Print | Email | Comments

More from Crain's Chicago

- BMO Harris veteran Ellen Costello retires
- Partner in CDH Proton Center hits financial snag
- Why Madigan and Cullerton aren't really warring on pensions
- Has Google outgrown River North?
- Why does Chicago care about New York Times' dope-slap?
- New York Times reviewer: 'I feel sorry for Chicago'

From around the Web

- 15 Celebs You Didn't Know Were Bankrupt (*She Budgets*)
- The Latest Killer Extension for Gmail (*Forbes*)
- 10 Great Cities for Older Singles (*AARP*)
- Is \$500K the magic number? (*Bankrate.com*)
- BYOD is Dead, Long Live SYOD! ☑️ (*Cloud Powered Work*)
- 4 Stupid Investment Mistakes Nearly Everyone Makes (*etrade.com*)

Recommended by

SPONSORED BY:



What do you think?

The commenter section of Crain's Chicago Business is an opportunity for our readers to start a dialog on our content. While we don't require you to use your real name, we do ask that you participate as though you were — that is, keep the conversation civil, stay on topic, avoid profanity, vulgarity and personal attacks, and please don't post commercial or self-promotional material. We will remove comments that violate these standards.

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Login](#) | [Register](#)

(Note: Your first name and last initial will appear with your remarks.)

Useful Links

Reviews

[Autow eek](#)
[Chicago Restaurant Review s](#)

Partners

[Crain Publications](#)

Business Tools

[Traffic](#)
[Weather](#)
[Big Dates](#)
[New Business Licenses](#)
[Bankruptcies](#)
[Federal Tax Liens](#)

Services

[Classified](#)
[2012 Book of Lists](#)
[About Us](#)
[Events](#)
[Crain's Events](#)
[Terms of Site Use](#)
[2012 Giving Guide](#)
[Wealth Management](#)

Advertise with Us

[Contact Us](#)
[Subscription Center](#)
[Add Your Event](#)
[Crain's in Social Media](#)
[2011 Giving Guide](#)
[Cardiac Care](#)

Also in Crain's

[Daily Business New s](#)
[This Week's Crain's](#)
[Lists](#)
[People](#)
[Industry New s](#)
[Small Business](#)
[Society](#)
[Real Estate](#)